

EDUCATIONAL SECURITY OF MINORITIES

BY THOMAS O'HAGAN

IT is well that all Canadians should remember that one of the happiest and most vital things in that great Charter known as the Act of Canadian Confederation, which has bound in one dominion the scattered provinces of Canada, is the provision which is made for the educational security of the minorities in two of the provinces.

There is not indeed better evidence of true statesmanship in any country than the wisdom which guides legislators in their watchfulness that no act may be passed clashing with the divine prerogative of individual conscience as the monitor of the soul. This it is that is the supreme test of good and just government in every instance, as regards the freedom of the individual. Let it be recognized, too, at the outset, that the child belongs primarily not to the state but to the parent—and that upon this parent devolves the sacred duty of fostering and educating the child.

The state has a duty in seeing that it has an enlightened and educated citizenship, and therefor it is incumbent upon it to make provision for an adequate education of its people; but the kind and character of education which the child is to receive is a question that belongs entirely to the individual parent, and this freedom of choice on the part of the parent cannot and should not under any circumstance be contravened by the state.

It should be remembered, too, that education is something far more than a sharpening of the intellectual faculties. It is the triune development of the child fitting it as well for its moral as its civil obligations.

Let me state here, also, that though the term secular or non-sectarian is widely accepted in connection with schools, in my opinion there is no such a thing as a non-sectarian school. It is generally considered that a school in which there is no formal teaching of religion is a neutral or non-sectarian school. But this is far from the truth.

There are three things that fix the character of the school: the teacher, the text-books and the pupils. For instance, suppose there was no formal teaching of religion to-day in the schools of Quebec, would these schools cease to be Catholic schools? Indeed they would not. Again the school of the majority in Quebec is quite as much a public school as is the school of the majority in Ontario. It is built and equipped to meet the needs of the general public in Quebec just as the public school in Ontario is intended to meet the needs of the general public. The only difference is that the general public in Quebec happens to be Catholic while in Ontario it is non-Catholic.

When the Fathers of Canadian Confederation sat in council, discussing the problem of binding together the scattered provinces of Canada,