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Flag

The Watchtower Reprints, May 15, 1917, p. 6086

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The Watchtower, June 15, 1964, p. 378

“Well, what is a flag? It is an image made by man; it is a representation of the State. Flags often contain representations of things in the heavens, such as stars, as well as things on earth. So to dedicated Christians, kneeling before or saluting a flag would be a violation of the Second Commandment and of the Christian command to ‘flee from idolatry.’”

Awake!, September 8, 1971, p. 14

“There are Christians today who feel similarly regarding national flags. They are Jehovah’s witnesses. Their position is the same the world over. Being keenly aware of the Scriptural command to ‘flee from idolatry,’ they decline to participate in flag ceremonies.”

(continued)

Awake!, July 22, 1993, p. 17

“Participating in the flag salute of any nation is to them a worshipful act that would intrude on and violate their exclusive worship of Jehovah.”

Awake!, January 8, 1994, p. 22

“Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that saluting a flag, singing a national anthem, and reciting a pledge of allegiance are religious acts. Their Bible-trained conscience does not permit them to participate in such acts of worship.”

(done)

DISPLAYING THE AMERICAN FLAG

Suppose the city or state officials should issue an order requiring, or even requesting, that all persons display the American flag. What should we do? We answer. We think it would be right to display the flag in obedience to such order or request. The American flag was adopted as an emblem of liberty. It is the national emblem. While some have insisted that it now represents war, this is hardly in keeping with the facts. It may represent war to those who desire war, but to those who love liberty and peace, the flag represents liberty and peace. However that may be, the displaying of the American flag can do injury to no one. If commanded or requested to display the flag, it should be done, out of respect to the Government under which it is the privilege of Christians to live. If an American was the guest of the British Government and was requested to display the British flag and refused to do so, it would be showing disrespect to the British Government, his host. If a Christian, who is an alien amongst all earthly governments, should, while journeying amongst them, be requested to display a flag of the country whose benefits he is enjoying, and refuse to do so, such refusal would be failing to show the proper respect to such government. Recognizing that the Government of the United States has been the special refuge of Christian people from intolerable persecution; that it was founded as an asylum of religious liberty and freedom of speech, every one in America should take pleasure in displaying the American flag—especially when requested so to do. It does not mean that by putting a flag on your house you would want to go to war.

Since the Bethel Home was established, in one end of the Drawing Room there has been kept a small bust of Abraham Lincoln with two American flags displayed about the bust. This is deemed entirely proper, having in mind what Mr. Lincoln did for the Government and for the people of the United States, and in this we see nothing inconsistent with a Christian's duty.

The Sixty-fifth Congress, now in session at Washington, has passed a law providing for selective draft into military service of the United States of all men between certain ages. Section II of said Act provides:

"Such draft shall be based upon liability to military service of all male citizens, or male persons not alien enemies who have declared their intention to become citizens, between the ages of 21 and 30 years, and shall take place and be maintained under such regulations as the President may prescribe not inconsistent with the terms of this Act. Quotas for the several States, Territories, and the District of Columbia, or subdivisions thereof, shall be determined in proportion to the population thereof available for military service, as shown by the registration provided for herein."

This provision of the Act means that the President of the United States may by selective draft call to arms all male citizens of the United States, and all male persons not alien enemies who have declared their intention (by taking out what is known as "First Papers") to become citizens of the United States, between designated ages; and that he has power to compel all such to respond to such call.

REGISTRATION FIRST

For the purpose of enabling the Government to know who may be called into such service, the Act provides for a registration as follows:

"Sec. 4. All persons liable to military service under the provisions of this Act shall be subject to registration in accordance with regulations to be prescribed by the President, and upon proclamation by the President or other public notice given by him or by his direction stating the time and place of such registration, it shall be the duty of every such person liable to military service under the provisions hereof to present himself for and submit to registration under the provisions of this Act; and every such person liable to military service shall be deemed to have notice of the requirements of this Act upon the publication of said proclamation or other notice as aforesaid given by the President or by his direction; and any person who shall fail or neglect to present himself for registration or to submit thereto as herein provided shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and shall, upon conviction in the proper district court of the United States, be punished by imprisonment for not less than three months or more than one year, and shall thereupon be duly registered."

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Act are required under the law to register and submit to examination; that on the day provided by such proclamation it shall be the duty of all male persons liable to military service under the provisions of said Act to present themselves for registration before the proper officers and to give answers to such questions as may be propounded to them. Since this section is not in any way in conflict with the law of God, as believed and understood by Bible Students of the INTERNATIONAL BIBLE STUDENTS ASSOCIATION, then all such should cheerfully obey this provision of the Act and duly appear and register in accordance with its terms.

EXEMPTION FROM MILITARY SERVICE

Recognizing the right of each person to exercise an honest religious conviction with respect to participation in war, Congress, in the Act herein under examination, has made provision for certain persons to be exempted or excused from selective draft for military service. Section 3 of said Act providing for such exemption, is as follows:

"Sec. 3. The Vice President of the United States, the officers, legislative, executive, and judicial of the United States and of the several States and Territories, and all persons in the military and naval service of the United States, shall be exempt from the selective draft herein prescribed; and nothing in this Act contained shall be construed to require or compel any person to serve in any of the forces herein provided for if found to be a member of any well-organized religious sect or organization, at present organized and existing, whose creed forbids its members to participate in war in any form and whose religious convictions are against war or participation therein in accordance with the creed of said religious organization; and the President is hereby authorized to exclude or discharge from said selective draft and from the draft under the second paragraph of section one hereof, or to draft for partial military service only, persons of the following classes: Custom-house clerks; persons employed by the United States in the transmission of the mails; artificers and workmen employed in the armories, arsenals, and navy yards of the United States, and such other persons employed in the service of the United States as the President may designate; pilots; mariners actually employed in the sea service of any citizen or merchant within the United States; persons engaged in industries including agriculture, found to be necessary to the maintenance of the military establishment or the effective operation of the military forces or the maintenance of national interest during the emergency; those in a status with respect to persons dependent upon them for support, which renders their exclusion or discharge advisable; and those found to be physically and morally deficient. No exemption or exclusion shall continue when a cause therefor no longer exists."

It follows, therefore, that any person who makes application for exemption because of his religious creed, or belief, forbidding his participation in war in any form, or whose religious convictions are against war or participation therein, is not violating any law of the land, but, on the contrary, is availing himself of the provisions of such law. In calling the attention of our brethren thereto, we are merely advising what rights and privilege this law grants to them.

The WATCH TOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY was incorporated and organized according to law in the year 1884 as a religious organization, and still is organized and exists as such religious organization. The INTERNATIONAL BIBLE STUDENTS ASSOCIATION is the same organization incorporated and organized in the year 1913 under that name according to the provisions of the laws of Great Britain, but said organization had existed as an unincorporated religious organization many years prior thereto, and still exists as such religious organization. The classes or congregations of Christian people throughout the United States organized and existing under the name of ASSOCIATED BIBLE STUDENTS of the INTERNATIONAL BIBLE STUDENTS ASSOCIATION are so organized and directed under the supervision of the WATCH TOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY and its like organization, the INTERNATIONAL BIBLE STUDENTS ASSOCIATION. The members of all such Bible Classes come clearly within the provisions of said section of the above Act of Congress relating to the exemption from military service. The Act provides that "Nothing in this Act contained shall be construed to require or compel any person to serve in any of the forces herein provided for who is a member of any well-organized religious sect or organization at present organized and existing, whose creed forbids its members to participate in war in any form and whose religious convictions are against war or participation therein in accordance with the creed of said religious organization."

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of mankind, Jesus rejected the offer. (Matt. 4:8-10) Jesus Christ would not accept any part, small or large, in the political structure that the world of unbelieving mankind had set up. Hence Jesus also turned down a popular draft for local kingship, 'withdrawing again into the mountain all alone.'—John 6:15.

Not only did Jesus himself stay separate from politics, but about 96 C.E. the resurrected Son of God gave his apostle John a vision of a wild beast ascending out of the sea, with seven heads and ten horns. Since Revelation was presented in signs, the wild beast was symbolic. Harmonizing with the Bible's own explanation of the wild beasts of Daniel, chapters seven and eight, the wild beast John saw in vision symbolizes the Devil's visible political organization under seven successive headships through the centuries. Who gave this symbolic political beast its power? The Bible says: "The dragon gave the beast its power and its throne and great authority." (Rev. 13:2) Since the Dragon, the Devil, gives the symbolic political beast its power, Christians wisely heed Jesus' counsel and example and refuse to get involved in the political affairs of the world of unbelieving mankind.

"GENTLE TOWARD ALL"

The Bible also shows that all true Christians must cultivate the fruitage of God's holy spirit in their lives. This fruitage includes love, peace, kindness, mildness and self-control. (Gal. 5:22, 23) Hence Christians, whether young or old, are told: "A slave of the Lord does not need to fight, but needs to be gentle toward all, qualified to teach, keeping himself restrained under evil." (2 Tim. 2:24) Following this counsel, we must be gentle both in our speech and in our conduct toward others. We should not go around with a chip on our shoulder, looking for fights or even expecting trou-

ble. We should learn to restrain ourselves, even when provoked.

Having noted certain Bible principles that must be heeded if a Christian is to keep integrity to God, consider what this means to you as a student in school. You go to school to get an education—learning to read and write, becoming acquainted with history, perhaps getting training in a trade. But while you are there in school, as a Christian you do not want to adopt the "spirit of the world," because Jesus said that his true followers are "no part of the world." And his inspired apostle Paul wrote: "Quit being fashioned after this system of things, but be transformed by making your mind over, that you may prove to yourselves the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (1 Cor. 2:12; John 15:19; Rom. 12:2) So a Christian cannot share with the world in all its activities. He must guide his course of conduct by the "perfect will of God" as set out in the Bible. Of course, the Bible does not give direct commands on every situation that may arise, but it does set out principles that should guide us.

FLAG-SALUTE CEREMONIES

For example, flag-salute ceremonies are frequent in schools all over the world. Now, what Bible principles govern what a Christian should do while the class is engaged in this activity?

Well, what is a flag? It is an image made by man; it is a representation of the State. Flags often contain representations of things in the heavens, such as stars, as well as things on earth. So to dedicated Christians, kneeling before or saluting a flag would be a violation of the Second Commandment and of the Christian command to "flee from idolatry."

In some lands children are expected to kneel and kiss the flag. Elsewhere flags are saluted with outstretched arm or with the

He then quotes the pledge of allegiance. Thus this author views flag ceremonies as a form of worship. So also does the Scottish Professor Denis Brogan of Cambridge University, who says on page 359 of the book *The Religious Situation: 1968*:

"The civic religion has its rituals. There are many, but one . . . is the ritual of flag worship."

On the same subject the Finnish writer Arvo Viikund states with respect to the Finnish flag:

"So when we understand what values even our blue cross flag hides in its folds, then our aversive attitude towards it must also change to become worship of the flag, which directs its holy anger towards all those who dare to underestimate or offend the most precious symbol of our nation."

To some people it may seem that these writers are drawing an extreme view. They personally may not regard themselves as engaging in flag worship. But if their actions during a flag ceremony were viewed for the first time by a native from the Amazon jungles, what do you think he would conclude? Would it not seem to him that people standing at attention with faces uplifted to a flag and with arms extended toward it or placed upon their hearts while repeating a memorized formula are worshipping it?

Obedience to Conscience

In the colonial days of America the Puritans objected to the British flag because of its red cross of St. George. According to *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, they did this, "not from any disloyalty to the mother country, but from a conscientious objection to what they deemed an idolatrous symbol."

There are Christians today who feel similarly regarding national flags. They are Jehovah's witnesses. Their position is the same the world over. Being keenly aware of the Scriptural command to "flee

from idolatry," they decline to participate in flag ceremonies.—1 Cor. 10:14.

Their position is comparable to that taken by Christians of the first century of our Common Era. Because of conscience, those early Christians refused to burn incense to Caesar, who, to the Romans, was not only a ruler but a god. Note what is said about this on page 137 of the first volume of the book *A History of Civilization* by Brinton, Christopher and Wolf:

"To hold this motley collection of peoples in a common allegiance, to give them something like a national flag as a symbol of this unity, the emperor was deified. . . . Simple rites of sacrifice to him were added to local religions and local rites. . . . The Christians, however, were as rigorous monotheists as the Jews; they could not sacrifice to the emperor any more than the Jews of old could sacrifice to Baal. . . . The true Christian, then, could not bring himself to make what to an outsider was merely a decent gesture, like raising one's hat today when the flag goes by in a parade."

Because Jehovah's witnesses have been obedient to their religious conscience in this matter they have been sorely mistreated in a number of countries. In the United States it was necessary for them to fight two court cases clear to the Supreme Court before getting a decision that protected their right of religious freedom.

The first case involved the town of Minersville, Pennsylvania, and its school board, which expelled children of Jehovah's witnesses for refusing to participate in flag ceremonies. In this case the Supreme Court ruled against the Witnesses. Regarding the case, Professor Denis Brogan states:

"The absurd and odious decision of the Minersville School Board meant that the children of Jehovah's Witnesses were punished for not performing an act that not only their parents but the Jews of the time of the Maccabees and the Christians of the time of Trajan would also have thought idolatrous."

Jren in Jehovah's ways. As our children went to school, I saw that things have not entirely changed. Judith and Stephen were both attacked for their convictions, and Erwin and I felt our hearts swell as they too showed the courage to take their stand for what is right. And I always found that by the end of the school year, their teachers realized that Witnesses are not a bunch of fanatics, and we forged very cordial relationships.

Looking back over the years, I can now certainly see that Jehovah has blessed our family. We presently total 52 family members who serve Jehovah. There are eight who have received their heavenly reward or else await the earthly resurrection, including my own dear parents, who left such a wonderful legacy of putting Jehovah first in life. In recent years we have thought much of that example. After having lived such an active and productive life, Erwin has struggled with a neuromuscular disorder that severely limits him.



Dennis Marsico

Lillian today

Despite such trials, we look forward to the future with real joy and confidence. Never once has either of us regretted our decision to worship Jehovah God exclusively.—As told by Lillian Gobitas Klose.

Why Don't Jehovah's Witnesses Salute the Flag?

THERE is a principle of worship that Jehovah's Witnesses emphasize more than other religious groups do: *exclusivity*. Jesus stated that principle at Luke 4:8: "It is Jehovah your God you must worship, and it is to him *alone* you must render sacred service." Witnesses thus choose to avoid directing worship to anyone or anything in the universe other than Jehovah. Participating in the flag salute of any nation is to them a worshipful act that would intrude on and violate their exclusive worship of Jehovah.

Both the Israelites and the early Christians were warned repeatedly against worshipping any man-made object. This practice was condemned as idolatry. (Exodus 20:4-6; Matthew 22:21; 1 John 5:21) Can the flag really be considered an idol? Few would seriously argue that it is a mere piece of cloth. It is widely treated as a sacred symbol, and more. Catholic his-

torian Carlton Hayes put it this way: "Nationalism's chief symbol of faith and central object of worship is the flag."

This does not mean that Jehovah's Witnesses disrespect the flag or those who salute it. Generally they will respectfully stand for such ceremonies as long as they are not required to participate. It is their belief that one shows true respect for the flag by obeying the laws of the land it represents.

Most people will agree that saluting a flag does not guarantee respect for it. That this is true was illustrated by a case in Canada. A teacher and principal ordered a little girl who salutes the flag to spit on it; she did so. They then ordered a young Witness girl in the class to do the same, but she steadfastly refused. To Jehovah's Witnesses, it is a matter of deeply held principle to respect the flag. Their worship, however, goes to Jehovah alone.

Philippine Supreme Court Upholds FREEDOM OF WORSHIP

By *Awake!* correspondent in the Philippines

ON JUNE 7, 1993, as millions of Filipino schoolchildren trooped back to their classrooms, Jehovah's Witnesses among them were most happy. Why? Because on March 1, 1993, just before the closing of the preceding school year, the Supreme Court of the Philippines reversed a Supreme Court decision of 1959 and upheld the right of children of Jehovah's Witnesses to refrain from saluting the flag, reciting the pledge of allegiance, and singing the national anthem.

What led to this turn of events? And what consequences are there for all lovers of freedom in the Philippines as a result of this decision?

Why Jehovah's Witnesses Do Not Salute the Flag

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that saluting a flag, singing a national anthem, and reciting a pledge of allegiance are religious acts. Their Bible-trained conscience does not permit them to participate in such acts of worship. (Matthew 4:10; Acts 5:29) No matter what country they live in, this is their stand in imitation of Jesus Christ, who said that his followers would be "no part of the world, just as [he was] no part of the world."—John 17:16.

At the same time, Jehovah's Witnesses show respect for the governments they live under, and they believe that these are an arrangement that God permits. Thus, they are under obligation to obey the laws of the land, pay taxes, and give due honor to the governing officials. At no time would they ever par-

ticipate in any rebellion against any government.*

Reasons for Supreme Court Decision

What reasons were given by the present Supreme Court for reversing the decision of the 1959 *Gerona v. Secretary of Education* decision? The 1993 decision written by Justice Griño-Aquino stated: "The idea that one may be compelled to salute the flag, sing the national anthem, and recite the patriotic pledge, during a flag ceremony on pain of being dismissed from one's job or of being expelled from school, is alien to the conscience of the present generation of Filipinos who cut their teeth on the Bill of Rights which guarantees their rights to free speech and the free exercise of religious profession and worship."

It was observed by the Court that while Jehovah's Witnesses "do not take part in the compulsory flag ceremony, they do not engage in 'external acts' or behavior that would offend their countrymen who believe in expressing their love of country through the observance of the flag ceremony." The Court further observed: "They quietly stand at attention during the flag ceremony to show their respect for the right of those who choose to participate in the solemn proceedings. . . . Since they do not engage in disruptive behavior, there is no warrant for their expulsion."

* For a detailed discussion of why Jehovah's Witnesses do not participate in saluting the flag, singing national anthems, and pledging allegiance, please see the brochure *School and Jehovah's Witnesses*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., pages 12-16.