

Rev. John R. MacDonald, St. Joseph's College and the University of Alberta

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On August 16, 1923, a friend in Montreal wrote Fr. John R. MacDonald in Edmonton:

Soon you will be in the midst of preparations for the coming school term. What great memories you will possess in years to come of the trials you are going through now, ... when today's dreams will have long since come true. In the meanwhile you will have to plod along content with little in the way of... visible and tangible achievement. So much of life would appear to pass that way.¹

The friend did not know that on that same day, Fr. MacDonald's sister, on her way home from Boston to Antigonish to be married, had died on the train near Lincoln, Maine. As a consequence, there would be no coming school term for him. Whatever memories he might have of Edmonton in the years to come, he would keep to himself. Visible and tangible achievements there would be, but mostly after he left the scene; and though the dream that brought him to Edmonton would come true, his part in it had already been accomplished. Others would carry on where he had been forced to leave off after one short year of dedicated service to the Church and to Education in the West.

It is late to be raising a monument to the memory of this man but I am grateful to the Canadian Catholic Historical Association for the opportunity to assist in doing so. Not even heard of by some of those who followed in his footsteps twenty years later, he deserves the recognition we are privileged to give him today in the hope he may inspire others tomorrow.

John Roderick MacDonald, born in Port Hood, Nova Scotia in 1891, graduated from St. Francis Xavier University in 1910, the year his uncle, Archbishop Neil McNeil, transferred from St. George's, Newfoundland, to Vancouver, B. C., passing through Antigonish, he invited his nephew to come West to teach. Though John R. remained only two years, returning East to enter the Grand Seminary, Quebec, he left something of his heart in the West. In 1922, six years after his ordination in Antigonish, he turned

¹ Rev. Martin P. Reid, Montreal, to Rev. John R. Mac Donald, Aug. 16, 1923.

westward again, telling the people of St. Ninian Cathedral Parish:

For many years, twelve now I think, I have desired to be able to do something for that vast western part of Canada where the Church is only in its infancy and where its struggles are so great. Through the kindness of Bishop Morrison that opportunity has been given me. Even though it may be temporary, I shall try, with God's help and your prayers, to make it fruitful.²

The kindness was Bishop Morrison's but the invitation had come from Archbishop O'Leary, Edmonton, and the urging to accept it from Archbishop McNeil, now in Toronto. Both Archbishops offered this young priest a challenge he could not refuse the establishment of a Catholic College to be affiliated with the University of Alberta.

To appreciate the nature of the challenge we must consider some of its elements. The first of these, the condition of the Church in Edmonton, has been described by Rt. Rev. P. F. Hughes, a contemporary, whom Archbishop O'Leary brought out from his native Prince Edward Island:

When Archbishop O'Leary arrived to take over his see in November, 1920, he found a city of 58,000, of whom 7,000 were Catholics, worshipping in eight churches under his jurisdiction.

He found also a vast territory sorely in need of evangelization. There was in the Archdiocese only a handful of priests, many of them worn out by their missionary labors... for the most part among the Indian people. There were few priests to take care of the fast-increasing immigrant population and the earlier settlers.

He saw that his first task was to recruit a clergy. He visited every diocese in Eastern Canada, and even crossed the Atlantic to beg for priests... In a short time he was able to found new parishes...

He realized, nevertheless, that bringing in priests, even the most devout, was not the full answer.... He must found an institution as a nursery of native vocations....³

A second element of the challenge was another challenge, thrown out to the Catholics of Western Canada by the Redemptorist, Father George T. Daly: A Catholic University for the West. Though he set forth his proposition in the form of a question, "Dream or Reality," there was no question in his own mind. The West needed such an institution, especially for the preparation and formation of its Catholic laymen:

We are waking up from our deep lethargy and beginning to understand that we shall not have our share in the shaping of the destinies of our country until our leaders, particularly among the laity, impose themselves upon the

² JRM, St. Ninian Cathedral, Antigonish, N.S., Aug. 6, 1922.

³ Rt. Rev. P.F. Hughes, D.P., Charlottetown, P.E.I., letter to author, June 12, 1965.

nation by their number and their value.⁴

Father John R. shared the conviction of his friend that the Church must provide itself and the nation with educated lay leaders, but he saw Archbishop O’Leary’s project as a practical step in that direction rather than away from it. Yet he would have to face the argument from those who, with Father Daly, maintained,

The presence of various denominational colleges on the grounds of our Provincial Universities only gives them a tint of Christianity. The teaching of history and philosophy will tell the tale.⁵

Likewise, he would have to prepare himself for clergy who, like one in Calgary, warned a leading layman that he was “on dangerous ground in advocating any form of affiliation with the Provincial institution.”⁶

A third element was his own health. Coming from a family that did not enjoy the blessing of good health, he knew his own limitations in this regard; like many Easterners, he hoped the West might bring improvement.

Other elements, still unknown to him or only surmised, would become evident after he had taken up the challenge; but one that had to concern him was the fact he would be doing in the West something his own Bishop could not whole-heartedly approve.

Father MacDonald was not the first one Archbishop O’Leary approached with his proposition. Because the Basilian Fathers had a good reputation as teachers, and especially because they were already conducting St. Michael’s College as an affiliate of Toronto University, Archbishop O’Leary invited them to accept the responsibility of founding a Catholic College to be affiliated with the University of Alberta.

On August 13, 1921, His Grace, representing his Archdiocese, and Father Vincent J. Murphy, representing St. Michael’s College, Toronto, met with President H. M. Tory and Dean W.A.R. Kerr of the University and drew up a memorandum of agreement for the affiliation of the proposed St. Joseph’s College.

Five days later the Archbishop acknowledged copies of the memorandum from Dr. Tory and stated he had sent one to Father Murphy, adding, “As soon as arrangements can be made for the Fathers to come, we will go into details.”

When it became evident those arrangements could not be finalized, the Archbishop looked farther East. He turned to the Maritimes, to the Diocese of Antigonish, where he had been urging Bishop Morrison, a fellow Prince Edward Islander, to give him priests, or at least candidates for the priesthood, “. . . men to cover this vast territory where souls are being lost to the faith by the thousands. Our need here is very urgent and I know you

⁴ Rev. George Thomas DALY, C.S.S.R., *Catholic Problems in Western Canada*, Macmillan, Toronto, 1921, p. 197.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁶ W.A. MacDonald, LL.B., Calgary, letter to JRM, Feb. 8, 1923.

will let me have at least two, as promised," he wrote January 9, 1922.

Now, in May, he wanted not only priests for the missions but a priest to organize a boys' high school and the new college as a seed-bed of native vocations and a school of formation for apostolic lay leaders. In this he had the full support of Archbishop McNeil who wrote Father John R.

Archbishop O'Leary has been here looking for more priests. He is now on his way to the Maritime Provinces.

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Two years ago he applied to the Basilians of Toronto to undertake a college in Edmonton. Yesterday he again interviewed the Provincial but got no definite reply. The Basilians do not have enough men. He prefers diocesan priests for the work but despairs of getting them. Meanwhile he is paying thousands of dollars every year in taxes on property which he holds for use of High School and University College.

He does not hesitate to adopt federation in his own case. For higher education, his plan is a college federated with the University of Alberta, whose President is H. M. Tory from Guysboro, N.S. He does not hope to make a beginning before September, 1923. His High School would have \$5,000.00 per year from the Separate School Board. If he can find a competent priest in the Maritime Provinces to undertake the organization of this work, he will give him a free hand to seek men wherever they can be found.⁷

From this letter we cannot conclude definitely that Archbishop McNeil was trying to persuade his nephew to undertake the project; but there is no question of his satisfaction when Father John R. accepted. Three weeks later he wrote again:

Archbishop O'Leary has been here with me for a couple of days, leaving last night. He spoke as if your going to Edmonton, at least for a year, and that soon, was already agreed upon, and it would be too bad to disappoint him. What you would gain in Washington would not materially help you in the work he requires of you.... He desires you to stay a couple of weeks in Toronto to study the Constitution of the University of Toronto especially in relation to St. Michael's College.⁸

Archbishop O'Leary was not disappointed. Four days later Father John R. wrote him:

Bishop Morrison has given me the necessary permission and I have definitely decided to go to Edmonton instead of to Washington.⁹

Because this story is primarily that of an individual whose decision helped determine the development of the Archbishop's dream, it is only fair

⁷ Most Rev. Neil McNeil, D.D., Toronto, to JRM, May 24, 1922.

⁸ *Ibid.*, June 16, 1922.

⁹ JRM to Most Rev. Henry J. O'Leary, D.D., June 20, 1922.

to indicate the sacrificial nature of that decision.

For more than four years Father John R. had hoped to attend the Catholic University of America for advanced studies in Education. He hoped he might some day be a member of the faculty of St. Francis Xavier University; and his uncle had encouraged him to take the post graduate course if he got the chance. Now when the chance was his, he decided, with his uncle, in favor of the Church in Western Canada.

Because he was a man who loved a challenge, the prospect of participating in a pioneer project undoubtedly appealed to him but it should be seen in relation to his mature desire to do something for the Church in the West.

To understand better the federation element of the challenge, we should know something of the struggle that was taking place between those who favored federation (as a practical compromise if not an ideal solution) and those who opposed it.

In England, for example, Cardinals Manning and Newman had not seen eye to eye on the question of having a Catholic College in Oxford; and even though Newman's views prevailed, "...an Oxford scheme was never Newman's ideal," according to his biographer:

It was a concession to necessities of the hour. His ideal scheme, alike for education of the young and for the necessary intellectual defence of Christianity, had consistently been the erection of a large Catholic University like Louvain. This he had tried to set up in Ireland. In such an institution, research and discussion of the questions of the day would be combined as in the Middle Ages with a Catholic atmosphere, the personal ascendancy of able Christian professors and directly religious influence for the young men.¹⁰

Catholic Canadians became involved in the controversy when the Carnegie Corporation extended its search for a locale where it could profitably experiment with an educational set-up that would minimize costly duplications and ensure greater value for endowment dollars.

In the Maritime Provinces, and especially in Father John R.'s own diocese, the struggle became quite intense, with Bishop Morrison representing those who opposed federation and Rev. Dr. J. J. Tompkins, Vice President of St. Francis Xavier University, actively promoting it.

Early in 1922, Archbishop McNeil, favoring federation for St. F. X. – where he had been Rector for a time – wrote Father John R.:

I received your letter this morning. After two interviews with the Carnegie people in New York, I wrote the Rector of St. Francis Xavier giving him a faithful summary of my impressions and their suggestions....

In my letter to him I did not take sides for or against, beyond impressing on him that the real question at issue is whether the Catholics of the Maritime Provinces are going to find themselves in a condition of

¹⁰ Rev. George Thomas DALY, C.S.S.R., *op. cit.*, pp. 222-223, quoting Wilfred WARD, *Life of Newman*.

educational inferiority...

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As far as the Carnegie people are concerned, St. Francis Xavier would not be expected to change its Board of Governors or its name. The suggestion is to transfer the last two years of the Arts Course to Halifax. The new university would be called the Maritime University of Canada and Newfoundland, or any name acceptable to the federated colleges. Degrees would be issued in the name of the University but in the case of degrees in Arts the name of the confederated college attended by the graduating student could also appear on the certificate. As to the Board of Governors of St. Francis Xavier, that would be a matter of arrangement among Catholic authorities. It might be advisable to have two Boards, one for the Halifax institution made up of men selected to represent those Dioceses that agree to come in, the other remaining substantially as at present.

One feature of the suggestion is the clear distinction between pass students in Arts and honor students. It is from the latter that the future leaders will mostly be drawn. The central university as such would regulate the honor courses, providing the classrooms and paying the professors. The professors in honor courses would, as far as possible, be the best men available in the confederated colleges. But the confederated colleges would themselves have honor courses in those subjects which affect denominational interests, such as Philosophy and History.

The Carnegie people have no desire to restrain the denominational features of the confederated colleges. On the contrary, they look upon such features as an excellent basis of grouping the unorganized masses of students found in the United States Universities. Part of their interest in the whole scheme is the possibility of using this example to show to United States Universities the value of honor courses and of denominational groupings.¹¹

Within his own Archdiocese, St. Michael's College was already being cited as the first Catholic College in Canada federated within government supported, non-Catholic university union, the University of Toronto.

The idea of federation in Toronto had originated with Sir William Molock. According to Rev. Edmund J. McCorkell, he sought co-operation among

... a variety of religious Colleges then scattered over a wide area and competing with each other for a share in the meagre annual government grants. The first step was to gather the religious colleges together at a single centre with common courses of high standard, with proper library and laboratory facilities, and a common staff well-trained and adequately paid by the government. The colleges were to provide residences and teach religion as an optional subject. Fr. John R. Teefy was able to gain the privilege for St. Michael's to teach its own history and philosophy, and it was doubtless through this concession that he was able to win the approval of the Catholic bishops for the government plan. All other subjects, except religion, were to be taken at the University... Thus the initial phase of

¹¹ Most Rev. Neil McNeil, D.D., to JRM, Feb. 11, 1922.

federation was effected in 1881 but it was to a large degree on paper. Only two additional colleges, Knox and Wycliffe, accepted the plan and came to the campus.¹²

The larger colleges, Trinity and Victoria did not: they were prepared to co-operate in a common effort to create a greater university, but they were not satisfied with a cooperation which practically excluded them from teaching their own students. They asked for a more generous participation in university life into which they might infuse their own spirit. To try to meet this request, a Royal Commission made an interim report in favor of a system of Arts Colleges, each of which would teach the humanities to its own students.¹³

Then, according to Fr. McCorkell, Father Henry Carr, who had been updating St. Michael's since his return there as a teacher in 1904, urged his colleagues "to apply for the status of an Arts College under the terms of the proposed University Act of 1906." The application was accepted. In 1910, the same year John R. MacDonald was graduating from St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, St. Michael's had its first class of graduates from the University of Toronto.

Safeguarding the right to teach their own adherents in their own way was the objective of Catholics in the Maritimes and Protestants in Ontario; and the struggle that went on in both places resulted in better conditions for the proposed St. Joseph's College in Edmonton when it eventually became affiliated.

When Archbishop O'Leary suggested that Father MacDonald spend some days in Toronto studying the constitutional arrangement between St. Michael's and the University, it was not because he considered an affiliation of this type ideal. It was simply practical; and in working out a practical arrangement for St. Joseph's, he desired the best conditions attainable. This becomes evident later in the attitude of Father MacDonald.

Both the Archbishop and Father MacDonald realized they could not begin immediately with the College. They would start with an existing high school but, at the same time, do everything possible to find funds and faculty for St. Joseph's. "Everything possible" became Father MacDonald's assignment and program; and all that remains now is to follow him as he carried it out.

When he arrived in Edmonton there was only one Catholic school doing full-time high school work. The Faithful Companions of Jesus conducted it, with one male lay assistant, and boys and girls studying in the same classrooms. One month after his arrival he appeared before the Separate School Board to press for a high school for boys only, on the South Side of the City where the Archbishop earlier had offered the Board two blocks. One block would take care of tax arrears and serve as a site for the new school. The other would be used for a boarding school for boys, not however to be

¹² Rev. Edmund J. MCCORKELL, C.S.B., "The Legacy of Father Carr," in *The Basilian Teacher*, March, 1964.

¹³ Rev. Edmund J. MCCORKELL, C.S.B., *Henry Carr – Revolutionary*, Griffin House, Toronto, 1969, p. 18.

undertaken by the Board. He suggested the new school should have four classrooms, physics and chemistry laboratories, a gymnasium and an assembly.

The Board referred his suggestion to the Finance Committee. Conscious of the high cost, and aware the Board had already committed itself to a new school for North Edmonton, the Committee suggested a compromise: a four-room school at a much lower cost and for pupils of the South Side only. If the Archbishop desired to accommodate outside pupils, he might build his own school. The Board could rent space from him as required and help defray the cost of teachers and upkeep. In the future, financial conditions might allow more.¹⁴

In February, 1923, Father MacDonald asked the Board to leave the matter of building in abeyance. [Meanwhile the boys and girls of Grades IX and X had been placed in separate rooms in the old school. By June, the Board agreed to separate also those in Grade XII, engage a male Principal and a male assistant in addition to the one male member already on the staff. After working through a misunderstanding, (Father MacDonald had asked for a total of four men, not three, intending to act as Principal himself)] the Board finally agreed to what Catholic Edmonton regarded as a minor revolution: a Catholic boys' high school completely staffed by four men. Boys and girls would continue to occupy the same building, with the boys on the upper floor. The girls would be taught by the Sisters in St. Mary's High School. The boys would form the nucleus of a new St. Joseph's High School, with Fr. MacDonald as Principal. The Board would pay the salaries. It was a beginning and Father MacDonald was largely responsible for it.

In the meantime he had been intensely active promoting the major project, St. Joseph's College, and he found that getting money and men for the high school was child's play in comparison. But one preparatory step was relatively easy – establishing a Newman Club for Catholic students already at the University.

Every parish in the City gave support and had representatives at the formal opening in November, at "The Box," a small wooden block that had been the residence of Archbishop Legal, a preparatory seminary directed by the Oblate Fathers and, later, an orphanage conducted by the Sisters of Providence of Kingston. The Sisters turned over the Archbishop's quarters, and his library, to Father MacDonald. Monsignor Hughes, who has related these facts, is generous in his praise of the young priest at this point

What tongue or pen will ever tell the story of the good accomplished by Father MacDonald among these young people; how many meetings he had in the humble surroundings with students who had given up the practice of their religion, with students who had to be taught the very first principles of religion. It was because he was the world's best public relations man, because his heart was so overflowing with charity, that he drew these young men and women to him, and showed them and the whole University

¹⁴ Minutes of Meeting of Edmonton Roman Catholic Separate School Board, Nov. 2, 1922.

body what Christian living means. He was accepted by the student-body, as an outstanding figure by the whole University body – students and faculty alike.¹⁵

But public relations men must stir up more than the interest of young university men and women. They've got to raise money! And he had also to sell the idea of higher education to Catholic parents, of whom many were immigrants deprived of educational advantages.

He spoke in all the parishes of Edmonton and, with the consent of the Bishop of Calgary, in all the churches there. He went from parish to parish in the country with the same message Catholic children must be educated in a Catholic atmosphere at the Provincial University. There must be Catholic lay leaders and Catholic men in professional and public life; and the growing Church must provide priests for her growing needs as well as for those being lost through a lack of contact. The winter and early summer of 1923 were devoted to propaganda at home and away from home.

Archbishop McNeil was offering guidance from the distance. Early in September he had cautioned:

Do not talk about formal agreement between Dioceses till interest in the project is created. Sometimes competition is better than formal agreement, once the project is generally accepted....

What might be done is to think out some clauses to be inserted in the Constitution of the Board of Governors, which would imply the equal responsibility of all parts of Alberta for the new institution, practically eliminating diocesan boundaries as such and making the Board a strictly Provincial body. Keep this strictly to yourself. Put a large part of the responsibility on the laity. A Board of seven members seems too small. Eleven to fifteen would be better with the Bishops and some priests added. There should be a French priest on the Board.¹⁶

One may wonder at this point about the University authorities and their interest. Did it flag when the Archbishop was unable to work out an arrangement with the Basilians? No. Three months after Father John R. arrived to carry on the work, Dr. Tory wrote the Acting-President of the Carnegie Corporation in New York:

The question of the development of a Roman Catholic College in the University of Alberta has arisen and some of the men connected with it are also interested in the movement going on in Nova Scotia for union of the colleges here.

The position in Western Canada is this. There are two factions, one desiring to see the Roman Catholic College develop apart, and the other, a strong faction, desirous of unifying their system with the State educational system. The Archbishop of Edmonton has approached me privately on the question and is anxious to co-operate with the State

¹⁵ Rt. Rev. P.F. Hughes, D.P., letter to author, June 12, 1965.

¹⁶ Most Rev. Neil McNeil, D.D., to JRM, Sept. 11, 1922.

University along the lines of St. Michael's College in Toronto, that is having a college where certain subjects will be taught but having all the scientific and higher work done in the University proper. There is room without question for the Roman Catholic College in this part of Canada. We have now over one hundred Roman Catholic students in the University and their presence here assists in the development of the idea of a college within the University.

Dr. Tompkins of Antigonish suggested to me that it might be possible that the Carnegie Corporation would be interested in assisting to carry forward such an idea. The representatives of the Catholic Church here who desire union have also spoken to me about it. I am therefore writing this letter to ask you if you think it would be possible to secure any assistance from the Carnegie Corporation corresponding to what has been made possible in Nova Scotia.

The Roman Catholics here have a good secondary school and are now working on the development of a college which may become a College of the University or may develop into something apart. We have suggested to them a site on the University grounds, if they come in with us, or that they should build just across the street from us on ground that is now available. Personally I would regard it as helping forward the cause of education enormously if any help could be forthcoming that would now fix the matter in a proper groove. If a sum of \$50,000 could be made available, I think the whole matter could be closed.

I hope you will forgive me the liberty I have taken in writing you thus, but knowing how much you have been interested in the Nova Scotia situation, I thought possibly you might be willing to co-operate in some measure here also.¹⁷

On receiving a reply, Dr. Tory invited Fr. MacDonald and the Archbishop to discuss it with him. There was no question of his interest or of his desire for the affiliation; but he left a question in Father MacDonald's mind: How far would his interest allow him to go in negotiating terms of affiliation? Father MacDonald sensed some reservation.

The following month, writing from Toronto where he stopped to visit Archbishop McNeil who promised to go with him later (in February) to help negotiate a more substantial grant from the Carnegie Foundation, Father MacDonald wrote Archbishop O'Leary:

Dr. Tory is to be here this week and we shall try to reach some agreement re subjects. I have had long talks with Archbishop McNeil and Father Carr. They both advise that we go slowly and carefully, because undoubtedly what we do is going to determine the status of Catholic higher education throughout the West. The other Provinces will not get more than we. In other words, our responsibility is more than local. If we get hold of Tory here, I think, with St. Michael's before his eyes, he will give more. The more I reflect on his recent remarks, the more am I convinced that he is trying to squeeze us down to the minimum.¹⁸

¹⁷ Dr. H.M. Tory to Dr. Henry Pritchett, Dec. 6, 1922.

¹⁸ JRM to Archbishop O'Leary, D.D., Jan. 14, 1923.

A week later he was somewhat reassured. He wrote Dr. McGuigan:

Had a long talk with Dr. Tory last Friday. I think things are going to work out satisfactorily.¹⁹

His reassurance, however, was not complete. In answer to the Archbishop's subsequent question, "Did you and Dr. Tory come to a satisfactory agreement re conditions ?", he replied:

Although I had a conversation with Tory in Toronto, nothing definite was agreed on. I shall see if the Carnegies will help us in putting through all we desire as conditions. Of course, nothing will be done until you are consulted, and everything will be submitted to you. As far as I can size up Tory, he wants us to go in quietly with a minimum and gradually assume or acquire other and further powers. We shall have to thrash out the whole matter when I return.²⁰

Until more documentation becomes available, we can only speculate that Dr. Tory, dealing with his own Senate and the Catholic proponents of affiliation, was acting judiciously in the interests of both. His previous recommendation that the Carnegie Foundation grant \$50,000, and a later appeal for more time – made on behalf of the Catholics when local conditions prevented them from reaching a deadline set by the Corporation – indicate he did desire affiliation and actively promoted it for reasons that were to him sound and praiseworthy.

Copy of a letter from Dr. H. M. Tory, President of the University of Alberta, to Rev. W. P. Reekie, Secretary of a sub-committee of the Board of Education of the Baptist Union of Western Canada, Weyburn, Saskatchewan.

January 7, 1914

Dear Sir:

I am returning herewith your questionnaire with my answer to your questions.

A. In answer to question A I have said no and my reason for my answer is this. The cost of founding a college of Liberal Arts to-day is too great unless it rests upon a munificent endowment at the start.

Secondly a College of Liberal Arts without being associated with scientific schools must necessarily become a second rate institution and I do not personally consider it fair to the young men seeking education that they should be deprived of the advantage of scientific study conducted in a modern way.

B. The reason I favor the founding of a theological school, whether the men take their Arts subjects in the University and the theology in their college is this. I believe the church owes the State the influence for good which it can throw into the life of the State University.

In the early days of the State University in the United States the denominational schools stood out and refused to participate in the State

¹⁹ JRM to Dr. J.C. McGuigan, Jan. 22, 1923.

²⁰ JRM to Archbishop O'Leary, Feb. 10, 1923.

University. Nearly all of the great State Universities are without the influence that the Church can directly throw around the University while the denominational colleges have either become practically without religious control or else sunk into insignificance. To my mind the Churches have thrown away their opportunity of influencing the brightest intellects of the country by thus shutting themselves off from the great State Universities. It is useless to write a paragraph upon this subject; it would require considerable discussion, but broadly that is my view.

With regard to the supply of men for the ministry, I do not believe that any scheme for cloistering men away from their fellows could possibly be effective from the point of view of the Church. The University is necessarily the forum where all types of questions are discussed. The place where the young men of the ministry become strong is where they have to face the questions of the hour and answer them in an intelligent way.

I am convinced that if the Churches were to concentrate their efforts in the Universities in order to secure men for the ministry rather than quartering them in little groups by themselves they would not only have more men, but more effective men as Christian ministers.

These are questions to which I have given some thought from the point of view of one who loves the Church and who would use every effort to give it a strong and effective place in the nation.

Yours sincerely

To follow Father MacDonald through the month of January and the first nine days of February, 1923, as he went about his episcopal Father's business from Edmonton to New York, with excursions into Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Boston, would be exhausting for us as it was for him. Where this man of indifferent health found the stamina to persevere is a little mystery; but his letters leave a record of untiring devotion as he interviewed business men, bishops, professors, pastors, seminarians, and Sisters, preached sermons, addressed women's groups and wrote articles, in his efforts to raise money, men and even housekeepers for the proposed College, and priests for other diocesan work. In the midst of it all there was anxiety about his father who had been seriously ill, a sudden call to Brighton, Mass., where his sister was not expected to live and where he underwent an emergency operation (without benefit of ether) that left him extremely weak. Though still unable to offer Mass four days after the operation, he planned to be in New York three days hence for his major interview. He wrote Dr. J.C. McGuigan, Archbishop O'Leary's secretary:

I go to New York Friday. When I finish I will return here and take my sister to Antigonish, if she is able to travel.

When I get going again I am prepared to push things to the limit. I have not accomplished much yet. Good things coming, I hope.²¹

The Carnegie interview paid off but not to the extent he and Archbishop O'Leary had hoped. Looking for \$100,000, he was assured of only half that amount. He wrote the Archbishop:

²¹ JRM to Dr. J.C. McGuigan, Feb. 6, 1923.

Well, the Carnegie business is over for the present. You may at first be disappointed at the outcome but, on the whole, I think there is reason for optimism. Rome was not built in a day; neither are institutions. Those, at least, are the considerations with which I buoy myself up.

The Carnegie Corporation has a limited amount available for expenditure outside United States. The trustees recently voted three millions to the Maritime Provinces Federation. This is the total income for six years on money for use in Canada. For the past few years the Corporation has held back most of money, so that, while they have voted six years' income, three years' income is already accumulated. This means that in three years from now, the Corporation will have fulfilled its obligations towards the Maritime Provinces.

Alberta comes next to the Maritimes in this scheme of University Education. That is, we are in on the ground floor and may expect something big in two or three years. Meanwhile, the Corporation is sympathetic towards our proposition and wants to see it get underway. Dr. Learned asked if \$50,000 would help start us. I told him, of course, that that depends on how much we can raise ourselves. He expressed the opinion that the people of Alberta should be given an opportunity of proving what they can do themselves and that the Carnegie \$50,000 should be held in the background until that had been done.

Dr. Learned can only recommend the gift of \$50,000. The Trustees decide the matter. He feels-in fact assured me – that the Trustees will be favorably disposed. I am to write out in full a statement of conditions in Alberta, our plans, etc. and make application for the above amount. The Trustees will meet within a month. There is no doubt in my mind about getting that much.

It is not all we looked for. We will have to begin smaller than we would wish. However, I feel we can get \$50,000 more from various sources and can build a sufficiently large section of the building for present needs.²²

What followed in the next few weeks can be stated briefly. Father MacDonald returned to Boston, where he prepared the memorandum that would accompany his formal request to the Carnegie Trustees and talked to more Women's Clubs about the needs of the Church in Edmonton before he left for Antigonish. While in Nova Scotia he interviewed, among others, Walter Daly and Ned Jennings, Holy Heart seminarians; and subsequent events proved he was not over-optimistic in stating, "The prospects of getting them are excellent."

Back in Montreal, he made more contacts and received some promises of help before leaving for Toronto where, in the mail waiting for him, was a letter of acceptance from S. N. Miller, Professor of History of the University of Glasgow, highly recommended on his previous trip to Toronto by Sir Bertram Windle. "We can get him, for a year anyway," he told Archbishop O'Leary, "if Tory will play the game and give him a respectable salary." Three days later he turned Eastward again on receiving a wire from home: "Father dangerously ill." He arrived home to learn his father would probably never work again. In view of what would transpire within the next few months, his words were almost prophetic, "I cannot make any plans now

²² JRM to Archbishop O'Leary, Feb. 13, 1923.

until matters clear up. I feel like giving up plan-making. Mine always go astray.”²³ (Those included his plans to be in Calgary on March 16, to “tackle Pat Burns and Duggan again.”) Prophetic, too, were the words of Archbishop O’Leary on receiving the news, “I sincerely hope that, under no circumstances, this will make us lose your valuable services.”²⁴

This is precisely what did happen. Though Father MacDonald returned to Edmonton, and though the Carnegie Corporation informed him on May 22, that the Trustees had favorably considered his application and were granting not \$50,000 but twice that amount – on condition that an additional sum of \$150,000 be raised by January 1, 1925 – and though Bishop Morrison graciously extended his leave of absence for a second year, his personal services to the West were to be lost, just when he had made a good beginning. In mid-August, when his Montreal friend wrote, “Soon you will be in the midst of preparations for the coming school term,” he received word of his sister’s unexpected death.

Suffering, himself, from a mastoid condition, he could not attend her funeral but two weeks later he set out on the long train-journey to Antigonish. There he found his father worse than when he had left him in March. Still he planned to return; but his father’s grave illness and his mother’s dependence on him were too real to be ignored. He made the painful decision and wrote Archbishop O’Leary:

In view of conditions at home, I have decided not to leave here. I have talked the matter over with Bishop Morrison and he will give me an appointment shortly. My decision has been made easier by reason of the uncertain condition of my own health. I am quite convinced that, during the past year, I did not do justice to the work confided to me.

I tried to induce Dr. Tompkins or Father [James] Boyle to undertake it, but failed. They both agree that frank cooperation from Calgary is essential to the success of the undertaking, and that, as I had to tell them, seemed impossible to secure.

I want to express my very sincere gratitude to Your Grace for your many acts of kindness to me. I have no fear that my not returning will adversely affect the policy of higher education in Alberta. It is a matter that need not and should not be rushed. The organization of the high school will lay a solid foundation for the College; and the success of the former under Doctor Hughes and Father Daly will convince the people of the advisability of the latter. No college can live without the backing of the laity, and the English-speaking laymen there have much to learn of their responsibilities toward Christian education. Under Your Grace’s able administration, however, they will learn rapidly and then the higher educational movement will succeed.

It is not necessary for me to add that I have the interests of Edmonton deeply at heart and will do anything possible from here to assist.²⁵

²³ JRM to Dr. J.C. McGuigan, Mar. 13, 1923.

²⁴ Archbishop O’Leary to JRM, Mar. 22, 1923.

²⁵ JRM to Archbishop O’Leary, Oct. 6, 1923.

Disappointed, but with kindness, the Archbishop sent his reply:

I received your letter and I cannot tell you how sorry I am to hear that you are not coming back. You met with many trials and some discouragement here but things are now brightening up. The crop is first class and the spirit of optimism is rising rapidly. Your High School has already 100 boys and is going on well. If you could only see your way clear to continue your good work re the building of the University College, you would be doing a great deal for Edmonton.

However, I realize your position thoroughly but yet hope that the embarrassment in which you find yourself may be only temporary and that you will be back with us again. I thank you for all you have done for us most cordially.

All here have the kindest memories of you and are sincerely sorry to hear that you cannot be with us.

I pray God to bless you and your new work and hope He may send you back to us again.²⁶

The rest of the story belongs to others. Father John R., though he did indeed have the interests of Edmonton deep at heart, could only trust that others would take up where he had to leave off. And they did. Archbishop O'Leary succeeded in getting the Toronto Brothers of the Christian Schools. Dr. Tory has left a memo of their first visit:

Was called upon this morning [March 20, 1925] by Brothers Alfred and Austin, representatives of the Christian Brothers, who are to staff the proposed Catholic College. They came at the request of Archbishop O'Leary in order to be shown about the University. Brother Alfred is in charge of the campaign to raise the money, and informed me that things were going splendidly. Half the money required is already pledged.... The two delegates seemed familiar with the St. Michael's arrangement in Toronto, and are apparently quite content to work along some such lines.... Brother Alfred informed me that he was at present living with the Archbishop and laying the foundation of a whirlwind campaign to complete the raising of the necessary money next summer. He expressed himself as being entirely hopeful of success.²⁷

Finally, the Bill to incorporate St. Joseph's College was enacted by the Provincial Legislature on March 18, 1926. The Governors of the University agreed, April 28, to transfer a site to St. Joseph's College. In June, the Congregation of the Holy Office in Rome approved the proposal to incorporate the College with the University. Both the Archbishop of Edmonton and the new Bishop of Calgary, Bishop John T. Kidd, were constituted members of its original Board of Governors. So, too, was Patrick Burns, K.S.G., of Calgary. On November 6, 1927, the new college building was formally opened by the Apostolic Delegate to Canada, Most Rev. Andrea

²⁶ Archbishop O'Leary to JRM, Oct. 11, 1923.

²⁷ Dr. H.M. TORY, *Memorandum*, Mar. 20, 1925, Archives, University of Alberta.

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The Brothers carried on, under difficult circumstances, especially during “the hungry thirties,” but later as well, until eventually, the Basilian Fathers were able to accept a new invitation to take on the work.

The new Rector took office on August 16, 1963. No one, of course, noticed the date – that it was just forty years after the unexpected death of Father John R.’s sister; and no one was aware that on that same day, in 1923, his Montreal friend had written the message with which we began this story:

Soon you will be in the midst of preparations for the coming school term. What great memories you will possess in years to come of the trials you are going through now, ... when today’s dreams will have long since come true. In the meanwhile you will have to plod along content with little in the way of .. visible and tangible achievement. So much of life would appear to pass that way