

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



Hse. No. J348/4 - Tema Beach Road - Nungua, Accra
P. O. Box GP 760, Accra, Ghana Tel. No.: (0302) 712456-8; 7010110 Fax: (0302) 712454

AB:DD February 14, 1991

TO ALL CONGREGATIONS

Dear Brothers:

As we all know, the neutrality of Jehovah's people has become a big issue in this country. We can expect the problem to heighten as this old world hastens to its end. As Revelation 13:3, 4 tells us, 'all the earth follows the wild beast and worship the dragon who gave the authority to the wild beast.' Those who want to be different because "they are no part of the world" will continue to find it difficult as long as the wild beast continues alive, even as Revelation 13:16, 17 shows.

In discussing the neutrality of his disciples, Jesus stressed the fact that they will continue to be "in the world" but they will be "no part of the world." (John 17, 11, 15, 16) The situation is comparable to the condition of the captive Hebrews in the land of Babylon. They were in Babylon, but they were no part of Babylon. They accepted job assignments and responsibilities in Babylon. Some even agreed to be schooled in "the writing and the tongue of the Chaldean." (Dan. 1:4) At the same time, they firmly resolved not to pollute themselves with foods and wine that might have been contaminated with sacrifices to false gods or the partaking of which was forbidden under the Law covenant of their God, Jehovah.—Dan. 1:8.

In the minds of these faithful Hebrews, there was no question as to what they were obligated to render to Babylon as being her due and what they were to render Jehovah as being exclusively owed to him. Thus, when three of them were summoned with the rest of the community to assemble for the inaugural ceremony of the national image erected by Nebuchadnezzar, even though they may have preferred not to be at the ceremony, they realized that they were under obligation to obey the king on this matter.

They realized, too, that their presence at the ceremony in itself did not violate any commandment of their God. Nevertheless, when it was demanded of them to give worship to the national image of Babylon, they fearlessly and firmly refused. They knew how far they could go and went just that far.

Today, true worshipers of Jehovah find themselves in a similar situation. Like Daniel and the other faithful Hebrews, we are in the world but are no part of it. We are under obligation to be in subjection to the superior authorities. Some of us have very responsible, though nonpolitical, positions in the administration set up by the superior authorities. Do we know the extent we could go in paying to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and the line we could not cross?—Matt. 22:21.

Broadly speaking, we all know exactly what the laws of our God are with regard to worship and images. We know the will of our God that we stay neutral in the political affairs of this world. But, under a given circumstance, are we always able to discern the extent we could go and where it stops?

Let us take the example of our schoolchildren. It is clear that much of the difficulties we have had to endure in this country has had to do with the stand of our children on nationalistic ceremonies at school. We note with appreciation that, in almost every instance, the children and their parents have been integrity keepers. We heartily commend them for this.

At the same time, it is evident from the reports we receive that, in some instances, problems would have been avoided if the children had been properly instructed by their parents to know how far they could go and the line they could not cross.

For example, a schoolmaster is informed that a Witness child does not recite the pledge nor sing the anthem at the school parade. Outside the school parade, the schoolmaster calls the Witness child to his office and tries to ascertain whether the child has been taught the song and the oath. He therefore asks the child to sing the anthem or recite the pledge. The child refuses. The schoolmaster takes this to be insubordination. Furious, he drives the child away from school.

The firm resolve of the child not to violate his neutrality is commendable. Nevertheless, what the child needed to know is that the atmosphere at the schoolmaster's office or during classroom instruction is different from that of the parade ground or assembly hall where a solemn religious ceremony takes place in worship of the State. At the classroom or office the schoolmaster is conducting a test of knowledge to assure himself that the child has been properly taught the anthem or the pledge. Would the child's compliance in the classroom or office constitute a violation of neutrality? The answer, in this case, is no.

In discussing the matter, the June 15, 1964, *Watchtower*, under the subheading "Classroom Instruction" at page 381 states:

"What if part of the classroom instruction you receive requires expression concerning what you understand to be contrary to Bible principles? Suppose in music class you are required to sing a national anthem? Though a witness of Jehovah could not conscientiously sing the words, some sing the notes to show they know the tune. If you are required to recite something such as a pledge that a Christian could not conscientiously make, then what? Even though it is simply a test of knowledge or memory, you would rather be excused from it if possible. But, if necessary, you could show that you have the mental ability to recite it, and, to avoid a wrong impression, you would explain beforehand or afterward that you do not share the sentiments of that pledge."

Why is *The Watchtower* saying this? It is because there is a difference between the religious ceremony in worship of the State at the parade ground and the classroom where instruction is given to students. As Witnesses of Jehovah, we cannot share in the solemn ceremony in worship of the State. However, this does not mean that our children will walk out of the classroom when the national anthem or the pledge is being taught. As *The Watchtower* is saying, if outside the nationalistic ceremony in worship of the State a student is asked by a teacher to recite the pledge by way of a test of knowledge, if it is not possible to excuse himself, he may go ahead and recite it although he would do well to show either beforehand or afterward what his Christian position is.

There are other subjects taught in school which Christians do not believe, such as the theory of evolution. Sometimes, too, history is taught in a way that glorifies the false religion of our ancestors. While Christians do not believe what is taught, students do not walk out of class on that account. Nor are they to ignore questions on these subjects during examination time. They could conscientiously give textbook answers or what the teacher taught in class and then, if possible, add the fact that they believe what the Bible teaches on these subjects.—Please see pages 381 and 382 of the June 15, 1964, *Watchtower*.

Of course, no Christian can give an undertaking that he would sing the anthem or recite the pledge in the solemn ceremony in worship of the State at the parade ground or assembly hall. If this is what the schoolmaster demands, then the children should know that they cannot conscientiously comply. But if it is only a test of knowledge in the classroom or at the headmaster's office, then there is no need for confrontation. Again it is important for the children to be properly instructed by their parents to distinguish between the worshipful ceremony and

classroom instruction or a test of knowledge. Our information is that sometimes the worshipful ceremony takes place in the classroom instead of the parade ground. As long as it is the solemn ceremony in worship of the State, no matter where it takes place, Christians cannot participate. But if it is classwork or written or verbal examination, then Christians may prove that they know it but that they do not share the sentiments. When children are properly instructed as to the extent they can go, most schoolteachers are willing to cooperate.

Let us take one example involving adults. Certain organizations whose aims and aspirations we do not share because they are unscriptural, may come to our village to carry on a community development project. The organization may be political or religious but the project itself may be one that violates no Bible principle. It may be the providing of good drinking water, road construction or the building of a school or day-care center. While the organization may provide the funding and technical supervision, the people may be pressed into communal labor to support the project. In such an instance, some of our brothers and sisters have concluded that so long as they could not, for Scriptural reasons, become part of the organization, they could not take part in the project.

Is this the correct Scriptural stand? Definitely, not. The question is, Does the project being undertaken in itself violate Scriptural principles? If it were the building of a church or the repairing of the shrine of a fetish, that would be a different matter. A Christian can definitely not share in such activity. But if such is not the case, and the project is to provide good drinking water or to build a school, which will benefit the Christian, then there is no reason why the Christian should refuse to share in such community work. By participating in the work the Christian is not becoming part of the political or religious organization that initiated it, anymore than a Christian becomes part of a corrupt government by participating in community development projects ordered by that government.

At Matthew 10:16, Jesus said to his disciples: "Prove yourselves cautious as serpents and yet innocent as doves." This requires our being adequately informed on the commandments of our God, Jehovah. It also requires knowing to what extent we can go in discharging our obligations toward the superior authorities without violating the commandments of our God. If we pay attention to personal study and the application of Scriptural principles, we will know the extent we could go, in order to avoid unnecessary difficulties. We will at the same time remain innocent before Jehovah our God.

Parents in particular have the obligation to instruct their young ones thoroughly in what their conduct should be at school. If they exhibit mildness, industriousness and respect for authority at school, no doubt they will win the praises of even those masters that may be difficult to please. At the same time, if they know how far they could go while remaining innocent before Jehovah, we will be able to avoid at least some of the problems that arise in some of the places.

We would like to emphasize here that what we have said above does not imply in any way that schoolchildren can now participate in nationalistic ceremonies at school. No. Rather, we have only tried to draw a distinction between the worshipful ceremony at school and normal classroom instruction or examination. Christian children cannot participate in the solemn ceremony in worship of the State no matter where the ceremony takes place. But they need not exempt themselves from classroom instruction or written or verbal examination involving patriotic subjects.

We will all continue to pray fervently that Jehovah may move the hearts of those in authority to tolerance and understanding, "in order that we may go on leading a calm and quiet life with full godly devotion and seriousness."—1 Tim. 2:2.

TO ALL CONGREGATIONS
AB:DD February 14, 1991
Page 4

We send you all, the young ones included, our warm Christian love and best wishes.

Your brothers,

*Christian Congregation
of Jehovah's Witnesses*

P.S. We recommend that the body of elders meet immediately to read and discuss this letter. After that they should make sure that it is carefully and thoroughly read to each group. Do not summarize the contents but read it verbatim to the congregation. Help parents to understand it correctly, so that they may be able to teach their schoolgoing children the right thing.