

Father Soulerin, C.S.B., Founder and Administrator

by

Rev. Francis **BOLAND, C.S.B., Ph.D.**,
*Department of History, Assumption University of Windsor,
Windsor, Ontario*

During the year 1954 the first steps toward the union of French and Canadian Basilians were taken with the visit of Father Roume of Annonay, France, to Toronto. With him, from the Basilian Archives, came the correspondence of Father Soulerin, the first Basilian superior in Toronto, to the Superior General of the Community. In addition there were letters from the Toronto bursar, Father Malbos, as well as those of Father Molony and Messrs. Vincent and Flannery to the French mother house. These letters provided the basis of this paper, though much information was gleaned from the writings of Bishop Charbonnel of Toronto to both Bishop Guigues of Bytown, and to Father Tourvieille, the Basilian general. The pages of the "Catholic Citizen" and the "Catholic Freeman," the Toronto Catholic weeklies of the 1850's, now located in the Central Library, Toronto, proved of immense value in disclosing the arduous difficulties attendant on the construction of the new St. Michael's College.

On May 26, 1850, Father de Charbonnel, a French priest and a former Basilian student, was consecrated Bishop of Toronto. A very zealous and saintly man, the new Bishop was faced with a multiplicity of problems and of these the more pressing seemed to be the Separate School situation in Canada West, diocesan poverty and the lack of priests. As a solution for this last mentioned problem Bishop Charbonnel requested and obtained the services of five Basilians from his native land to assist him in carrying on the work of a Little Seminary. Arriving in August, 1852, the little group of Basilians was composed of the superior, Father Soulerin, the bursar, Father Malbos and two unordained clerics, Messrs. Flannery and Vincent; the fifth member was Father Molony who had accompanied the Bishop in 1850.

It is not the purpose of this study to glorify the first superior of the Basilian foundation in Canada: our aim is rather to assess the value of his work and to judge him as an administrator. This can be done only by probing his problems and examining his solutions to these problems.

Prior to the arrival of the small community in Toronto, a treaty was arranged between the bishop and the Basilian general, Father Tourvieille. The main work of the Basilians in Toronto was to be the establishment of a Little Seminary which was to be owned by the bishop. Diocesan work similar to that of Father Molony was to be an added project; a house for the community was to be furnished by the bishop, so that a religious life in common could be observed and in a short period a parish church was to be entrusted to the Congregation. To be

assured of at least some English-speaking priests, the bishop offered a meagre salary only to those whose English was satisfactory.

Between August 21 and September 4, 1852 the Basilian community lodged in the Toronto Cathedral palace, while awaiting the completion of a house on Queen Street which was to serve temporarily as both the Little Seminary and the residence of the Congregation. A church, promised by the bishop, was to be opened the following spring and made available to the Basilians, though owned by the diocese.¹ Located at the corner of Adelaide and Bathurst Streets, the foundation was to include a brick church, St. Mary's, and a wooden structure to serve as the Little Seminary. With this plan in mind the temporary building on Queen Street was named "St. Mary's Seminary," and this ecclesiastical school was opened September 15, 1852, with nine students.²

While the Basilians had been engaged to administer the Little Seminary; Bishop Charbonnel had obtained the services of the Christian Brothers to conduct a school for boys of high school or college age who sought a secular education.³ This school was to occupy a wing of the Palace, constructed during the spring and summer of 1852, and was to be separate from St. Mary's Seminary, though it was hoped that some of the students might evince signs of a vocation. Called "St. Michael's College" it was ready for occupancy at the same time as the Little Seminary opened its portals. In spite of the best efforts of both the bishop and the Christian Brothers, St. Michael's College enjoyed little success and after a half-year, its student body totalled only eight.⁴ The slow progress of the College contrasted unfavourably with the seeming rapid development of the Seminary where the same period saw a rapid increase of students.⁵ Nevertheless the picture was far from promising to the bishop who not only was saddled with the salaries of the three Basilians whose language was adequate, but also with the rent of the Queen Street house, while at the same time he was denied most of the tuition fees because of the poverty of the students. In the face of the Cathedral debt and other pressing financial needs, it seemed that some modifications of the treaty were required.

In the midst of the uncertainty generated by the financial-administrative problems, the little band of five Basilians were encountering additional problems of a different nature. In the Little Seminary, life for the Basilians approximated that of Annonay. While continuing their theology under Fathers Soulerin and Malbos, Messrs. Flannery and Vincent did school work, the former teaching the six youngest students, the latter acting as a supervisor while improving his

¹ Rev. J. Soulerin, *Undated Letter to Rev. Deglesne*, p. 3.

² Rev. J. Soulerin, *Journal of St. Mary's Seminary, Toronto, 1852-1853*, p. 8.

³ Rev. P. Molony, *Letter to Rev. Tourvieille*, April 29, 1852, p. 2.

⁴ Rev. J. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, January 9, 1853, p. 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2. Father Soulerin mentioned that the enrollment for St. Mary's reached a total of twenty-one students.

English. Fathers Malbos and Molony divided lessons for the other students. Chaplaincy duties to the Ladies of Loretto and the Sisters of St. Joseph were entrusted to Fathers Malbos and Molony while Father Soulerin was appointed confessor of the Brothers. Week-end ministerial work was at first centred in the Cathedral and then in the mission areas of Weston, Brockton and further away communities. The preaching of retreats was a regular practice. In the absence of Bishop Charbonnel, Father Soulerin was usually appointed to replace him in his minor work, such as the blessing and laying of corner-stones and in a secretarial capacity.⁶

While the problem of poverty faced Bishop Charbonnel it was no less a difficulty for the Congregation. Each member received a salary from Annonay but unfortunately the prices of Canadian articles greatly exceeded the French ones, and only three of the five Basilians received the episcopal salary. Twenty-five louis were needed annually for school up-keep, light and heat, and a similar amount was spent on washing and medical supplies. Sacrifices were required, and in a letter to Father Polly, Father Malbos writes “Father Soulerin gives us each only one piece of paper; it is awfully expensive.”⁷

Used to the warmth of the Midi, the Basilians were unprepared for the cold climate of the Toronto winter months, and the effort to purchase adequate clothing taxed to the limit the resources of the little community. Strange, too, to the Fathers was the spirit of independence evident in the students. Accustomed as the Basilians were to the tradition of absolute rule whether exercised by a Bourbon or a Bonaparte, the majority of Toronto citizens traditionally witnessed important laws decided by a majority vote in Parliament. So the Little Seminary students were “naturally inclined to demand a reason for certain rules.”⁸

Perhaps the greatest initial difficulty facing the infant Community was the problem of language. Fathers Soulerin and Malbos, though passably competent in English were frequently perplexed; the latter made only one effort to preach in the novel tongue, while the former, though more advanced, seldom preached without reading his sermon. It was not until Father Vincent became superior that his language problem was solved. Of course Father Molony and Father Flannery experienced no difficulties, and it was consequently on them that the chief burdens of the external ministry fell. In an effort to solve the problem Father Soulerin introduced the custom of speaking English at all times and induced the members to pledge themselves to this practice.⁹ The early letters of Father Soulerin are filled with suggestions to the General concerning the language difficulties – the most frequent request was the necessity of teaching English to the students at Annonay and particularly to any of the novices who showed some

⁶ *Ibid.*, October 1, 1852, p. 1. This letter contains scattered references to the early work of the Community.

⁷ Rev. J. Malbos, *Letter to Rev. Polly*, August 29, 1852, p. 2.

⁸ Rev. I. Malbos, *Letter to Rev. Charmont*, January 5, 1853, p. 3.

⁹ Rev. P. Flannery, *Letter to Rev. Deglesne*, December 1, 1852, p. 2.

inclination to volunteer for the Canadian mission.

As the time for occupancy of the new St. Mary's Church and Seminary approached, anxieties filled the hearts of the Basilians. On the one hand, occupancy of St. Mary's Church would provide a solution to the cramped quarters on Queen Street, but on the other hand, both the Jesuits and Oblates had objected to being mere hired priests administering a church, the entire revenue of which became the bishop's. Moreover, through personal observation Father Soulerin had noticed that most American ecclesiastical institutions under the jurisdiction of religious, were both constructed and owned by the religious. "I would like to do as the other religious orders ... they have churches of their own."¹⁰ Moreover, a certain amount of security was needed for the continuance of the Congregation and while it was the wish of Bishop Charbonnel to maintain St. Mary's in Basilian hands, exigencies might arise under the tenure of a succeeding bishop that would lead to the expulsion of the Fathers. It was thus with mixed feelings that the Community viewed the rapid construction of the new residence and Church; and when the bishop proposed the diversion of St. Mary's to secular control, and the Little Seminary building to the Sisters of Loretto, he was not opposed by the Fathers. Yet, his suggestion that Basilians occupy the Palace was not in conformity with the ideas of a separate house envisioned by Father Soulerin. In the face of this reluctance on the part of the Basilians to fit in completely with the bishop's ideas Bishop Charbonnel broached the possibility of a later location in any one of three districts in the city of Toronto.¹¹ At most, the Palace occupancy was to be but a temporary move in the minds of the Fathers.

In January, 1853 the Basilians were informed of the full nature of the bishop's plans. The Congregation would be lodged in the Palace and in the house adjoining it, and the dining-room and table fare would be in common with the bishop and his staff. In addition, the Little Seminary would become a mixed school composed of students with both secular and ecclesiastical pursuits. To the added burden of teaching resulting from this new arrangement, the Basilians were to take care of the Cathedral, which prompted Father Soulerin to utter "this is more of a job than five poor Basilians can handle."¹² Unity of administration of Cathedral, Seminary and Congregation was the aim of the bishop: precisely the opposite was the aim of the Basilians who feared the loss of their Community identity under such a plan. This fear was the basic reason for the Basilian petition to Bishop Charbonnel. This petition demanded a completely separate administration in the Palace, and the appointment of an assistant priest by the bishop for Cathedral duties. These duties were incompatible with Seminary classes and exercises. The petition also included the request that all episcopal orders to individual Basilians be referred first to the Basilian Superior. To this

¹⁰ Rev. J. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, October 1, 1852, p. 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, December, 1852, p. 1

¹² Rev. J. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, January 23, 1853, p. 1.

petition the bishop was quite receptive, but failed to agree with the Congregation's desire for autonomy in the field of administration. In the minds of the Basilians,

the simplest arrangement would be for the bishop to have his own separate house and for us to live in ours, undisturbed by every stranger that he may invite to meals, able to perform our evercises with regularity, with stable hours and days set aside for confessions and preaching.¹³

When the Little Seminary moved from Queen Street into the Bishop's Palace it assumed the name of St. Michael's College and the term, St. Mary's Seminary, faded into obscurity.

Once located within the portals of the Palace, the Congregation attempted to lead a normal community life. So busy was the Bishop with other matters that he seldom intruded within the confines of the Basilian enclosure. However, the student body was growing rapidly, including as it did both aspirants for the priesthood and non-aspirants, and by November, 1853, the enrollment had reached the total of forty-seven, including thirty boarders.¹⁴) With every promise of a yearly increase of the student body, the Palace was simply too small. Moreover, while Bishop Charbonnel ignored the noise generated by the healthy boys this was no criterion of the attitude of future bishops, and this uncertainty only added to the insecurity felt by the Fathers. The failure of the bishop to appoint an assistant until 1855 meant that the Community mingled in "about a thousand things none of which directly concerns us."¹⁵ The increased student body taxed, to the utmost, the strength of the priests who had to teach theology to the boys, and philosophy to five, as well as the regular prescribed subjects to the boys of college and high school level. In their dilemma a happy compromise was reached in the assigning of high school classes to the more mature aspirants to the priesthood.¹⁶ While this stratagem reduced the excesses of work in the classroom, it failed to allay the gradual growth of discontent among the confrères.

The following year, 1854, saw a further increase in the student body, and despite the discomforts of the Fathers, Father Soulerin could write "we are admired and our work is appreciated, and His Lordship is well satisfied."¹⁷ Towards the end of the year conditions reached an impasse; certain that a separate house was needed if the Congregation was to enjoy harmony, to maintain its high reputation and to endure, the superior was in an unenviable

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, November 21, 1853, p. 2.

¹⁵ Rev. P. Molony, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, September 19, 1853, p. 3.

¹⁶ Rev. J. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, November 21, 1853, p. 1. Messrs. Rooney and Keleher were conducting classes, supplementing the Basilians.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, January 2, 1854, p. 1.

position. On the one hand the confrères were disgruntled, and as Father Souleriri writes, “I was attacked as if I was the only cause of our protracted stay in the Palace where we seem to be something but can do nothing.”¹⁸) On the other hand the edifying patience of the superior was taxed to the utmost in an effort to maintain harmonious relations with Bishop Charbonnel. The Superior avoided impatience and while doing and saying everything possible to obtain a separate house, was always prudent enough not to say a word that could be misconstrued by the energetic and zealous bishop. Patient waiting and co-operation with episcopal authority was to be rewarded.

The single purpose of Bishop Charbonnel was the good of his diocese, and this good admitted of various levels. Unfortunately for the success of the Basilian Community, the bishop felt that greater goods than secondary and college education existed and of necessity must have a priority.

Foremost in the mind of Bishop Charbonnel was the need of priests. Added to this problem the bishop was confronted with the diocesan financial situation, the need of Catholic separate schools, the erection of a Catholic hospital, and a House of Providence for the aged. In addition “the bishop maintained a constant vigilance against the inroads of divorce and secret societies.”¹⁹ For the Basilian Fathers, the prime aim of their foundation was, of course, the education of young men for the priesthood; so it seemed that the aims of both principals coincided, but when circumstances intervened to thrust the growing number of non-aspirants on the Basilians, the Bishop was not slow to show his reluctance to foster such an undertaking. The fear that St. Michael’s might gradually lose its seminary character was one of the reasons for the retention of the Community at the Palace when the members yearned for a house of their own. We see, more clearly, the capability of Father Soulerin in preventing any breach of good relations between his frustrated confrères and the bishop. To realize the aims and problems of the bishop is essential if we are to have a clear grasp of the difficulties surrounding the position of the Fathers.

In his educational program the bishop had expended one thousand louis in constructing the building adjacent to the Cathedral. The contemplated vacating of this edifice by the Basilians would be a serious blow to the bishop’s economy, and it, is little wonder that he could not concur wholeheartedly with the desires of the Community.

Bishop Charbonnel was prompted to detain the Basilians in his palace from religious reasons also – the need of priests to act as missionaries. Throughout the letters of the Basilians written to the Superior General the lack of priests to carry out the Sacred Ministry in the Toronto diocese was a constant topic. Father Soulerin mentioned that there were only four priests in the city at the time of his arrival.²⁰ So serious was the situation that Father Soulerin, for a very short

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, November 8, 1854, p. 3.

¹⁹ Editorial from *The Catholic Freeman* of Toronto August 26, 1859, p. 2., c. 1.

²⁰ Rev. J. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, October 1, 1852, p. 2.

period, contemplated the feasibility of employing some of the Basilians in a mission capacity: “Basilians are needed in Canada far more than in a little piece of France – Fathers Vincent and Flannery would do very well in a mission.”²¹ This consideration was short lived in the face of the necessity of education, but his feelings indicated the tremendous task of the bishop, who wrote to the Propagation of the Faith: “I need good priests and it is absolutely necessary that I find them myself.”²²

As a result we can realize the feelings of the zealous bishop as he viewed the five Basilian priests in the Palace. Hopes of obtaining the Community priests for mission work could be held so long as the Basilians did not live in an educational establishment of their own. We thus see that for both spiritual and economic reasons it was to the interest of the bishop that the Congregation be detained in the Palace.

Despite his difficulties the bishop was above using pressure on the Community, and he adhered to the terms of the original treaty. In 1852 when the time came for the Fathers to take vows, the bishop officiated, though it was his express wish that the members refuse to bind themselves.²³ The taking of vows reduced the possibility of Community members devoting themselves to missionary work.²⁴

Fear for the constancy of the missionary priest living by himself was not only a source of worry to Father Soulerin, but it had been one of the determining factors in the rejection of the bishop’s request by the Oblate Community. Early in 1853 a request for Father Molony to assume control of St. Mary’s parish fell on deaf ears not only because the demands of teaching prevented it, but also for spiritual reasons. Even for Father Molony there would be a danger in living a solitary life after years of life in a community or, at least, in the Palace as the Bishop’s archdeacon and associate. It was not only the request for individual Basilians to assume the duties of the external ministry that reflected the bishop’s attitude; it was also quite evident in the matter of vocations. In 1853 it was his policy to favour vocations to the Community only if the young aspirant pledged himself to prepare for the life of the missionary rather than that of the teacher.²⁵ In fact the bishop “didn’t want the Basilians to build a college when there was another work more pressing.”²⁶ This negative attitude of the bishop created

²¹ Rev. J. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, September 5, 1854, p. 2.

²² Bishop Charbonnel, *Letter to Cardinal Fransoni*, August 31, 1855. (Preserved in the *Registered Letters of Bishop Guignes*, Vol. 8, p. 331, Archives of Archdiocese of Ottawa).

²³ Rev. J. Malbos, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, November 21, 1852, p. 2.

²⁴ Though Fathers Soulerin and Malbos took vows on November 21, 1852 and Fathers Molony and Vincent did so at a later date, Father Flannery never took vows.

²⁵ Rev. J. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, December 13, 1853, p. 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, November 8, 1854, p. 3.

difficulties for the young community, and had it not been for the prudent foresight of Father Soulerin the history of the Basilians in Canada might have been more brief or much different than the reality.

This negative or prohibitory attitude of the bishop was first evident toward the end of 1852; by spring, 1853, the attitude had generated into a definite policy. This period of development corresponded chronologically with the vain episcopal attempts to secure priests and the efforts to obtain a fair Separate school settlement. It caused consternation among the Fathers as it immediately succeeded the loss of St. Mary's parish, and subsequent alternative proposals of the bishop.

The later proposals of Bishop Charbonnel are contained in a letter of Father Soulerin to his Superior General in December, 1852. After being informed by Father Soulerin of the advantages, both to Community and diocese, of the establishment of a separate Basilian house, as found in American dioceses, Bishop Charbonnel, after deciding against Basilian occupancy of St. Mary's, proposed possible sites for the venture. For Father Soulerin a solid establishment was immediately necessary for the living of a religious life; such a foundation would provide an atmosphere of confidence for future Basilians. The bishop, realizing the Community's desire for security, declared: "I am not immortal, my successor may have different plans for the Palace."²⁷ The proposal of a large area in the vicinity of St. Paul's Church was rejected on the grounds of its unhealthy location near a cemetery. Offering many more advantages was that section of the Elmsley property, previously offered to Father Tellier. Situated north of the Cathedral, it was within twenty minutes walking distance of Toronto. The property occupied an area of somewhat more than an acre, and with the addition of a neighbouring section, would provide ample space for both college and church. Soon assuming the name of the district, Clover Hill, the Elmsley property possessed the elevation necessary for healthiness and the privacy and spaciousness necessary for a boarding college. But the community was to find itself in the awkward position of owning a property on which no building could be erected.

One of the difficulties preventing the Community from taking positive steps in establishing a college at Clover Hill was the problem of separation of students: i.e. of separating the students who sought secular pursuits from those who sought ecclesiastical ones. While their experience in Toronto convinced the Basilians that educational facilities should be offered to non-aspirants to the priesthood, the bishop remained adamant in his view that separation was essential: "we must withdraw the aspirants from worldly life and from those who are seeking worldly professions."²⁸ It is quite obvious that the bishop's view was

²⁷ *Ibid.*, December, 1852, p. 3. The actual words of the Bishop are quoted by Father Soulerin in this letter.

²⁸ Bishop Charbonnel, *Letter to Cardinal Fransoni*, January 7, 1854, *Letter Book*, p. 40.

the ideal, and that plan is accepted as the “sine qua non” of all major seminaries. It was the view of Father Soulerin too, but he maintained that “the establishment of a Grand Seminary was out of the question in such circumstances as were found in the Toronto diocese.”²⁹ Though he felt that the community scarcely possessed a staff for a Little Seminary and rather than face the prospect of the loss of the non-aspirants, Father Soulerin at first toyed with the idea of using St. Michael’s College for non-aspirants, and the proposed Clover Hill foundation for seminarists.³⁰ This was impossible, of course, because of the lack of teachers to administer two foundations.

Added to the occasional tenseness that must have developed in the Palace over the different aims, the Basilians were also subject to a very natural silent criticism from missionaries visiting the bishop. It would be impossible for these missionaries not to compare the rigours of their life with that of the five Basilians “whose work consisted in teaching latin and greek to children.”³¹

It was at this juncture that Father Soulerin introduced his missionary proposals. To the College and Church a mission for the French speaking people of the diocese in the vicinity of Penetang “would complete our work here.”³² Such an establishment would partially satisfy the hopes of the bishop, and would allay any criticism emanating from the hard working missionaries. Since the foundation would include at least three members living the Basilian rule in common, spiritual dangers would be avoided. To the obvious good such an establishment could confer on the diocese, it would admit of a change of personnel during the summer vacation period, thus providing a fruitful field of endeavour for the teaching Basilians. Aspirants to the Basilian community might be increased since the Congregation could now offer another spiritual activity to the youth of the country. However, the success of the plan depended on the authorization of the Mother House at Annonay, and whatever hope the Toronto Superior had of receiving three additional members was shattered when the Crimean War broke out. The effect of this war on French vocations was immediately felt and added to the “sterility of 1852 made any additional aid to the colony out of the question.”³³

The bishop constantly seeking a solution to the difficult problem of securing priests, suggested a rather surprising proposition to the Community. Contained in a letter of Father Malbos to the Superior General, dated February 6, 1853, the episcopal proposal requested the Basilians to assume charge of the three Toronto parishes, the Cathedral, St. Paul’s and St. Mary’s. It was by far the most specific suggestion and, for the bishop, it was a compromise in face of the Basilians’

²⁹ Rev. J. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, April 18, 1854, p. 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, February 13, 1854, p. 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, October 1, 1852, p. 3.

³² *Ibid.*, July 15, 1853, p. 2.

³³ Rev. P. Tourvieille, *Letter to Rev. J. Soulerin*, July 30, 1853, p. 3.

reluctance to set up missionary centres. To the Basilians it did present a different aspect to the old problem. Should the scheme be feasible, the question of common life would arise. Would Basilians assigned to the parishes live in the Palace or because of their parochial duties, be forced to reside in the rectories? If the latter were selected, what would happen to the religious life of the members? Would not the arduous duties of a pastor play havoc with any attempt to combine teaching and mission work? The Catholic population of Toronto, largely Irish in background, “lacked confidence in Scottish and English priests.”³⁴ How would they accept priests whose mastery of the English tongue was, at best, imperfect? Father Soulerin once more had to reject the bishop’s request.

Subsequent letters to the Superior-General in 1853 expressed the frustrated feelings of the Fathers:

I prefer that we could keep to teaching – doesn’t appear easy in a country such as this – if our students increase we would be forcibly obliged to perform our ordinary functions and Monseigneur would complain.³⁵

Added to the opposition towards the missionary role because of its inroads on teaching, was the fear of the effect of such duties on the Community: “the big danger is that some of ours lacking taste for teaching take too much part in the external ministry.”³⁶ The spirit of acquisitiveness could easily rear itself and cause a lack of harmony among the members. It was a known fact that Father Flannery received at least fifty francs from his duties in Weston, and so “there is more eagerness to go out into the parishes than would be the case in France.”³⁷

There was no question but that a participation in mission work to the extent requested by the bishop, would either mean the break-up of the Community or the formation of an entirely different congregation. Fully aware of these dangers, Father Soulerin began to realize the necessity of having official support for his position. In writing Father Tourvieille he asked “please recommend the attachment to our rule and duties as teachers.”³⁸ This request for a directive was a very prudent one. There was no insistence that the external work be completely prohibited, as such a demand would have only served to aggravate the zealous bishop, and would probably have resulted in the same treatment for the Basilians as that accorded Father Tellier. However, the situation was rapidly reaching a climax which would require some treaty or concordat to establish, once and for all, the position of the Community in the diocese.

To show how the tenseness between the occupants of the Palace was increased, we have need to examine another concurring problem. The

³⁴ Rev. J. Malbos, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, February 6, 1853, p. 2.

³⁵ Rev. J. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, March 22, 1853, p. 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁷ Rev. J. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. Deglesne*, August 16, 1855, p. 2.

³⁸ Rev. J. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, April 9, 1853, p. 2.

Community was interested primarily in providing secondary education and seminary instruction; the bishop, anxious though he was to secure priests, was, almost from his arrival in Toronto, enmeshed in the struggle to secure a just Separate elementary school system; and this objective virtually obliterated for him, at least temporarily, the need of providing education for the more advanced students. Beset with so many pressing difficulties, the bishop could not see why the Community attached so much weight to what to him was of only relative importance.

It is rather amazing, too, that virtually all the undertakings of the bishop, eminently good though they were, should have greatly increased the problems or created new, difficulties for the Basilian Fathers. In a letter dated July 5, 1855, just after permission had finally been granted the Basilians to build a foundation on Clover Hill, and just four days prior to the actual commencement of operations, Father Soulerin bemoaned the inopportune time selected by the bishop for a diocesan financial drive in aid of a Catholic hospital. The impecunious Basilians were at first denied permission to collect in the Toronto diocese so as not to detract from the success of the hospital; this prohibition was soon withdrawn in part. The diocese, except the city of Toronto, was open to the solicitation of the Basilian Fathers.³⁹ The exclusion of Toronto as a source of revenue, despite a later reprieve to the extent of two annual Sunday collections, was a sorry blow. A high percentage of the wealth of the relatively poor diocese of Toronto was found in the See city; the country areas were sparsely settled and the majority of the settlers were recent immigrants whose resources were very limited. Even if the pioneer people were financially well-to-do, it would be much more difficult to convince them of the necessity of higher Catholic educational facilities than the city-folk. However, the urban areas of Hamilton, St. Catharines, Brantford and London were among the communities open to the Fathers' canvassing and these promised fruitful returns. Even these hopes of the Community were shattered by the needs of the bishop.

For several years Bishop Charbonnel had sought a co-adjutor to assist him in his many problems.⁴⁰ His choice fell on Father O'Dowd, a Sulpician from Montreal, but despite the episcopal influence bolstered by two supporting letters from Rome, the Sulpician priest refused to accept the dignity. Not to be denied, the bishop then attempted to reduce the size of his unwieldy diocese: in this he was successful, and the dioceses of London and Hamilton were carved out of the Toronto diocese. On December 3, 1855, Fathers Farrell and Pinsonneault were consecrated bishops of Hamilton and London, respectively.⁴¹ This reduction in area of the Toronto diocese naturally made the financial problem facing the Basilians much more grave. Many of the more lucrative centres were now in the

³⁹ Rev. J. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, July 5, 1855, p. 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, July 15, 1853, p. 3.

⁴¹ Bishop Charbonnel, *Pastoral Letter*, April 23, 1856, p. 1. (Preserved in Archives of Archdiocese of Toronto.)

new dioceses, and therefore not subject to Basilian collections.

When Father Tourvieille submitted a circular to the bishop he congratulated him on his undertakings and especially on “the establishment of a new home for the aged – the House of Providence.”⁴² It was yet another example of episcopal zeal, but it increased the diocesan debt and considerably reduced any help the Community could hope to obtain.

The Clover Hill property had been offered to the Jesuit Fathers on condition that a large educational establishment be erected; and when the Society failed to accept it, the proffered land reverted to Mr. Elmsley. There was an understanding, however, between donor and bishop that the land would be available for any future episcopal undertaking.

Following conferences between the bishop, Mr. Elmsley, Fathers Soulerin and Molony and an unidentified lawyer, an understanding was reached on April 9, 1855. The original four lots were donated to the “Episcopal Corporation for the use of the Basilians for as long a time as their order will exist in the city of Toronto and remain in communion with the Holy See.”⁴³ The donation had to be made to the Corporation in order to conform with the law which did not recognize property donations made to priests. The community was to have the use of the property and could not alienate it for any reason. On the other hand, the Fathers could not be dispossessed of the property, legally, so long as they remained in Toronto and were free from all taints of heresy. Should either of these eventualities occur the property was to pass to another Community after compensation was made the Basilians for any constructions and additions made by them. Mr. Elmsley also designated that the property be put to a religious purpose. Though not specifying any definite time, the construction of a church was inserted as a ‘sine qua non’ of the donation. This was the beginning of the Basilian foundation in Canada.

The area, though over an acre in size, did not seem large enough to Father Soulerin for the construction of both a church and a college or Little Seminary with adequate space for recreation. Privacy, so lacking on Queen Street and in the Palace, must be guaranteed also. With these ends in mind, Father Soulerin applied to Mr. Elmsley for four adjacent lots. Through the office of Father Polly, the bursar at Annonay, Father Soulerin obtained some 30,000 francs, more than enough to purchase the four additional lots. This land was an outright purchase by the Community completely belonging to the Fathers who could put the area to any use. There was now, more than a germ of truth in the remark of Father Soulerin on April 9, 1853 “we are now the owners of a small part of Canada.”⁴⁴ Between the time of this statement and the opening of the new St. Basils’ Church and St. Michael’s College in September 1856, the ability of Father Soulerin became very evident. It was presumed that the buildings were to be erected on

⁴² *Letter to Bishop Charbonnel*, October 13, 1856, p. 1.

⁴³ Rev. J. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, April 9, 1853, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Rev. S. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, April 9, 1850, p. 3.

the purchased property. It was the superior who altered this presumption as he realized that no compensation for construction on the purchased lots would be forthcoming to the Community should the Toronto foundation be abandoned at any subsequent period. It was Father Soulerin who organized a subscription campaign, novel in the Toronto diocese, for building funds. It was he, too, who realized that the initial saving on a building half brick and half wood was false economy for the future. As an economic measure he proposed that the architecture be gothic which had the added feature of dignity.

Against the aims of both the bishop and the Basilian general, Father Soulerin wanted St. Michael's to be a haven for both secular and ecclesiastical students – a combined Little Seminary and college with adequate separation of the two types of student. Bishop Charbonnel agreed with Father Tourvieille who expressed the view that “in the first fifty years of their existence Ste. Barbe and Ste. Claire (the two Little Seminaries at Annonay) produced six hundred priests while the College has only produced one-tenth of that number.”⁴⁵ In conclusion Father Tourvieille indicated that his view was shared by the bishop: “I believe we have always been in agreement on this point, that the separation of the students studying for Orders from those seeking other careers will be extremely useful.”⁴⁶

The very convincing argument of the Superior General was by his own admission based on conditions that existed in France. Despite communications, lengthy and detailed though they were, Father Tourvieille acknowledged he was “just not on the scene.”⁴⁷ Moreover, in analyzing his argument in favour of a Little Seminary only, some of the original force is reduced. It is true that the ordination of six hundred young men from the two French seminaries was an edifying accomplishment. No less, however, was the ordination of approximately sixty youths in a College whose end was the education of young men for careers which did not necessarily embrace ecclesiastical futures. It was also a matter of fact that those who did seek a priestly life went to the Little Seminaries, while those who did not, went to the College. In Annonay, there was a college and a seminary; in Toronto, such an enviable situation did not exist. The problem resolved itself into a problem of whether to have a College, similar to the one in Annonay, or to have a Little Seminary, like Ste. Barbe. If the latter was decided on, it meant that the young Catholic men seeking secular careers would be educated in a thoroughly Protestant environment; if the former was selected, there was a possible danger to the aspirants of becoming too interested in the worldly pursuits of the non-aspirants. A tangible rebuttal to this danger was the success in vocations of the Annonay College.

The position of Father Soulerin is clearly seen in this written warning to the

⁴⁵ Rev. P. Tourvieille, *Letter to Bishop Charbonnel*, March 15, 1854, *Letter Book*, p. 59.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 59.

general: “the students might be tempted to go to Protestant schools.”⁴⁸ Support for this position is found in remarks made by Bishop Charbonnel on the University of Toronto when he wrote:

degrees are granted to Catholics if they reject their faith – Catholics are excluded from burses – they follow courses determined by the state and are instructed in history and philosophy by Protestants – nine-tenths of the students and nineteen-twentieths of the professors are Protestants.⁴⁹

To the educational motive behind Father Soulerin’s position there was also a sound financial reason and this was contained in Father Malbos’ observation: “of some eighty candidates at the Missouri Little Seminary, not one persevered.”⁵⁰ Realizing the enormous financial sacrifices that Bishop Charbonnel was making for the maintenance of St. Michael’s College, the bursar continued: “the bishop will scarcely be able to continue his sacrifice if we should have poor results.”⁵¹ A combined College and Seminary would enable the Community to make expenses and would not be a charge on the diocese. In this way the future of the Community, even its continuance in Toronto as a religious congregation, would not be, in large part, dependent on the success of the Little Seminary. Keenly aware of the obstacles confronting the bishop and of the rapid alteration of his policy, of which the replacement of the Christian Brothers was but one example, Father Soulerin championed the adoption of a Seminary admitting worldly career-minded Catholic boys, and by the weight of his argument his plan was ultimately adopted.

While the principle of Father Soulerin was accepted regarding separation, the Bishop, never keen on the departure of the Basilians from the Palace, was at last induced to agree with the superior on this measure also. Three factors supplemented the superior’s arguments. Living in close proximity with the Congregation in the Palace, the Bishop could not have helped but notice the growing restlessness of the Fathers. This restlessness was expressed by the superior: “my position becomes sad even in the midst of confrères because of their repugnance toward living in this house.”⁵² Though no records exist to substantiate this conclusion it can be reasonably held that the bishop could not have overlooked the possible departure of the Fathers from his diocese. It certainly would not have been a novel experience for the bishop to witness his

⁴⁸ Rev. J. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, September 14, 1853, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Bishop Charbonnel, *Letter to Cardinal Fransoni*, May 30, 1853, *Letter Book*, p. 38.

⁵⁰ Rev. J. Malbos, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, April 23 1853, p. 2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 2

priests returning to their native European dioceses.⁵³ It is probable to conclude that the bishop felt that separation might solve the frustration of the Fathers, particularly since Father Soulerin writes: “I have told Monseigneur everything I can or believe to get him to give us a separate house.”⁵⁴

In addition to Bishop Charbonnel’s charity and interest in the wellbeing of the Fathers, his debts had been considerably reduced by 1854. In a letter to the President of the Propagation of the Faith, the bishop recorded: “I finished paying what remained on the Seminary.”⁵⁵ The fears of financial chaos were thus by early 1854, largely reduced.

It was above all, however, about the growing student body that the bishop was alarmed. The Palace, in late 1853, had reached its maximum enrollment, and the superior felt that “If the numbers increase the bishop might leave us the entire Palace and move to a new house.”⁵⁶ When the student total increased by February 1854, “the bishop felt that fifty-three students in his Palace are already too many, and that is why he would like to see us go.”⁵⁷

With prudence, Father Soulerin made overtures to the bishop regarding departure: “the first time I spoke of a concordat he said he already had made some conventions with us – but I believe that Monseigneur is willing to make a concordat.”⁵⁸ Before any change could be possible the superior realized that some treaty or concordat should be agreed on with the bishop. It was not so much a matter of binding Bishop Charbonnel but of building for the future, and establishing a binding force which later bishops would recognize.

It was always the goal of Father Soulerin to establish the Basilians solidly for the future, subject to no whim or caprice of circumstances. He, like so many others, was well aware of the adage that “good intentions can be forgotten; what is written remains.”⁵⁹ Thus in the eyes of the superior a written agreement was essential and to this desire of a binding concordat and the bishop agreed.

⁵³ Bishop Charbonnel, *Letter to Cardinal Fransoni*, May 30, 1853, *Letter Book*, p. 38. A reference to some fifteen priests who returned to their native dioceses between 1850-1852.

⁵⁴ Rev. J. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, November 8, 1854, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Bishop Charbonnel, *Letter to Cardinal Fransoni*, January 7, 1854, *Letter Book*, p. 40.

⁵⁶ Soulerin to Tourvieille, February 13, 1854, p. 2

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, February 13, 1854, p. 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, April 18, 1854, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Rev. J. Soulerin, *Letter to Rev. P. Tourvieille*, November 4, 1854, p. 1.