CHRISTIAN MISSIONS AND THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE IN THE FAR EAST

by

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IN DISCUSSING Christian missions and the civil magistrate in the Far East we shall deal chiefly, though not exclusively, with those countries of the Far East where the most difficult problems in the relation between Christianity and the State have arisen in recent years, namely the Japanese Empire (including Korea and Formosa), Manchukuo and those portions of China which have come under Japanese occupation. We shall consider the conception of religious liberty in relation to missions, the ways in which the freedom of Christianity is infringed by the State, and the reaction of missions and churches to the demands of the State, and then we shall seek to formulate a Scriptural course of action with reference to these demands.

I.

THE CONCEPTION OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN RELATION TO MISSIONS

The conception of the limited function of the civil magistrate has long been recognized, though not always fully realized in practice, in Western countries, but in the Far East it is almost unknown, and to the Oriental — often even to the Oriental Christian — almost incomprehensible. Although nearly all countries embody in their fundamental law some kind of statement about religious liberty, still this is frequently quite unrelated to the real situation in particular countries. In order to grasp the present status of missions in the Far East, it is necessary to bear in mind the distinction between religious liberty and religious toleration. Although these may seem to be synonymous terms, they are really contrary to each other.
True religious liberty is a natural, God-given human right, which ought to be recognized and protected by the civil magistrate, but which does not originate in the magistrate's authority any more than the right of parents to rear their own children originates in the magistrate's authority. Religious toleration, on the other hand, is based on the assumption that the civil magistrate is supreme in the sphere of religion. The magistrate authoritatively tolerates certain religions, not as a matter of intrinsic human right but as a matter of privilege which it is proper for him to grant or to withhold. This toleration implies that the magistrate may restrict and regulate that which he has officially tolerated. Such toleration is often called "liberty" and at the same time represented as being granted by the State. The claim of the civil magistrate to supremacy in the sphere of religion is a seed of error which has taken firm root in the Far East, and which when fully developed cannot but bring forth a harvest of bitter fruits.

True religious liberty necessarily includes three elements: (1) freedom of thought and belief; (2) freedom of profession and practice, including freedom to propagate one's religion among the adherents of other faiths; and (3) freedom to abstain from contrary practices, not only in the sphere of religion in the strict sense, but in any sphere of life. With reference to this third element, the citizen, not the magistrate, must be the judge of what practices are contrary to his own religious belief. Only in case the actual rights of other persons, or the safety of civil society, are truly endangered, can the civil magistrate legitimately overrule the conscience of the individual. Lacking one or more of these elements, nothing purporting to be religious liberty can be acknowledged to be truly such. Even where there is a constitutional guarantee of religious liberty, true religious liberty may be non-existent, because local officials may uniformly disregard constitutional provisions and there may be no legal means available for obtaining constitutional rights. Moreover, the State may set forth nationalism as a super-religion, demanding supreme devotion of all citizens, thus nullifying all guarantees of religious
liberty by depriving citizens of freedom to believe that God is higher than the State and to act accordingly.

The various countries of the world may be classified in three groups according to their relation to the principle of religious liberty. First, there are countries where true religious liberty exists, in actual practice as well as on paper, adequately guaranteed by law and protected by the civil magistrate who is the minister of God to men for good. In such countries there can be no real conflict between Christian missions and the civil magistrate. Second, there are countries where neither religious liberty nor toleration exists, so that the profession and practice of Christianity, and hence all real Christian missionary work, is practically impossible and can be carried on, if at all, only in semi-secrecy. There can hardly be a conflict between Christian missions and the civil magistrate; the problem is rather how Christian missions can effect an entrance at all. Third, there are countries in which the place of religious liberty is taken by a greater or lesser degree of religious toleration. Certain religious bodies are authoritatively permitted by the State, and their practice and propagation are subject, to a greater or lesser degree, to the magistrate’s regulation and control. This toleration is usually represented by the magistrate as being full religious liberty, which is natural enough since the magistrate’s conception of the scope of his own functions and authority differs widely from the Biblical conception of the limited function of civil government. It has been said that a number of years ago it was held that labor unions could not be legal in a certain country, because no law had been enacted granting permission to such organizations to exist. This may serve, perhaps, as an illustration of the Oriental conception of the functions of the civil magistrate; it is precisely this type of thought that the Christian missionary and the Christian church are facing in some fields of the Far East today. This third group includes some of the great mission fields of the Far East, as well as some fields in other parts of the world, and it is this group that is raising the most difficult problems for Christian missions today. These problems, far from being, as they are often represented, mere “misunderstandings”, are really the inevitable result of the
clash of irreconcilable conceptions of civil government in relation to the sphere of religion. The reality and inevitability of this clash are clearly shown by a recent Japanese writer:

"One reason why the position of the church is so difficult today is that governmental forces press it harder than previously. Formerly, Christianity experienced difficulties in its cultural relationships. Today throughout the world there are totalitarian States which are not only political entities but which also restrict and control the people's social and economic existence and their thought and religious life. They seek by every possible means and by endless effort to subordinate the people to the leadership of the State. The existence of the church was formerly independent of politics and it also sought to maintain its freedom, but today it cannot exist unless it fits into the political system. It is inevitable, therefore, that we should consider how to conduct our religious life and thought under such conditions as well as how to settle the problems of individual faith arising out of this situation. This is, of course, a world-wide problem, but mission lands with characteristic cultures such as China and Japan have difficulties which the European and American Christian peoples do not easily grasp."

Christian missions and the Christian church are faced with this serious alternative: either to "fit into the political system", thus becoming an adjunct of the State, or to refuse to be fitted into the political system, thus hazarding external peace and security for the sake of faith and a good conscience. The church faces the choice of becoming a subsidiary of the State, or bearing the reproach of Christ outside the camp.

II.

THE FREEDOM OF CHRISTIANITY INFRINGED
BY THE STATE

The official restriction which is the logical implication of the conception of authoritative religious toleration has been exercised upon Christianity along three principal lines: (1) the denial of the educational rights of Christians; (2) the demand

for participation in idolatrous rites as a pledge of civil allegiance; and (3) the requirement that Christian missions and churches accept control by the civil magistrate.

The first of these, the denial of the educational rights of both missions and churches, is becoming more and more prominent throughout the sphere of Japanese dominion. More and more the State tends to assert that education is its exclusive prerogative. Thus in Manchukuo, for example, although mission and other Christian schools have for several years been licensed by the State (under increasingly strict governmental control), it now appears that the State has embarked on a program of taking over, if not all, primary and secondary schools and operating this type of education itself. Of course the teaching in State schools is anything but Christian in its content and point of view, and participation in polytheistic worship is required of every student. This program, when fully carried out, will not only prevent missions from operating such schools, but will render impossible the existence, under whatever auspices, of Christian primary or secondary schools. A group of Christian converts cannot operate a primary school for their own children, for by doing so they would be encroaching upon the alleged domain of the State. This situation is extremely serious. The covenant youth of the Christian church must either grow up illiterate, or receive their education in schools which are strongly biased against Christianity. An illiterate church is certain to be an ignorant church, and consequently a weak church, a ready victim to heresy and a poor match for the subtleties of its foes. On the other hand, what could be more perilous than to expose the children of the church, during their formative years, to an educational system which is utterly opposed to Christianity and which is saturated with the doctrines of emperor-worship, State-deification and humanistic ethics? Yet the majority of native Christians in Manchukuo seem scarcely to realize that this problem exists, far less to be ready to try to do anything about it. Meantime the State is at work, day after day, impressing non-Christian thought upon the minds of the youth of the church. This is certain to have an extremely adverse effect on the future leadership of the church, and consequently in time on the church itself.
The second line of State restriction of the freedom of Christianity, the demand for participation in idolatrous rites as a pledge of civil loyalty, really constitutes an oblique attack upon Christianity under the pretext of patriotism. Christians are citizens, and as such owe civil allegiance to the State. All that the State demands, it is alleged, is that its citizens manifest a proper spirit of loyalty to their country. What could be more reasonable than this? But here the snare is introduced by which the consciences of Christian people are taken captive to the obedience of men in the things of God. Almost invariably the particular ceremony, designated by the State as a pledge of loyalty, itself partakes of the nature of polytheistic worship. Christian citizens are thus placed in a dilemma. If they comply with such demands, they sin against God and injure their own conscience. If they refuse compliance, they are liable to be charged with disloyalty to the State. The State never admits that such demands are an infringement of the freedom of Christianity, and cannot make such an admission, because the totalitarian conception of the State implies that religion must be confined to formal worship, pious feelings and mystical experience. Such a State can never allow the Christian conception of religion as the ruling principle of all of life. It is inevitable that there should be conflict between such a State and all that can be truly called Christianity. The oblique nature of the attack may deceive careless Christians and may serve to vindicate the State in the eyes of foreign countries, but cannot mitigate the fact that Christians are required by the State to worship that which is not God.

In Japan, Korea, Formosa and Manchukuo participation in worship at Shinto shrines is required of common schools, colleges and universities, both public and private, and on various occasions all teachers and students of such institutions are required to perform the ceremonies of bowing reverently to the Emperor’s portrait and of bowing reverently in the direction of the Imperial palace. In Manchukuo the worship of Confucius has been revived by the State, and practically all schools are required twice each year to repair to the local Confucian temple, where the teachers and students participate in the worship of the deified sage. All of these ceremonies
are specified by the State as pledges of civil loyalty. In the Japanese Empire and Manchukuo participation in ceremonies at Shinto shrines and war memorials was formerly required only of ordinary schools and governmental organs, but this requirement is now being extended to embrace various other civic bodies and social organizations, including, in some cases, Christian congregations and ecclesiastical judicatures as such. This "State Shinto" has been affirmed by a high official of the Japanese Government to be not a religion, but absolute as "the way of the gods" and above religion. The Government, in requiring Christians to participate in Shinto rites, has attempted to avoid the charge of persecuting Christianity by the assertion that the ceremonies of State Shinto are non-religious in character. The attempt to solve the problem in this way, of course, makes the State the judge of what is and what is not religious worship, so that the Christian citizen is deprived of his freedom of conscience, quite apart from the question of whether the claim that these rites are non-religious in character can be allowed as valid.

On the basis of the Government's assertion that the rites of State Shinto are non-religious, almost all branches of the Christian church throughout the Japanese Empire have capitulated on the question of participation in these rites. The Roman Catholic Church, which before 1935 had been rather strongly opposed to participation, reversed its position, the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda having decided that the rites, though in earlier times religious, today possess only civil significance. The reaction of the great majority of Protestants to the State's demands is exemplified by the resolution passed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea in September, 1939, which was as follows:

“Obeisance at the Shinto shrines is not a religious act and is not in conflict with Christian teaching and should be performed as a matter of first importance thus manifesting patriotic zeal.”

Three months later the Moderator of that General Assembly sent out, over his own signature, a warning to all congregations under the Assembly’s jurisdiction, stating that refusal to participate in obeisance at the Shinto shrines would be “a regretful act that is in opposition to the will of the Lord”, and that recusants “absolutely cannot be regarded as citizens, or as members of the church” and must be subjected to church discipline.5

Although both the State and most branches of the church seem to regard the matter as a closed question, it is necessary to assert that the Government’s claim that the rites of State Shinto are non-religious in character cannot be accepted. In the first place, the obvious nature of the rites themselves contradicts this claim. The fact that the magistrate may, by a stroke of official legerdemain, declare that ceremonies which include priesthood and altar, sacrifices and prayers, possess no religious significance, does not alter the situation in the slightest; it is not what the magistrate says about such ceremonies, but what they plainly are in themselves, that constitutes their inherent immorality and incompatibility with Christian practice. To say that the cult of the sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami has nothing to do with religion does not make it right for the Lord’s people to participate in the worship of the sun goddess; it only means that the sin of dishonesty is added to that of idolatry. The pity is that so many are deceived by such palpable conceits, which must result in dreadful injury to their own consciences in the end.

In the second place, the claim that these rites are non-religious in character is contradicted by the common profession of the Japanese Government and people as shown, for example, in the descriptions of these ceremonies which appear continually in the strictly censored Japanese press. The following may be cited as an example:6

5 The Independent Board Bulletin, loc. cit.
6 The Manchuria Daily News, April 26, 1939, p.7. (This is a Japanese owned and edited newspaper published in the English language).
"For the second time since the outbreak of the current Sino-Japanese hostilities, the entire Japanese nation on April 25 observed a special national holiday in memory of the valiant dead who have fallen on the field of battle in the cause of Far Eastern peace and order. Divine Shinto rites marked by the utmost solemnity were initiated on the night of the 23rd for the enshrining at the Yasukuni Shrine of the souls of 10,389 fallen heroes, who by their supreme sacrifice have for eternity become the guardian gods of the Yamato race. The sober ritual commenced with what is known as the ceremony for beckoning the spirits of the dead back to this mundane world . . .

"At the signal of the shrieking of sirens, at the precise hour of the arrival of His Majesty at the Yasukuni Shrine, thousands of citizens of Dairen, Port Arthur, Hsinking, Mukden and other centres in Manchuria bowed in worship before the War Monuments to offer a minute's silent prayer to the spirits of our national heroes. Gratitude is hardly the word to describe the deep emotion which every loyal Japanese feels as he stands in venerable posture before these monuments. The feeling is a mixture of genuine thankfulness, reverence and worship."

In the face of the repeated appearance of such statements in the Japanese censored press, the Government's assurance that these rites have no religious significance is simply unconvincing. The claim advanced by those zealots who say that State Shinto is not a religion but a super-religion only increases, rather than diminishes, the difficulties of Christians who are compelled to participate in these rites. For Christianity admits of no super-religion above itself. It is absolute, final and exclusive, or else not Christianity.

Furthermore, patriotism in a professedly pagan, emperor-worshipping state is a very different thing from patriotism in Britain or America. We may accept as sound the principle that the citizen owes civil allegiance to his country, but when we seek to apply this principle in the Far East today we immediately encounter difficulties. It is doubtless the duty of subjects to "honor the king", but this means to honor the king as king, that is, as the supreme civil magistrate of the nation. Suppose that the king claims to be divine, is commonly regarded as divine, and that it is commonly under-

7 I Peter 2:17.
stood that honor paid to him is a recognition of his divinity. Under such circumstances, how can Christians honor the king without according him divine honor? If they refuse to participate in ceremonies which regard the ruler as more than human, they are liable to be charged with disloyalty to the State. To make this clear we shall quote a further portion from the newspaper editorial cited above:

"His Majesty's gracious and considerate act in honoring the Yasukuni Shrine rites with his personal attendance reminds us again of the virtue and strength of our national polity, which lies in the unity of the Throne and the nation. In no other country do we find a national polity even remotely resembling our own. The Emperor of Japan is infinitely greater than a Sovereign under a constitutional monarchy. His Majesty's relationship to the nation is not merely that of ruler and subject, but of father and child, with all the connotations which this special relationship implies. His Majesty's person, moreover, is invested with divine qualities, as the direct descendant of the Sun Goddess, the ancestor of the Yamato race. In His august person we find represented the virtues and noble aspirations of the Japanese nation."

Now of course "divinity" does not mean to a polytheist what it does to a monotheist. When used by polytheists it cannot include those absolute and incommunicable attributes which are inseparable from the Christian-theistic conception of God. The Japanese who claims that the Emperor is "divine" does not mean that the Emperor is the omnipotent Creator of the heavens and the earth; he only means that the Emperor is one divinity among many. There are indeed some who say that since no one claims that the Emperor is the God of the Bible, there is no reason why Christians should not honor him as divine in this lower sense of a human being "invested with divine qualities". But this is just another sophistry to beguile the consciences of the simple. Christians are monotheists; they not only believe that the God of the Bible is the living and true God, but that he is the only living and true God, and therefore that all others, regardless of the degree of divinity to which they pretend, are simply false. The Chris-

tian recognizes that it is his duty to render the things of Caesar to Caesar, while rendering the things of God to God; but what is he to do if Caesar refuses to recognize this distinction and says, in effect, "Everything or nothing — being Caesar and being divine is all one to me"? It is obvious that in such a case non-compliance is the only course open to the conscientious Christian. And yet compliance is the course advocated and followed by the majority. Such ceremonies as bowing reverently before the Emperor's portrait, and in the direction of the Imperial palace, are commonly performed by multitudes of Christians in the Far East, the Second Commandment to the contrary notwithstanding.

Even if it could be conceded that these ceremonies are non-religious in themselves, there would still remain the most serious objections to their being required of Christian churches and schools by compulsory government regulations. Civil allegiance is the duty of citizens as such, in their individual capacity, not of citizens as church members or as members of any and every voluntary association. To demand a pledge of civil loyalty of a religious body, even though the pledge may be a thing indifferent in itself, is to violate the body's specifically religious character. When earthly governments demand that the Christian church must aim at cultivating "the national spirit", they are regarding a religious body as a means to a political end, and churches which comply with such official demands pervert the church of the living God into an instrument for enhancing the greatness of the State. The State has no legitimate authority whatever to control religious bodies in their specifically religious character and functions; therefore all demands of this sort made upon the church and other Christian institutions, quite apart from all other objections to them, constitute an encroachment of the civil magistrate upon the things of God, and therefore a dishonor to Christ and an injury to his people.

The third line of State restriction of the freedom of Christianity, namely, the requirement that Christian missions and churches accept control by the civil magistrate, is a comparatively recent development. In April, 1939, the "Religious Bodies Law" of Japan was promulgated, and the law became
effective on April 1, 1940. To show the character of this law we shall quote some portions here:

Article 16

"If the propagation of religion or doctrinal teaching, or the performance of religious rites, or the conduct of religious affairs by religious bodies or teachers disturbs peace and order or proves contrary to the duty of national subjects, the competent Minister of state may restrict or prohibit it, or suspend the function of teachers, or cancel the permission of the establishment of a religious body."

Article 17

"In case any religious body or any functionary in its service violates the law or ordinance, religious doctrine, sectarian institutions or organizational regulations, rules of a temple or of a church, or otherwise commits an act prejudicial to public interest, the competent Minister of state may cancel or suspend (the sanction), or prohibit (his teaching) or order such functionary to be replaced by another.

"In case a (religious) teacher contravenes the law or ordinance or otherwise commits an act prejudicial to public interest, the competent Minister of state may suspend his service."

Article 18

"If considered necessary for the supervision of religious organizations, the competent Minister of state may call for the submission of reports or institute investigation into the actual state of affairs."

Article 26

"In case a teacher or missionary has contravened the restriction, prohibition or suspension of work provided for in Article 16 . . . or contravened the suspension of work provided for in Article 17, paragraph 2 . . . he shall be punished with penal servitude or imprisonment not exceeding six months or a fine of not more than 500 yen . . . ."

Without undertaking any extensive interpretation of the above, it can be seen at a glance that this law gives the civil magistrate an Erastian control over the Christian church.

* The Japan Times, September 17 and 24, and October 1, 1939. (An English language newspaper published in Tokyo).
It must be realized that the Government regards participation in the rites of State Shinto as "the duty of national subjects". A religious body which opposes this may have its license cancelled, and a religious teacher who does so may be suspended from office in a religious body by action of the civil magistrate. In case a religious teacher, after being suspended by the civil magistrate, continues to obey the command of Christ to preach the gospel, he may be fined or imprisoned. Religious bodies are to be, not merely protected, but supervised by the State, and that not merely in matters of property, but in matters of religious doctrine. The discipline and rules of religious bodies are to be, not merely recognized, but actually enforced by the competent Minister of state. In such requirements as these we see that Erastian regulation and control which is the logical implication and consequence of authoritative toleration as distinguished from true religious liberty. The regulations issued to enforce the law require Christian churches and religious teachers to apply for and obtain from the civil magistrate licenses to carry on their work. Thus not only does the State encroach upon the sphere of the church, but the church is required to recognize and comply with this encroachment by applying for and accepting licenses under its specifications.

In Manchukuo a "Temporary Ordinance for the Control of Religious Temples and Preachers", which was issued in September, 1938, provides that the civil magistrate may suspend from ecclesiastical office a preacher who opposes local customs, and may cancel a particular church's permission to exist, either because in the magistrate's judgment the existence of such church is contrary to the public welfare, "or for other reasons." This ordinance makes the very existence of the church as a religious body contingent upon the express permission of the civil magistrate, which must be applied for and obtained. Persons who establish, dissolve or unite churches without having obtained the magistrate's permission may be fined or imprisoned. A recent announcement in the press states that since the ordinance became effective, approximately seven thousand temples, churches and shrines have been registered by the Government, and that official licenses will be granted to about 5,400 of these, after which the authorities will in-
vestigate all religious bodies not having licenses and "will adopt appropriate measures in coping with them."

How far all this is removed from the Reformed conception of the legitimate relation of the civil magistrate to the sphere of religion and the church will appear when we note the statements of Charles Hodge on this subject:"

"The proper sphere of civil government is the civil and social relations of men, and their temporal welfare; conscience, and of course religion, are beyond its jurisdiction, except so far as the best interests of civil society are necessarily connected with them. What extent of ground this exception covers, ever has been, and probably will ever remain a matter of dispute. Still it is to be remembered, that it is an exception; religion and morality, as such, are not within the legitimate sphere of the civil authority. To justify the interference of the civil government, therefore, in any given case, with these important subjects, an exception must be made out. It must be shown that an opinion or a religion is not only false, but that its prevalence is incompatible with the rights of those members of the community who are not embraced within its communion, before the civil authority can be authorized to interfere for its suppression. It is then to be suppressed, not as a religion, but as a public nuisance. God has ordained civil government for the promotion of the welfare of men as members of the same civil society; and parental government, and the instruction and discipline of the church, for their moral and religious improvement. And the less interference there is between these two great institutions, in the promotion of their respective objects, the better."

As Dr. Hodge pointed out, the civil magistrate possesses no jurisdiction over conscience, religion and morality as such, though of course this does not mean that the civil magistrate has nothing whatever to do with these subjects, nor does it imply that there are no matters in which the civil magistrate may legitimately exercise authority over the church and in which the church owes obedience to the commands of the magistrate. Though the church as such, i.e., in its specifically religious character and functions, owes obedience to God alone,

† The Manchuria Daily News, June 1, 1940, p. 8.

‡ Hodge, Charles, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, pp. 652–653, on Rom. xiii. (Quoted from new edition (no date) published by Kregel).
still the church owes obedience to the lawful authority of the State in those civil aspects of the church’s existence which are common to human actions and societies. If in order to check the spread of an epidemic disease all public meetings are forbidden for a period of time, this civil requirement is binding upon church assemblies the same as upon secular meetings. If all private associations are required to report to the civil magistrate their membership statistics, the church ought to obey this requirement the same as any other voluntary association. Obedience to civil requirements such as these is no compromise of the principle of religious liberty, because the requirements are within the legitimate sphere of civil authority. The requirements faced by missionaries and church leaders in the Far East today are entirely different in character. In Japan, for example, by enacting the “Religious Bodies Law”, the State has frankly stepped across the line which divides the civil from the religious, and proposes to control the doctrines, personnel and activities of religious bodies as such. In the words of Mr. Ishihara, already quoted, “the existence of the church was formerly independent of politics and it also sought to maintain its freedom, but today it cannot exist unless it fits into the political system.”

The situation is, then, that missionaries and churches in these fields are faced with governmental control of their work. The alternative placed before Christian leaders is virtually this: either subordinate missions and the church to the control of the State, or else cease to exist and function at all. The Christian church must either become a subsidiary of the State, or be regarded as a rebel against the authority of the State. Religion is to be a State-controlled monopoly; the Government will receive applications for the establishment of religious bodies, and at its own option will grant or refuse licenses for these to exist and carry on their work. Christianity becomes, in effect, one of several established religions, and the more important officers of a denomination acquire a quasi-political status, since the express sanction of the civil magistrate is necessary before they can be installed or discharged from office. The true separation of church and State is broken down and supplanted by a relationship of a definitely Erastian character.
III.

The Reaction of Missions and Churches to the Demands of the State

The reaction of the majority of missionaries and Oriental Christian leaders to such demands as have been described above is by no means reassuring to persons who regard religious liberty as the birthright of the Christian church and a heritage dearer than life itself. The great majority favor immediate, unquestioning compliance with such demands. Among Oriental Christians appeal is often made to a superficial interpretation of Scripture to justify compliance. Such Scriptures as "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers" and "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" are held not merely to warrant but even to require compliance with the demands of the civil magistrate, even in the sphere of religion. Though it is obvious that such texts are addressed to Christians in their individual capacity and set forth their duty as citizens of the State, yet it is urged that the church is simply an association of Christians, and that what is the duty of each as an individual must be the duty of all collectively. Thus the conception of the church as the household of God, having a Head as well as members, is disregarded, and the members propose to permit the civil magistrate to usurp the place and functions of Christ the Head. Although it is clear that the apostles themselves disobeyed the commands of magistrates, and asserted the principle that "we ought to obey God rather than men," the advocates of compliance declare this consideration to be irrelevant, since the State's demands are held to be not positive contradictions of the commands of God but merely requirements of civil loyalty and of control, but not suppression, of missions and the church. It is very commonly stated that if the magistrate positively forbids the preaching of the gospel, then Christians ought to obey God and disobey the magistrate, but that as long as the magistrate merely proposes

-ROMANS 13:1.
-1 PETER 2:13.
-ACTS 5:29.
to license and control the preaching of the gospel, Christians ought to comply with the demand.

Among missionaries, the prevalent tendency is to assume that the magistrate's demands concerning control of missions and churches are purely formal and technical. Some even welcome legislation which sets up State control over the church, as giving Christianity a legal status and protection against arbitrary action. Others view the requirements with more or less concern but hold that compliance is legitimate because only formal control is contemplated by the State. The magistrate, it is said, has no intention of really interfering with the freedom of the Christian church; all that he wants is a formal acknowledgment of his authority to supervise and control the church, after which he will allow all things to continue as they were before. Concerning this attitude, two things must be said. First, it must be regarded as wishful thinking; Mr. Ishihara's statement that "the church cannot exist unless it fits into the political system" is probably nearer to the truth, so far as the State's designs upon the church are concerned. Second, even if it could be conceded that only a formal recognition of the magistrate's authority in the church is required, still we hold that to grant such recognition is to concede the entire principle and to inflict a grievous dishonor on the Lord Jesus Christ, the only legitimate Head of the church. When Satan said to our Lord "If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine";

5 all that he asked was a formal acknowledgment of his sovereignty. We may give neither the form nor the substance of the things of God to Caesar. It is possible, of course, that such control will remain purely formal for a long time, but there is no guarantee that it will remain so permanently. The civil magistrate can implement his formal control by actual control at any moment, and those who have complied cannot object to this, because they have conceded the principle in complying with formal control by the State.

The real objection to such requirements as these concerns not this or that particular detail of the regulations, unjust and offensive as these may be. Rather it concerns the very

idea of such requirements. For the civil magistrate to control religion is an infringement of the people's religious liberty and a usurpation of Christ's headship over the church. All the weak and doubtful arguments that are adduced to prove the contrary propositions fail miserably to do so, and leave the inescapable impression that they proceed not from principle but from a desire to avert untoward consequences.

Confronted with such demands to render the things of God to Caesar, the great majority of missionaries and Oriental Christian leaders, as already stated, favor compliance. This seems to us to reveal a very serious situation and to manifest some symptoms of a very dangerous spiritual malady. We shall present five objections against the attitude of compliance on the part of those persons who recognize the State's encroachments as an evil and a burden, but see no other course than to comply with the State's demands. In the following we refer particularly to the second and third lines of infringement of the freedom of Christianity, viz., the demand for participation in idolatrous rites as a pledge of civil allegiance, and the demand that missions and churches accept control by the State.

First, the attitude of compliance with such demands proceeds from unsound ethical principles. It is, in reality, a proposal to do evil that good may come, and based on the false doctrine that the end may justify the means. It is held that if compliance is refused, missionary work may be suppressed and persecution stirred up against the church. By compliance, the evil day may be indefinitely postponed, and missionary work can continue, for the time being at least, as usual. Since we are commanded to preach the gospel, it is said, we must do whatever is necessary to prevent the suppression of this work, and therefore compliance is held to be legitimate.

Second, the attitude of compliance proceeds from false and narrow views of the message and task of missions. Some missionaries say that compliance is legitimate as long as freedom to teach the Bible is not interfered with. This is based upon an unconscious assumption that the missionary message is simply a message of salvation for individual sinners, and that so long as this is left free and unrestricted, compliance
is right. But the fact is that compliance with such require-
ments leaves the missionary free to teach only a part of the
Bible; he can no longer honestly proclaim the whole counsel
of God, because his conscience has been brought under obedi-
ence to the civil magistrate with respect to some truths of
the Bible, such as religious liberty, the intrinsic powers of the
church, Christ's headship and the sinfulness of idolatry. The
missionary's real message is the whole counsel of God as re-
vealed in the Scriptures, including the truths just mentioned.
The missionary who by compliance with Erastian demands
has recognized the supremacy of the civil magistrate over the
church cannot consistently proclaim the great truth that "The
Lord Jesus, as King and Head of His Church, hath therein
appointed a government, in the hand of Church officers, dis-
tinct from the civil magistrate." The missionary who has
explicitly or tacitly consented to participation in the cere-
monies of polytheistic worship on the part of his converts
cannot consistently proclaim and apply the great truths set
forth in the First and Second Commandments. To assert
that the suppression of these truths is no curtailment of the
missionary's freedom to teach the Bible, is to hold an erroneous
and narrow view of what the message of the Bible really is.

Third, the attitude of compliance harbors within itself the
germs of a non-theistic view of life. Man's salvation is regarded
as all-important. The welfare of man is thus made the sumnum
bonum. Therefore, if circumstances require, some lesser mat-
ters, such as religious liberty and Christ's headship over the
church, may be sacrificed upon this altar. But the true sum-
num bonum is the glory of God, not the welfare of man in
itself. Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and
only subordinately to this to enjoy God forever. The first
concern of missions is indeed the salvation of men, but the
highest concern of missions is the glory of God; therefore to
sacrifice the glory of God for the supposed welfare of men
can bring man no real good in the end, but is certain to result
in doctrinal and ethical decadence, whatever the immediate
apparent results may be. At bottom this attitude is based on
a conception which regards God as a means to an end,
namely, the welfare of man.

* The Westminster Confession of Faith, XXX. 1.
Fourth, the attitude of compliance proceeds from unbelief in the power of God to carry on his work in the world and to protect the church against the assaults of all her enemies. We must do right though the heavens fall. It is no part of our duty to keep the door open for preaching the gospel by compromising with moral evil. Our Lord is on the throne, ruling in the midst of all his enemies. He is the Head of the church, and has given his promise that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”.

The church’s continuance and prosperity are not contingent upon human expedients of doubtful morality, but depend on the unchangeable decree of the omnipotent God.

Fifth, the attitude of compliance even when considered from the viewpoint of the pragmatic test of results is certain ultimately to fail of accomplishing that which is expected of it by its advocates. In missionary and church policy with reference to totalitarian governments, as in international diplomacy, the policy of appeasement soon proves itself unworthy of the confidence placed in it. The persons who begin to comply with such demands thereby take not the last step, but only the first of a series of steps down the slippery pathway to complete capitulation to the demands of a State which is actively opposed to Christianity. When once it becomes evident that the spirit of compromise has infected the forces of Christianity, the thirst of the totalitarian State for complete domination over Christian institutions becomes unquenchable. The fact that the Christian community is divided about these questions having been noted by the State, advantage is taken of the division to bring even greater pressure to bear on recusants. The dissenting minority is represented as being extreme and fanatical, and coercive measures are employed to bring it into line.

The consequences of increasing governmental pressure, in the sphere of the religious life and thought of mission churches, must be viewed with the greatest concern. In the face of increasing encroachments by the State upon the sphere of religion, there is a tendency manifested among Oriental Christians and among some missionaries to withdraw from all such

*Matthew 16:18.*
points of conflict and retire, as it were, into the inner sanctuary of the spiritual life. Instead of bearing an emphatic testimony, in the face of opposition, against the evils of the times, the tendency is to limit the scope of Christianity more and more, so that purely personal religious experience is emphasized, while broader ethical and social responsibilities are largely neglected. In this way the religious life becomes more and more self-contained, and it begins to appear as if Christianity had but little to do with the real life of the world in which the Christian lives. If Christian life can successfully be thus restricted to the realm of inner experience, it may be possible to avoid all persecution and all conflict with the world. This is of course precisely in line with the totalitarian State’s notion of religion as consisting in formal rites, mystical experience and pious feelings. This tendency is exemplified by those Christians who justify their participation in Shinto shrine worship by stating that it is their body, not their soul, that bows before the shrine. Though persecution may be avoided by such shifts, the resulting type of religion is certain to be a mere travesty of the full-orbed Christianity of the word of God. We do not mean to question that many of those who are influenced by this tendency are true believers, but we hold that they are sadly deluded and anything but honoring the Lord in whom they have believed. Christians are to be the salt of the earth, but cannot be if their conduct is conformed to the ways of the world. It is easy to drift into a way of divorcing religion from life and even into a plausible rationalization of this spiritual retreat. We believe it constitutes a real danger on the mission fields of the Far East today.

In countries where special sections of the police exist for the specific purpose of controlling the thought life of the people, it is not surprising that Christian people, in effect, stop thinking about the bearing of Christianity upon political, social, economic and educational questions, and if at all serious in the Christian life, devote their spiritual energies to the quest of sanctification in its individual character and implications. Multitudes of new converts from the world never start to think about the relation between the Christian life and the Christian’s environment, except in the narrowest and
most individualistic terms, with the result that churches composed of such members cause but little impact on the pagan society which surrounds them. Assuredly, Christian experience is not genuine unless its source and essence is a new spiritual life, the product of regeneration, in the heart of the believer; but just as certainly, a genuine Christian experience ought to affect the whole man in all his relationships. The unconscious attempt to dam the stream of the Christian life in the inner regions of individual spiritual experience, or to confine it to purely personal matters, is an unhealthy tendency which can produce only evil in the end. Its logical and inevitable result is a form of religion which has little or nothing to do with life beyond the limits of the individual soul.

IV.

The Scriptural Position of Non-compliance with Evil

With reference to all infringements of the freedom of Christianity by the State, we believe that the attitude of compliance is fundamentally unsound. The ethics of the Scriptures is based on the destruction of evil, and therefore necessarily occupies the ground of non-compliance with evil. If it be alleged that non-compliance with the demands of the State threatens the very existence of the church as a visible body, we may reply, first, that compliance threatens the very Christianity of the church, in principle as soon as compliance takes place, and in fullest actuality with the lapse of time; provided the policy of compliance is not broken off, the inevitable result, in the end, will be a merger of Christianity and paganism; and second, that it is our duty to walk by faith rather than by sight. Christianity has suffered, and successfully withstood, the opposition of the world for nearly two thousand years, and it has been demonstrated again and again that Christianity contains within itself the power of the omnipotent God to overcome all evils, but only when it refuses to compromise with them. As suggested by the words *Nec Tamen Consumebatur* on the emblem of the Church of Scotland, like the bush seen by Moses, ever burning yet never consumed, because God was in the bush, so the Christian
church is ever in conflict with the world, and often hard pressed, yet never overcome, because God is in the church. This is our true ground of confidence for the future.

The true church is sometimes more, and sometimes less visible. The word of God guarantees the continuity of the church in the world, but this does not mean that the church must always and in every place be fully or equally visible. The church's visibility and outward organization, though important, are by no means its most precious possession. Faith and a good conscience, and the honor of Christ the church's Head, are far more precious. Sometimes, in order to avoid sinful compliance with the doctrines and commandments of men, a retreat from a more to a less visible form may be necessary. Sometimes God would be more glorified, and his kingdom more advanced, by the dissolution, in whole or in part, of the outward visible organization of the church in a particular place, rather than by the church retaining its proper organization and visible form by compliance with the Erastian and idolatrous commands of a pagan State. Christians must always assemble themselves together, but there may be times when this can be rightly done only in deserts and mountains, and dens and caves of the earth. If an ecclesiastical judiciary cannot meet without reserving seats for police and detectives, and without the members being prelimited by the orders of the civil magistrate, then we may confidently assert that it would be better for the judiciary not to meet at all, rather than for it to meet under conditions which would prevent its being a true judiciary of Jesus Christ. It would be better to wait for the Lord, in his providence, to change the times and the seasons, rather than to continue the usual activities and meetings by a sinful compromise with evil. Sometimes a retreat to other forms of work may be necessary, but this should never take place except as a last resort, under protest, while waiting on God for relief, and with the responsibility placed clearly and squarely upon the civil magistrate who has made this retreat necessary by his infringements of the freedom of Christianity.

The freedom of Christianity is not ours to barter or sur-

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18 The Westminster Confession of Faith, XXV. 4.
render as we please. Oriental Christians frequently say that in Europe and America Christian people can resist the demands of the State because they enjoy religious liberty, whereas in the Far East many lands lack true religious liberty, and therefore the Oriental Christian must comply with all the demands of the civil magistrate in the sphere of religion. But religious liberty was not won in Western lands without resisting unto blood against the tyranny of bishops and popes, kings and emperors, nor is it long retained in any land except at the cost of perpetual vigilance and if need be heroic sacrifice. May God raise up in the churches of the Far East men with the faith and courage of Andrew Melville, who said to King James VI of Scotland: “Sir, there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland: there is King James the head of this commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the King of the Church, whose subject James the Sixth is, and of whose kingdom he is not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member.” 19 After all, Christ is the Head of the church, and Christ’s place and honor cannot be yielded to any other, whether pope, emperor or totalitarian State.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE BY THE AUTHOR

On page 8 of the above article there appears the statement that “Three months later the Moderator of that General Assembly sent out, over his own signature, a warning to all congregations under the Assembly’s jurisdiction . . .”. This statement was based on information which at the time when the article was written (1940) was considered trustworthy. However, in the course of time more reliable information became available which indicated that the true facts in the case referred to are as follows. The Japanese officials in Korea demanded of the Moderator that he send out the letter which they prepared, but he refused. Thereupon the officials persuaded another minister to issue the letter with the Moderator’s name fraudulently appended to it. The Moderator did not know it had been issued until he himself received one in the mail. See BIBLICAL MISSIONS (Philadelphia), March, 1945, page 11.

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