

## **Bishop Charbonnel: The Beggar Bishop and the Origins of Catholic Social Action**

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Canadian historians for the most part have ignored or been unsympathetic to the career of Bishop Armand de Charbonnel. When he is given recognition he is portrayed as a stubborn and arrogant man because of his stand against Egerton Ryerson in the battle for separate schools in Upper Canada. However, if one examines his tenure more closely, Bishop Charbonnel could be looked upon as the father of the Archdiocese of Toronto, the separate school system and Catholic social action.<sup>1</sup> Through his efforts the needs of the poor, starving, unhealthy, unskilled immigrants who arrived in Toronto after the Irish Famine of 1846-47 were met and immediate assistance to survive and adjust in their new urban milieu was given.

As the second Bishop of the Diocese of Toronto, Charbonnel adopted the traditional structure of the universal Church. Personnel, money and ideas were available through its existing, external communication network, but their application depended upon the development of an internal diocesan structure which could absorb those external elements to assist the laity. The models Charbonnel chose to form his internal communication linkage were French. The religious orders he selected had been affected by the devotional, moral and social renewal of Alphonsus de Liguori and included nuns who combined cloistered life with service to the poor. Through them, Charbonnel planned to reach out to the sick and the poor, to establish schools and seminaries, and to serve the spiritual needs of the laity.<sup>2</sup>

Armand François-Marie, Comte de Charbonnel, was born of privileged parents at Monistrol sur-Loire in southern France on 1 December, 1802. He was the second son of John Baptist Comte de Charbonnel, Baron of Soussor, Lord of Bets, Flachots and Comblaire. His mother, Mary Claudine di Pradier,

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<sup>1</sup> Murray W. Nicolson, "Ecclesiastical Metropolitanism and the Evolution of the Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto," *Histoire Sociale*, vol. XV, no. 29 (Mai 1982), pp. 129-156.

<sup>2</sup> Nicolson, "The Irish Catholics and Social Action in Toronto," *Études d'Histoire de Politique; Journal des Sciences Historiques/Politique*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Fall 1980), 30-35.

was the daughter of the marquis D’Agrain, first President of the Parliament of Dijon during the French revolutionary war.<sup>3</sup> The young Charbonnel acquired the rudiments of knowledge in the primary school and at a college at Montbrison. At age ten he was sent to the newly founded College of Annonay where he was educated by a group of secular priests who, a few years prior, had formed an association for educational work. The priests, known as the Basilians from the parish of that same name, were the founders of the Congregation of St. Basil. Members of that order later developed St. Michael’s College in Toronto on the lines of Annonay with emphasis on the teaching of classics, philosophy, science, discipline and obedience, with the presentation of awards for good conduct and medals for excellence,<sup>4</sup> standards which under Bishop Charbonnel became an element in the separate schools of Ontario.

Despite his father’s wish that he enter the military, Charbonnel at age seventeen was admitted to the Sulpician Seminary at Issy and was ordained to the priesthood on 19 December, 1825. For fifteen years Charbonnel taught dogma and Holy Scripture in the Sulpician seminaries of Versailles, Lyons, Bordeaux and Marseilles. During that time he was approached frequently for promotion – Vicar-General or coadjutor by the Bishops of Puivy, Autun, Limoges and Bordeaux, as well as Superior of the Seminary of Grenoble — all of which he declined. During the riots at Lyons in 1834, Charbonnel was instrumental in saving the city from pillage and, in recognition, was offered the Cross of the Legion of Honour by King Louis Philippe, which he refused. To escape promotion, Charbonnel offered himself as a missionary to Canada.<sup>5</sup>

It is uncertain whether Charbonnel went first to Montreal and then to Baltimore in the United States, returning to Montreal, or whether he went directly to Baltimore and then to Montreal. Nonetheless, he learned English in Baltimore and worked among the Irish in Montreal from 1840 to 1847. While Charbonnel was in Montreal, Archbishop Blanc of New Orleans sought him as coadjutor and Governor-General Sydenham wanted Charbonnel to accept a mitre in one of Great Britain’s colonies.<sup>6</sup> But

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<sup>3</sup> R.P. Candide Cause, *Évêque d’Or, Crosse de Bois: Vie de Monseigneur de Charbonnel* (Paris, 1930), pp. 1-20, *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Brother Alfred, “Most Rev. Armand-François Marie, Comte de Charbonnel, D.D., Second Bishop of Toronto (1802-1891),” unnumbered MS in the Archdiocese of Toronto Archives (hereafter ARCAT).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> John R. Teefy, “The Life and Times of The Right Reverent Armand Francis Maris Comte de Charbonnel, Second Bishop of Toronto,” J.R. Teefy, ed., *Jubilee Volume, The Archdiocese of Toronto and Archbishop Walsh* (George T. Dixon: Toronto, 1892), pp. 143-168.

Charbonnel replied to Sydenham: “If I wished to be a bishop, I would not have left France.”<sup>7</sup> Instead, Charbonnel continued to work among the Irish and, like Bishop Michael Power in Toronto, fell ill with typhus contracted from the famine immigrants.<sup>8</sup>

Recalled by his superiors, Father Charbonnel returned to France to convalesce. Even then he found it difficult to evade the offers of honours, such as the seat in the National Assembly left vacant by the death of Charbonnel’s brother, Felix Louis. When Charbonnel was fully recovered, he accepted the position of professor of Theology in the Seminary of Aix in Provence where his humility, charity, humour, courtesy, embodiment of poverty and religious fervour made him popular with the students. Meanwhile, the See of Toronto had been left vacant for three years by the death of Michael Power. It had been offered to Father John Larkin, a Sulpician of Montreal, who had declined the succession. Subsequently the Canadian hierarchy, recognizing the attributes of Charbonnel, asked the Propaganda in Rome to appoint him.<sup>9</sup>

The Vatican could not permit any further delay and Father Charbonnel was appointed Bishop of Toronto. Charbonnel hurried to Rome to plead his incapacity before the Curia. But he could not escape the will of Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti, Pio Nono. In order to ensure Charbonnel’s compliance, Pope Pius IX personally bestowed the episcopal dignity upon him on 26 May, 1850. Strangely, the episcopate of the reluctant Charbonnel was influenced greatly by Pio Nono, who has often been looked upon as an administrative failure. Yet, in retrospect

The pontificate of Pius IX was one of striking success in its spiritual and ecclesiastical achievements. The erection of many new dioceses and missionary centres, as well as the restoration of the hierarchy in England (1850) and Holland (1850) and the conclusion of concordats with many European and American governments, testified to a vigorous life within the Church.<sup>10</sup>

When Bishop Charbonnel arrived to administer the disorganized Diocese of Toronto on 21 September, 1850, one of his first undertakings was to address the Irish laity in St. Michael’s Cathedral with a sermon entitled “The

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<sup>7</sup> Brother Alfred, “The Most Rev. Armand-François Marie.”

<sup>8</sup> Teffy, “The Life and Times,” *passim*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 145-47.

<sup>10</sup> F.L. Cross, ed., “Pius IX,” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford University Press: London, 1957), p. 1079.

Duties of the Good Shepherd.” The contents of that sermon were summarized in *The Mirror*:

He began by hoping that they would excuse his, imperfect English, when he assured them that he warmly represented to His Holiness the Pope how utterly unfit he was for the position, that he only accepted it upon the express command of the Holy Father. He spoke of his labors in Montreal amongst the Irish immigrants. He had caught, he continued, the fever during that memorable year and was lying upon what was considered his death-bed. But that providence, whose invisible hand directs and governs all things, had otherwise decreed; and through its controlling will he stood then before them as their Chief Pastor, ready at all times to risk everything, to sacrifice everything, even life itself, if necessary, for the welfare of the flock committed to his care. In proof of his entire devotion to their services he assured them that he had made over the whole of his paternal estate in France to assist in liquidating the debt contracted for the building of the magnificent Cathedral in which they were, and for such other religious purposes as the Diocese mostly stood in need of, without so much as reserving a farthing for his own private use. He concluded by promising to visit them all; but he wanted especially to see the poor, to cheer, to console, and if possible to relieve them.<sup>11</sup>

With that dedication Charbonnel applied himself to an onerous task, for Toronto’s Catholic population had increased rapidly to 7940 from what was reported as 3240 in 1842.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the increase was even larger because it is possible that the Rolph Census of 1842 included all Catholics attached to the single parish of St. Paul’s, which covered a large, combined urban and hinterland area. Although there were twenty-eight priests scattered throughout the diocese, in the city Charbonnel had but two churches, two priests and a few Sisters of Loretto who had arrived in Toronto in 1847 shortly before the death of Bishop Power.<sup>13</sup>

Change was *a sine qua non*. The Diocese was in financial trouble, burdened with a pressing debt. Two converts, John Elmsley and S.G. Lynn, paid \$60,000.00 and Charbonnel \$10,000.00 to guarantee the Cathedral, but it was unfinished. Plagued with the spectre of Michael Power, the laity had to face reality and were told by Charbonnel:

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<sup>11</sup> *The Mirror*, 27 September 1850.

<sup>12</sup> The Census of The Canadas 1851-52, 1, 30-31

<sup>13</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers. See church statistics for 1850.

We say we owe because this debt is ours and not the debt of the first Bishop; Martyrs are in Heaven, and in Heaven there is no debt.<sup>14</sup>

Charbonnel attended the Quebec Provincial Council to consult with his metropolitan and more particularly with Bishop I. Bourget, a genius in church organization. As well, he visited Baltimore several times to confer with Bishop M.J. Spalding and attended the Plenary Council of Catholic Church in America held there in 1885. His interaction with Bishop Spalding, Archbishop John Hughes of New York, Bishop C.F. McKinnon of Nova Scotia and prelates in Ireland, France and Italy provided Charbonnel with answers to problems and gained for him financial aid, priests and nuns for his Diocese.<sup>15</sup>

To pay off the debt on the unfinished Cathedral and to create a fund for expansion Charbonnel created the Cathedral Loan Fund. Money flowed in from Canada East, Canada West and the United States. Charbonnel's relatives and friends gave £ 3000; he himself collected £ 200 in Baltimore and the laity in Toronto collected £ 3000. Donations arrived from Catholics in Montreal from whom Charbonnel, while he was their pastor, had never accepted a stipend and to whom he had given £ 100 per month. Some insured their lives with the church as beneficiary, some gave their life's savings and others left land.<sup>16</sup>

The growth of the Cathedral Loan Fund and the sequence of new Catholic institutions after 1850 demanded precise accounting practices. No longer could the Diocese be run from Bishop Power's simple bookkeeping methods in a single ledger. Charbonnel demanded strict fiscal accountability and each parish and institution was required to keep a current set of books, which grew in complexity as the years passed.<sup>17</sup> He also established the Toronto Savings Bank to remove from church personnel, whom he needed to advance the spiritual well-being of the laity, the burden of the clerical work associated with the Loan Fund. That involved keeping track of money loaned to the Church and the reimbursement of those funds on demand at various interest rates. Secondly, the Bank was intended to encourage the laity as a means of self-help: a depository to be used for providing for old-age, the education of children, for periods of illness and unemployment, or a seminal thrust towards housing.<sup>18</sup> Priests, urban and rural, were expected to submit

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<sup>14</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers, pastoral letter 1850.

<sup>15</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers. General correspondence.

<sup>16</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers. List of notes, Insurance Premiums, autobiographical sketch, etc. 1855.

<sup>17</sup> ARCAT, Various Record Books and Ledgers 1842 to 1860.

<sup>18</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers, Records of the Toronto Savings Bank.

records of bazaars, picnics, pew rents and door collections so that Charbonnel received the Cathedraticum, one tenth of parish revenue, a tithe he established to support diocesan expenses. Adopting the life-style of a beggar in regards to his personal use of food and clothing, Charbonnel expected a similar charitable commitment from the priests and laity:

You laity, give us liberally for our support and the good work we have to attend to, and we clergymen, let us continue to live economically, not to indulge our kindred which is one of the curses of a family.<sup>19</sup>

In 1852 Charbonnel made a visitation throughout the vast Diocese of Toronto to gain first-hand knowledge of its spiritual needs. Subsequently he called the priests into the city for seven days to attend an ecclesiastical retreat which concluded with a synod. The priests were to bring their books to be audited, records of marriages and baptisms, and to be prepared to discuss separate schools, mixed marriages, heretical books and the absorption of the city's orphans into homes in country parishes. As a step towards decentralization, Charbonnel reinstated the system of deaneries which had begun under the administration of Bishop Power but had ceased to function in the interregnum after Power's death. The Deans submitted reports to Charbonnel on the parishes far removed from Toronto.<sup>20</sup>

Charbonnel realized the Diocese was far too large to be controlled effectively from one centre. He proposed that it be divided into three separate Sees: Toronto with 6 counties and 40,000 Catholics; Hamilton with 8 counties and 22,000 Catholics; and London with 9 counties and 10,000 Catholics.<sup>21</sup> Concerned that "wandering or vagabond priests are increasing like a disease" and that "mixed schools are the burial place of children,"<sup>22</sup> Charbonnel warned the future Cardinal Taschereau that, overall, twenty additional priests, churches and presbyteries and forty schools were needed urgently.<sup>23</sup> In his appeal to Rome, Charbonnel concluded: "Thank God our Irish know only how to believe in the Church and Protestants make less noise than we could fear."<sup>24</sup> But it was in his direct appeal for division at the Second Council of Quebec in 1855 that one discerns the difficulties Charbonnel and his laity faced in trying to establish themselves as Catholics:

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<sup>19</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers. Notes for a circular, no date.

<sup>20</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers, Circular to the Clergy, 18 July 1852.

<sup>21</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers, Charbonnel to Father Taschereau, 26 June 1854.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers, Charbonnel to the Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda, 25 May 1855.

Also Protestantism reigns supreme in the Diocese of Toronto, powerful, rich and zealous, it has at its beck and call landed property, business and labour and numerous clergy, well endowed, teaching in schools of every branch and degree, churches and magnificent schools in abundance, elections and all the seats in Parliament, almost all public employment, houses of charity, the press and secret societies. The Bishop of Toronto is insulted in the streets of this city and in several counties there have been different attempts on the life of the missionaries. However, the presence of the Bishop, his visits and his insipient institutions have produced a certain betterment which will be much better with two new Sees and the action of their bishops.<sup>25</sup>

Charbonnel succeeded and the Diocese of Toronto was divided in 1856. He was then able to tighten his span of control and concentrate his efforts on a reduced area.<sup>26</sup> It was Charbonnel's foresight that predetermined the future creation of an Ecclesiastical Province in Upper Canada, under the direction of an archbishop with suffragans. Although Charbonnel was not the metropolitan of the newly divided dioceses, he still spoke with authority for the Church in their area.<sup>27</sup>

Having developed an internal communication linkage to tie the Diocese together, Charbonnel needed the support of the laity to establish institutions and schools which would broaden it. Long gone was the security of Bishop Alexander Macdonell's show of loyalty to the Crown and association with powerful Compact friends that gained advantages for the mission Church. With the erosion of the old Compact power in the 1840's, Bishop Power found himself in a vacuum and his laissez faire approach to politics<sup>28</sup> led him to inadvertently stamp episcopal sanction on the public school system when he became Chairman of the Board of Education for Upper Canada. Charbonnel, burdened with the debts and decisions of his predecessors, realized that in Toronto the Irish were the Catholics and his power-base lay among them, not among the Scots.

The Protestant majority in Toronto viewed the Famine Irish as an alien group, deserving such retribution because of their Catholic faith. As one man put it:

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<sup>25</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers, Charbonnel to all Bishops at the Second Council of Quebec, 20 October 1855.

<sup>26</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers, Circular on the subdivision of the Diocese, 1856.

<sup>27</sup> For evidence of Charbonnel's leadership see the various issues of the *Toronto Mirror* and *The Canadian Freeman*, 1850-1860.

<sup>28</sup> Nicolson, "Ecclesiastical Metropolitanism," *passim*.

God has destroyed the Roman Catholics in the South and West of Ireland with famine and disease... God gave them a final overthrow in the distant towns and other parts of North America.<sup>29</sup>

By the time Charbonnel arrived, the Irish were stereotyped in a most unsympathetic manner and, because of it, it was difficult to obtain assistance to overcome their social and physical ills. George Brown of *The Globe* waged a persistent attack against them and his abusive comments contributed to their peripheral position in the city:

Irish beggars are to be met everywhere, and they are as ignorant and vicious as they are poor. They are lazy, improvident and unthankful; they fill our poor-houses and our prisons, and are as brutish in their superstition as Hindoos.<sup>30</sup>

Charbonnel, victim, with his priests, of the biting remarks of George Brown and the overt attacks of violence in the streets, decided to build a separate society for all Catholics in his Diocese. The obvious growth of Catholic institutions, churches and solidarity made the Protestant majority uneasy and antagonism towards the Church and laity intensified. But Charbonnel stood firm. When the mayor of Toronto asked for a contribution to the Patriotic Fund in 1855, Charbonnel replied:

I beg to inform your Lordship that I am unable to give anything towards the patriotic fund because the thousands of children who, in Toronto and still more in the Diocese, are intellectually starving and perishing through want of religious education and of the means necessary for it, and the thousands of immigrants whom the most unjust tyranny sends here every year in a condition worse than that of the unfortunate victims of the Eastern War, have a privilege right in all my savings, hence France far from expecting anything from me sends me assistance.<sup>31</sup>

However, in expecting the clergy and laity to employ the same dedication to fulfilling his commitment of providing separate educational and social institutions, Charbonnel's approach was not always popular with the Catholic community.

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<sup>29</sup> ARCAT, Bishop Power Papers, "A Christian" to Rev. Mr. Carroll, no date.

<sup>30</sup> *The Globe*, 11 February 1858.

<sup>31</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers, Charbonnel to his Worship the Mayor, 2 March 1855.

Charbonnel assessed the needs of the Church and the people as one. The organizational forms that would institutionalize Catholic social action and Catholic education were predetermined models that had originated in France to serve the needs of the poor. The religious orders and associations that had evolved had been constituted to perform a combination of charitable, social or educational functions and had tested methodologies to deal with various social problems. The religious orders of women were not bound to a strictly cloistered life and were free to interact on a limited personal level in society. The lay institutes were based on voluntarism and tolerated no social class distinction.<sup>32</sup>

The Sisters of Loretto had come to Toronto at the time of Bishop Power's death and had begun work in the two Catholic schools of the city. They were excellent teachers but their numbers were few and Charbonnel needed more versatility to accomplish his task. In 1851 the Sisters of St. Joseph arrived to take over the orphanage that John Elmsley had established to protect the religious rights of Famine Irish infants. In addition, they began a program of outdoor relief and visitations to the homes of the poor, sick and dying.<sup>33</sup> In 1855 Bishop Charbonnel opened the House of Providence and it was to become a crucible for social action under the administration of that dynamic group of nuns. It was a home for the orphaned, sick, aged and destitute, run on a voluntary basis with the Sisters begging in the city and hinterland for its maintenance. From that single institution begun by Bishop Charbonnel there evolved, under the Sisters of St. Joseph, Providence Villa for the aged, three hospitals (St. Michael's, St. Joseph's and Our Lady of Mercy), three orphanages, St. Nicholas Home for street boys and Notre Dame Des Anges for working girls.<sup>34</sup>

At Charbonnel's invitation the Christian Brothers also arrived in 1851 to open St. Michael's College in the Bishop's Palace and to assist the Sisters of Loretto with teaching in the primary grades. They later expanded their work to establish De La Salle High School and St. John's Training School. The teaching methods employed by the Christian Brothers were widely acclaimed and, in Toronto, succeeded in the development of rehabilitated, skilled and educated young Irishmen.<sup>35</sup>

The Basilian Fathers arrived in 1852, responding to Charbonnel's plea to establish a seminary to train priests for Canada West. Like the Christian

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<sup>32</sup> *The Manual of the Society of St. Vincent of Paul* (London, 1851); *Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the Archdiocese of Toronto* (Toronto, 1884), *passim*.

<sup>33</sup> Sisters of the Community of St. Joseph of Toronto Archives (hereafter CSJTA), *Annals*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* See as well the Records of the House of Providence.

<sup>35</sup> Christian Brothers Archives, Records.

Brothers, they had minimal success initially, both being plagued with internal financial problems. Charbonnel assigned the Christian Brothers to the charge of the Catholic boys' schools in the city and gave the Basilian Fathers the responsibility of administering the newly constructed St. Basil's Church and St. Michael's College, built on a donation of land from John Elmsley. They served in dual roles of priests and educators of priests and young laymen.<sup>36</sup>

The fact that church personnel were subjected to the same prejudiced bias as the Irish population helped to draw the Catholic community in Toronto closer together. Raids against the St. Joseph's, orphanage on Nelson Street stirred Catholic ire. Those nuns were dear to the beggar bishop's heart. Working fourteen to sixteen hours a day, living in cramped quarters where they shared beds with orphaned children and had barely enough to eat,<sup>37</sup> the Sisters proved to the people that they lived at the same economic level and prompted feelings of charity that led to voluntarism. And witnessing the manner in which Charbonnel and his priests responded to physical attack and abusive insults, the Catholic laity began to adopt a similar attitude of Christian forbearance which alleviated some of the old tensions.<sup>38</sup>

To supplement the work of the religious orders Charbonnel required a lay institution to function in a voluntary manner and found it in the St. Vincent de Paul Society. The Society was formed in France in 1833 through the conceptualization of Alfred de Mun and Frederick Ozanam. It was commissioned in the words of Ozanam to

Go to the poor, go to the worker. Go not with empty hands. And what is more, go live among the poor and the workers. Like St. Vincent de Paul become in effect one of them.<sup>39</sup>

Like its French parent, the St. Vincent de Paul Society established in Toronto in 1850 was governed by rules and membership was granted on virtue and integrity. The members were obliged to visit the homes of the poor in pairs to avoid any cause for embarrassment; their commitment was personal and could not be delegated. Unlike the Protestant workers of the 1890's who developed the movement known as the Social Gospel, the

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<sup>36</sup> ARCAT, Education Papers.

<sup>37</sup> CSJTA, Annals.

<sup>38</sup> Nicolson, "The Catholic Church and the Irish in Victorian Toronto," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Guelph, 1981.

<sup>39</sup> P.A. Boyle, "The Apostolate of Catholic Charity," B. L. Masse, ed., *The Catholic Mind Through Fifty Years, 1903-1953* (New York, 1952), p. 228.

members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society did not act as social investigators but, rather, as friends. Poverty was not considered a sin, just a human condition that had to be overcome.<sup>40</sup> Charbonnel often accompanied the members on their visits. Saying “God loves the poor,” Charbonnel would lift his outer robe, the gift of a Toronto merchant, to reveal his tattered garments beneath,<sup>41</sup> a gesture that uplifted the spirits of the beholders and filled them with feelings of self-worth and group dignity.

The men in the St. Vincent de Paul Society supplied outdoor relief, food, fuel, furniture and clothing. They found living accommodations, paid rents, furnished tools for workers and loans to start small business ventures. They visited the sick, consoled the dying, and attended wakes. They set up the Toronto Savings Bank with Charbonnel, acted as truant officers, and initiated libraries to spread the faith and educate the poor. Motivated by the spirit of the beggar bishop, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul expanded its work and membership after his tenure. It influenced the formation of many benevolent and insurance societies and in the 1890’s established the St. Vincent de Paul Children’s Aid Society which was to become the Catholic Children’s Aid Society.<sup>42</sup> Modelled along the lines of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, there arose a number of Catholic female associations who supplied food and clothing to school children, visited women inmates in the jails and patients in the hospital, assisted the nuns with outdoor relief, and organized bazaars to raise money for the religious orders.<sup>43</sup> Although each society and order was independent, none duplicated the work of the other and all fell under the jurisdiction of the bishop.

Even before he arrived in Toronto, Bishop Charbonnel knew he was expected to commit himself to the pursuit of religiously-oriented education. During the period that followed Power’s death, the Diocese had been administered first by Archdeacon John Hay and then by Vicar-General John Carroll, with John Elmsley acting as secretary. At Carroll’s request Elmsley had advised Charbonnel:

But whenever you come, we all feel convinced that your arrival will be the commencement of a new era: that religion and religious education will soon be planted upon the best possible footing.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Manual of the Society of St. Vincent of Paul, passim.*

<sup>41</sup> CSJTA, “A Great Charity Organization for Laymen,” unpublished manuscript.

<sup>42</sup> ARCAT, Record Books of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

<sup>43</sup> Nicolson, “The Irish Catholics and Social Action,” *passim*.

<sup>44</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers, John Elmsley to Bishop Charbonnel, 21 June 1850.

Therefore, it is not surprising that one of Charbonnel's major goals was to secure Catholic schools for his flock. The fact that they became Irish Catholic schools was an evolutionary consequence. What Charbonnel wanted to attain for the Irish children in Canada West was parity with the minority rights of Protestants in Canada East,<sup>45</sup> a goal which pitted him against Egerton Ryerson. Charbonnel concluded that only through a form of separate education which encompassed a Catholic philosophy could the deprived children of the faithful be socialized and retained as a practising Catholic laity.

Charbonnel was determined to make the Catholic system of education independent from the common one. He did not want it to become a peripheral segment in a larger unit, relegated to secondary importance. Nor did he want the Catholic system subjected to a program that, in his opinion, was oriented to Protestantism, a duplicate of various elements in the American, Swedish, Irish National and Prussian models, which he believed was responsible for the immorality and infidelity in those countries.<sup>46</sup> Catholic schools were to be institutional elements in the whole planned program to implement social change and religious reform. Like the other social institutions, separate schools were components of a vastly interlocking system organized to protect Irish Catholics from proselytism and differential treatment. They ultimately guaranteed the survival of the group.<sup>47</sup>

When Charbonnel arrived in the city there were only two separate schools. Concerned with the behaviour of neglected Catholic children who were allowed to run wild in the eastern portion of the city, Charbonnel immediately asked for financial assistance to set up a school to accommodate those youths. In his judgement, he offered a compromise. It was to be staffed by the sisters, which would reduce the cost and would regenerate a class of citizens who might otherwise become criminals or depraved individuals. But the city was not open to compromise and denied the request. Ryerson and Charbonnel became embroiled in a bitter conflict and Charbonnel used the legislation in every way he could to advance his position in the attainment of a legally protected separate school system. In 1860, at the end of Charbonnel's tenure, Toronto had five separate schools with 716 pupils under the direction of the Christian Brothers. The Loretto Sisters were teaching 25 boarders, 25 select pupils and 100 free pupils. The St. Joseph's Order taught 500 pupils in eight institutions which included the girls' section of the five separate schools shared with the Christian Brothers, the House of

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<sup>45</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers, letter to City Superintendant of Common School, 14 October 1850.

<sup>46</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers, Correspondence in general including pastoral letters.

<sup>47</sup> Nicholson, "The Irish Catholics and Social Action," *passim*.

Providence and their convent school, as well as 40 students in night school. The total number of students receiving Catholic education in the city that year was 1505.<sup>48</sup>

So convinced was Charbonnel of the necessity for Catholic education that he coerced dissenting laity, under pain of sin, to support the schools.<sup>49</sup> He utilized the Catholic Institute to spread the concept of Catholic education as, similarly, his successor John Lynch used the Catholic League to promote political equality. Catholics began to support Charbonnel's stand more forcefully when they realized the implications against them in the various Ryerson pronouncements, particularly as they applied to Catholic teachers employed in common schools.

In December 1855, Charbonnel issued a pastoral letter. In it he outlined a course the laity were to follow to attain separate schools equitable to those in Canada East. Charbonnel also included a statement which expressed his support for the feminizing of the teaching profession, albeit for economic advantage:

To select good teachers, and principally females, who, though not read in the stars, nor understanding Newton's Theorem, are generally more economical and better able to attend even young boys and teach them prayers, Catechism, piety, modesty, good manners, reading, writing, cyphering, etc.<sup>50</sup>

That portion of the pastoral letter was directed more specifically to rural areas. Catholic schools in Toronto were run by members of the religious orders, none of whom were paid individual salaries. Instead, the religious order received a bulk payment for teaching services rendered. Through those arrangements education on a par with that offered in the public schools became financially feasible for the poorer laity.

Critics accused Charbonnel of compelling his flock to accept a school system it did not want. The basis for their argument apparently derived from a strongly worded, religiously coercive, Lenten Pastoral written by Charbonnel in 1857. In it, Charbonnel warned:

Catholic electors in the County, who do not use their electoral power in behalf of Separate Schools are also guilty of mortal sin. Likewise parents

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<sup>48</sup> *Dunegan's American Catholic Almanac and List of Clergy* (New York, 1859), p. 251.

<sup>49</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers, various Pastorals, particularly the Lenten Pastoral of 1857.

<sup>50</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers, Pastoral Letter, 1855.

not making the sacrifices necessary to secure such schools, or sending their children to mixed schools.

Moreover the Confessor who would give absolution to such parents, electors, or legislators as support mixed schools to the prejudice of separate schools would be guilty of a mortal sin.<sup>51</sup>

The thrust of that pastoral letter was also directed primarily to the laity and priests in the hinterland where, by example, nonsupport of separate schools threatened their existence in all areas of the province. Charbonnel's coercive methods were intended to counterbalance or neutralize the secular pressure influencing his Irish Catholic laity in the rural areas. Minority Irish Catholics were almost powerless in the face of a strongly organized Orange order and other nativistic groups like the Blazers. Voting was open and the few Irish politicians elected to office followed the party line.

Furthermore, the leading Catholic politician in the province, the Scottish John Sandfield Macdonald, was not in favour of separate education and on occasion spoke out against what he considered an unnecessary system. As a result, most Irish Catholics in rural areas compromised their religious principles and sent their children to mixed schools. In Charbonnel's opinion that unacceptable situation could be changed by meeting pressure with counter-pressure.

The use of that particular pastoral as an indication that Catholics, generally, were forced to accept a separate system seems an irrelevant application. In the urban centres of Canada West, Toronto particularly, the Church was hard-pressed to meet the demands of its growing laity for separate schools. Irish newspapers in Toronto were a good indicator of urban support, for they upheld the concept of Catholic schools throughout Charbonnel's tenure and well beyond. An example would be the *Mirror's* editor, Donlevy's, being the first Chairman of the Board of Separate Schools. In the latter decades of the century, some of the Irish laity disagreed with the clergy about the administrative control of the schools, or the amount or nature of Irish nationalism taught in them, but never over their being Catholic.

Like Charbonnel, albeit for different purposes, Egerton Ryerson used the legislation to advance his goal. It took several decades before Catholics received an equitable portion of the school grant and therefore the major problem in the operation and expansion of separate schools was financial. In 1854 governmental funds were received for two of the seven existing diocesan parochial schools, scarcely enough to allay expenses. The grant totalled £ 249.3.2, Catholic taxes collected were £ 252.12.1½, fees paid were £ 82.7½ and Charbonnel made up £ 1267.17.9, or 69%, from his own

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<sup>51</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers, Lenton Pastoral, 1857.

pocket, which was the residue of his personal estate from France.<sup>52</sup> The laity found many ways to make up revenues to fund their growing school system. Picnics, bazaars and concerts were organized to support the schools which were lacking in resources and accoutrements. The bulk sum paid to religious orders for teaching services reduced administrative costs. The religious orders were allowed to apply profits gained from the operation of private schools to balance the budget of partially funded elementary institutions under their control. The introduction of sound cost-accounting practices performed by efficient unpaid laymen achieved tight fiscal control over meagre resources. In that way separate schools survived.<sup>53</sup>

One year after Charbonnel's departure, Egerton Ryerson admitted:

The good Sisters of St. Joseph and the Christian Brothers deserve our gratitude for the manner in which they are educating our Catholic youth. They are a blessing to the city of Toronto. They are pointing out to the youthful mind the way of virtue, religion, morality and useful knowledge.<sup>54</sup>

Regardless, the city utilized the Catholics as a scapegoat for its current social ills. When the census of 1861 showed 2500 of the 11,500 children between the ages of 5 and 16 in the city not attending school, the assumption was that Catholics formed by far the majority of that group of 'street arabs'. The census of 1863 proved otherwise. Of the Catholic children enumerated, 1999 attended school and 467, or 18.9%, did not. Of the 5877 Protestant children enumerated, 1165 or 16.5% did not attend school. Catholics formed 28.6% of the children out of school, which meant the problem was shared by both Catholics and Protestants alike.<sup>55</sup>

While Charbonnel was in Europe in 1856, he wrote:

Venio de Toronto  
Apud Lacum Ontario  
In populo Barbaro  
Benedicamus Domino.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> ARCAT, Education Papers, Separate School Report, 1854; S.G. Lynn to Charbonnel, 14 April 1855.

<sup>53</sup> ARCAT, Education Papers. In addition, see the advertisements in the Catholic press in the period 1850-1890.

<sup>54</sup> *The Journal of Education for Upper Canada*, 14, no. 9, (September 1861), p. 144.

<sup>55</sup> ARCAT, Education Papers, *Copy of the Annual Report for 1863*, p. 43. See as well the Toronto newspapers, particularly *The Globe*, 1861-1864.

<sup>56</sup> W. Perkins Bull, *From Macdonell to McGuigan* (Toronto, 1939), p. 278.

Four years later he resigned as Bishop of Toronto and entered the Capuchin Order. Possibly his resignation stemmed from the abuse heaped upon him and his Basilian priests because of their French accents and backgrounds. Although the abuse came primarily from a fraction of the urban Irish and others urged on by an anti-Catholic element in the city,<sup>57</sup> it may have served as a signal to Charbonnel of a need for change. Charbonnel's final gift to the Diocese of Toronto was John Joseph Lynch, chosen because he was English-speaking, and who, therefore, could be more successful in expanding the church, its educational programs and social work among the laity. Having been made Titular Bishop of Sozopolis in 1869, Charbonnel escorted Bishop Lynch to a place among the Archbishops at the Vatican Council in 1870. Charbonnel, who had divided the large Diocese of Toronto, witnessed its reorganization into a unit under the jurisdiction of a metropolitan.<sup>58</sup>

In 1880 Charbonnel was made Archbishop of Sozopolis and died in 1891 at Crest, France. Armand de Charbonnel has never been canonized; no choir has sung "Beatae Armandus Oro Pro Nobis." Look not for memorials to the beggar bishop, but look to the institutions, the schools, the churches themselves in the Archdiocese of Toronto – they are memorial enough.

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<sup>57</sup> ARCAT, Charbonnel Papers. See the various Broadsheets.

<sup>58</sup> *The Globe*, 1 December 1869; 21 January 1870.