



**CHARBONNEL, ARMAND-FRANÇOIS-MARIE DE**, Roman Catholic priest, Sulpician, bishop, and office holder; b. 1 Dec. 1802 at Château du Flachat, near Monistrol-sur-Loire, France, son of Jean-Baptiste de Charbonnel, Comte de Charbonnel, and Marie-Claudine de Pradier; d. 29 March 1891 in Crest, France.

Armand-François-Marie de Charbonnel began a brilliant scholastic career in 1812 when he entered classical studies at a college in Montbrison. A year later he transferred to the college in Annonay. Subsequently he studied for the priesthood at the Séminaire de Saint-Sulpice in Paris, where, at the age of 20, he declined the offer of a professorship in philosophy. He was ordained on 17 Dec. 1825 and was appointed chaplain to the Duchesse de Berry in appreciation of his father's support for the Royalist cause during the French revolution.

Seeking more challenging work, Charbonnel joined the Society of Saint-Sulpice in 1826 and became professor of dogmatic theology and scripture, and later treasurer, at the seminary in Lyons. Charbonnel's intervention during a workers' revolt in that city in 1833 saved the seminary from destruction but he would not accept the cross of the Legion of Honour for this action. After a period of poor health he spent 1834–39 teaching at the seminaries of Versailles and Bordeaux. To avoid appointment as bishop or as superior of a seminary, he decided to undertake missionary work in North America and came to the Séminaire de Saint-Sulpice in Montreal late in 1839. There he distinguished himself as an eloquent preacher at large retreats before moving to Baltimore, Md, about 1841 to study English.

In 1844, some two years after his return to Montreal, Bishop Antoine Blanc of New Orleans asked Charbonnel to be his successor, and the pope was petitioned to make him Blanc's coadjutor. Charbonnel, however, refused advancement and remained in Montreal, where he barely survived the typhus epidemic of 1847, which had been carried to Canada by refugees from the Irish famine. He returned to France that autumn to convalesce. When his brother Félix-Louis was killed in Paris during the revolution of 1848, he would not agree to take his place in the assembly, preferring to be a professor again, at a seminary in Aix-en-Provence.

Following the death of Bishop Michael [Power\\*](#) on 1 Oct. 1847, the see of Toronto had become vacant and it remained so for two and a half years. John [Larkin\\*](#) was proposed for the post, but when he refused, four Canadian bishops wrote to Rome in 1849 stating that Charbonnel was their preferred candidate. Charbonnel was already admired by the clergy of Toronto because of a retreat he had preached at Bishop Power's request in 1845. He received the papal bulls of

appointment in France early in 1850, was preconized bishop of Toronto in a consistory on 15 March, and was consecrated in the Sistine Chapel on 26 May by Pope Pius IX.

Arriving in Toronto on 21 September, Charbonnel faced the immense task of bringing order to a diocese left virtually leaderless during the interregnum. In 1844 Bishop Power had admitted that he had “neither colleges, nor schools, nor men” in the diocese, which stretched from Oshawa to Windsor. By 1850 the Catholic population in the city of Toronto had increased to 7,940 from an estimated 2,500 in 1838, chiefly because of immigration subsequent to the Irish famine (by 1860 it exceeded 12,000). The Catholic population of the diocese had increased from about 50,000 in 1842 to an estimated 80,000 in 1850, of whom, Charbonnel believed, the majority were Irish. He was so shocked by the poverty and the “ignorance and intemperance” of the immigrants that he instituted a multi-faceted program to mould and educate both old and young in the Catholic faith.

Although the needs of the diocese were great, there were no institutions, few Catholic schools, and no male religious to assist the bishop. The city of Toronto contained a single Catholic church, St Paul’s, at Queen and Power streets, and the unfinished St Michael’s Cathedral with a debt of £11,216 11s., which had been guaranteed by two prominent Catholic laymen, John [Elmsley\\*](#) and Samuel George Lynn. There were a few Sisters of Loretto teaching in Toronto [*see* Ellen [Dease\\*](#)] but only 28 secular priests scattered throughout the extensive diocese. Finally, there was little evidence of financial accountability in a diocese that was insolvent.

With Charbonnel, however, change became a *sine qua non*. He established the Cathedral Loan Fund, which received donations from Upper and Lower Canada and the United States; the laity in Toronto contributed generously as did Charbonnel’s friends and family. Artisans were hired to decorate the unfinished cathedral and Charbonnel personally paid for the stained glass windows that were installed. Under his direction priests and institutions adopted precise accounting practices; in 1852 he initiated the *cathedraticum*, by which one-tenth of the income of all parishes was remitted to the bishop for the operation of the diocese. To fulfil the spiritual needs of his flock, Charbonnel recruited priests, including John [WALSH](#), Michel [Moncoq\\*](#), and Jean-François [Jamot\\*](#), and he exercised control over the clergy by reintroducing a system of deaneries and a synod. By 1855 he reported that 42 priests had been brought into the diocese and that 40 aspirants were being educated. In February 1856 the western portions of the diocese were separated into two new bishoprics, Hamilton and London, and three months later John [Farrell\\*](#) and Pierre-Adolphe [Pinsoneault\\*](#) were consecrated bishops of these new sees. In 1860, the year he left, the reduced diocese still had 36 priests. Additionally, during Charbonnel’s tenure 23 churches were constructed: 16 in the area that made up the diocese of Toronto at the time of his departure, 2 in the diocese of Hamilton, and 5 in the diocese of London.

Charbonnel introduced a number of religious orders from France to meet social and educational needs. The Christian Brothers arrived in Toronto in 1851 to open St Michael's College and to teach in the emerging separate school system. The Basilians came in 1852 to share in parish work but primarily to train men for the priesthood [see Jean-Mathieu [Soulerin\\*](#)]. Their seminary was amalgamated with St Michael's College in 1853 and the college became an important Catholic educational institution for priests and laymen. In 1851 the Sisters of St Joseph arrived and took over the administration of the orphanage begun by John Elmsley [see Marie-Antoinette [Fontbonne\\*](#)]. They also set up a social program of outdoor relief to aid the poor, visited the homes of the sick and needy, and taught in the schools with the Sisters of Loretto and the Christian Brothers.

Under Charbonnel's auspices the Toronto conference of the Society of St Vincent de Paul for Catholic laymen was formed in November 1850 to serve the poor. Its members visited the needy in their homes, in the hospital, and in jail; they provided food, clothing, fuel, furniture, and medicine; they found jobs and lodgings, set up libraries and night schools, and acted as truant officers. With the members of the society, Charbonnel established in 1854 the Toronto Savings Bank to invest funds for charitable purposes and to provide the poor Irish immigrants with a depository of their own as a means of saving for housing, education, retirement, or periods of illness. Charbonnel also founded the House of Providence (opened in 1857), delegating its administration to the Sisters of St Joseph. Within the institution the sisters cared for the sick, the incurables, the aged, and the homeless. It contained a hospital section, an orphanage and orphanage school, and a school for the deaf and dumb. From it evolved a home for the aged, three hospitals, three orphanages, and hostels for homeless youth.

Through the expansion of institutions and personnel, Charbonnel created the traditional metropolitan form of church government. By introducing annual retreats (in 1853), encouraging sacred music, religious art, and Marian devotion, and insisting upon religious instruction in the schools, Charbonnel fostered an increased spirituality among the Irish (who, he believed, were lax in religious observances). This devotional renewal was complemented by a growing proliferation of stores selling religious and devotional literature from Ireland and by a press (the *Toronto Mirror*, the *Catholic Citizen*, and, after 1858, the *Canadian Freeman*) which tended to identify the Catholic Church with the Irish peasant.

Charbonnel also played a major role in establishing Catholic separate schools in Upper Canada, which he considered essential for his program to educate children in the faith. He was appointed to the Council of Public Instruction in the year he arrived, 1850, the same year that religious animosities were awakened by the papal aggression controversy [see George [Brown\\*](#)] and separate school legislation was being criticized as discriminatory and prejudicial to the development of a national educational system. Nevertheless, Egerton [Ryerson\\*](#), the chief superintendent of education, met Charbonnel's request in 1851 for a separate school in each city

or town ward and the bishop praised the “sincere liberality” of Ryerson and the government. Although the abolition of separate schools was demanded by some members of the assembly on the grounds of national unity, Ryerson defended their existence, though not their extension, as a privilege and a protection, rather than an inalienable right as claimed by Roman Catholics.

In 1852 Charbonnel complained that in Chatham blacks had been treated more generously than Catholics in the matter of educational financing, that certain textbooks gave “mongrel interpretations” of religious truth, and that Catholic children had to be protected from the triple danger of Protestant teachers, Protestant books, and Protestant fellow-students (he declared that mixed schools were “the ruin of religion and a persecution of the Church”). He called for “full management” by Catholics of their own schools as part of a dual system like Lower Canada’s. Ryerson suggested that this change of approach reflected European ultramontanist influences and defended the letter of Upper Canada’s school laws. In a lengthy exchange of public letters Charbonnel proved to be impassioned, and often ill informed, whereas Ryerson’s knowledge of the system gave him an insuperable advantage.

Archbishop Pierre-Flavien [Turgeon\\*](#) assured Charbonnel that Co-Premier Augustin-Norbert [Morin\\*](#) and Attorney General William Buell [Richards\\*](#) had promised to make the Upper Canadian system dualistic like the one in Lower Canada. A remedial bill, which exempted separate school supporters from common school taxes, was drafted by Catholic members of the legislature and submitted to the government late in 1852; the next spring a revision approved by the authors became law. Ryerson insisted these separate school provisions did not endanger the school system, but he deprecated “Lower Canada interference in an exclusively Upper Canada question.” Before the end of 1853, however, Charbonnel asked Co-Premier Francis [Hincks\\*](#) for specific amendments. Shortly before the fall of the Hincks–Morin government in June 1854, Ryerson drafted another bill to meet these requests but warned that concessions had reached their limit, suggesting that if further demands were made 90 per cent of Upper Canadians would support complete separation of church and state.

After the subsequent election and the installation of the ministry of Morin and Sir Allan Napier [MacNab\\*](#) in September, Charbonnel personally presented the new attorney general, John A. [MACDONALD](#), with a “protestation” and yet another draft separate school bill, which was unexpectedly introduced by Étienne-Paschal [Taché\\*](#) in the closing days of the session and passed with majority support from Lower Canada. The Taché Act of 1855 removed several administrative obstacles to the establishment of separate schools, permanently exempted separate school supporters from common school taxes, and gave separate schools a proportional share of the legislative educational grant. Charbonnel formally thanked the government for “doing justice to his Church,” but a few days later he resigned from the Council of Public Instruction, announcing that the effects of the new act were “iniquitous.” His Lenten

pastoral of 1856 said Roman Catholics who did not use their votes to promote separate schools were guilty of mortal sin.

Despite his achievements in developing the diocese, Charbonnel had always felt inadequate to the challenge because of his linguistic and cultural distance from his people. As early as March 1854 he informed Rome that he was not liked by his clergy and that several of them even detested him. When his request to be relieved of his post was accepted in 1856, he travelled to Europe, leaving that summer, and stayed 22 months. He twice visited Rome, where he was told that because of public admiration for his work and character his request was now refused, and he returned to Toronto in June 1858. The following year, when for the third time he asked for a coadjutor, he was given Irish-born John Joseph Lynch\*, founder and president of the Seminary of Our Lady of Angels (later Niagara University) in Niagara Falls, N.Y. Lynch was consecrated in the Sistine Chapel in November and Charbonnel left again for Europe in February 1860, resigning his see on 26 April to become titular bishop of Sozopolis.

Charbonnel entered the Capuchin friary at Rieti (Italy) and after his noviciate returned to France where he was appointed an auxiliary to the cardinal archbishop of Lyons. For the next two decades he travelled widely in France, engaged in administration, preaching, organizing retreats, and consecrating priests, especially Basilians, to whom he was particularly attached. He continued his interest in and support for the Canadian church. In 1880, ten years after the diocese of Toronto was raised to an archdiocese, Pope Leo XIII responded to the request of Archbishop Lynch and three Ontario bishops for recognition of Charbonnel's services to the church in Canada and France by appointing him archbishop of Sozopolis. As early as 1878 Charbonnel's health had been failing and in 1883 he gave up his administrative duties and preaching and retired to a Capuchin friary at Crest, France. Charbonnel had always been a busy traveller but by 1885 he was forced to confine himself to the friary, where he died and was buried in 1891.

Despite his accomplishments, Charbonnel had always suffered from a deep sense of personal inadequacy. Many of his problems in Toronto arose from the fact that he never mastered English. He repeatedly sought to retire to the monastic life but, ever obedient to the will of his church, he persevered courageously in the duties assigned to him. A gentle and pious man, he was nevertheless unyielding in his convictions, which he expressed with great emotion. Charbonnel, an ascetic by nature, adopted the life-style of a beggar and was loved by the poor. Some of the laity in Toronto, however, who chose to remain anonymous, resented the demands made upon them to practise their religion and to support the schools and charities. They directed their criticism towards what set Charbonnel apart – his French background and his French religious personnel – and their opposition to his innovations played a large part in his determination to be relieved of the episcopal duties that he had only assumed on the orders of the pope.

Although Charbonnel was first and foremost a preacher, his many talents prompted the bishops of Canada to call him “father and founder of the ecclesiastical province of Toronto.” During his relatively short episcopate he laid the foundation for financial stability in the diocese and created the organizations for his church’s endeavours in charity, education, and spirituality. His episcopate coincided with a decade of revolutionary social, economic, political, demographic, educational, and technological changes in Upper Canada, and he equipped his church to cope with the problems of a rapidly modernizing urban and industrial society.

MURRAY W. NICOLSON and JOHN S. MOIR

Additional details concerning primary sources can be found in M. W. Nicolson, “The Catholic Church and the Irish in Victorian Toronto” (PHD thesis, Univ. of Guelph, Ont., 1981).

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