THE STATE AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN INDIA

by

WILLIAM PATON, M.A.

Secretary of the National Christian Council of India
THE STATE AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN INDIA

by

WILLIAM PATON, M.A.

Secretary of the National Christian Council of India
FOREWORD

This bulletin is most timely. Those who are responsible for the policies of Christian education in China are discussing how to meet the administrative difficulties involved in acceptance of the new government regulations for the registration of Christian institutions, which require that courses in religion be made elective. A similar situation has been met in India, to the mutual satisfaction of the government authorities and of the Christian educators, by the adoption of what is called “The Conscience Clause.” It is not improbable that some form of “conscience clause” may prove a solution in China, at least for elementary schools, and Christian educators should be familiar with its working and with the results in India.

Mr. Paton is admirably qualified to write on this subject from his experience as a missionary and more recently as secretary of the National Christian Council of India. The China Christian Educational Association is indebted to him for his admirably clear exposition, and bespeaks for it a wide reading in China.

E. W. WALLACE,
Associate General Secretary,
China Christian Educational Association.

Shanghai,
January 13, 1926
THE STATE AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN INDIA

From the very beginning of the modern Protestant missionary educational movement in India missionary education has been in intimate association with Government. The father of the modern missionary educational movement was Alexander Duff. He encountered much opposition, particularly from those who desired to retain the classical languages of India—Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian—as the medium and subject matter of instruction. At the same time he worked closely with men like Sir Charles Trevelyan, who were working within Government for the spread of modern learning. With the development of Departments of Public Instruction and the organisation of education province by province, the schools and colleges conducted by missions have in practically all cases taken their place within the official system.

The policy of Government has been that of grant-in-aid, and dates in its present form from 1854, when a famous Despatch articulated the policy of Government. It was there laid down that Government would not themselves try to cover the whole field with institutions financed, controlled, and directed by themselves; but that they would seek to solve the immense problem of the spread of education throughout the Indian Empire by fostering private and non-official effort, aiding private generosity by Government grants, and by this means covering a far larger area than directly official action based on the taxable resources of the provinces could ever hope to touch.

This has been the fundamental policy actuating Government in India in its dealings with education. It has meant that the number of schools and colleges maintained by Government is in every province much less than those aided by Government. It may, with great justice, be held that the system has preserved for India a certain measure of variety of type and tradition in her educational system, which a purely Governmental system would infallibly have failed to achieve. Even this one claims with some hesitation, because the tendency to the standardisation of schools and colleges is immensely powerful and there are few heads of Christian schools or colleges who would not, if they could, embark on policies even more divergent from the average. It may however be held that the grant-in-aid system has preserved for India a certain variety of type in education, and has made a place within the national system for education on a specifically religious basis, whether that basis be Christian, or Hindu, or Moslem, or Jain, or Sikh, or Parsi.
There are signs that this policy of aiding education and only undertaking by direct Government action a small part of the educational burden, may be, if not deserted by Government, at least pursued somewhat ambiguously. In certain provinces the tendency now is to enlarge the proportion of educational grants given to Government institutions, and this course is defended with some plausibility on the ground that the multiplication of institutions is tending towards a low standard and that Government should use its powers to foster a few outstanding places of learning. It is, however, unlikely that the grant-in-aid system will be departed from, for it so obviously suits the conditions of a country like India where room must be found for the educational expression of the different communities and different religions. In any case the apparent wavering of Government in certain parts in regard to this principle has no reference to the religious aspect of education and need not therefore trouble us further.

As to the religious aspect of education, the grant-in-aid system takes no notice of it. If a school or a college satisfies the educational requirements, works according to the educational code, and passes the scrutiny of the Inspectors, it will continue to receive recognition and Government support. It is an essential part of the policy of the school that religion should be taught; Government accept that fact placidly and are not concerned with it. It has been understood that Government cannot themselves undertake the entire maintenance of schools and colleges for the whole Indian population, and they have accepted the cooperation of private bodies, which may add to a purely educational purpose a more generally religious one.

It may be worth mentioning that the elasticity of the grant-in-aid system has even in certain recent cases allowed Government to continue recognition and financial support of mission schools which have departed from the Government code. This has notably been the case with regard to Mr. W. J. McKee’s well-known rural school at Moga in the Punjab, where the Government code is not followed at all, but the authorities have been so thoroughly convinced of the excellence of the work done that they have given their warmest support. More recently the Madras Government gave the same permission in the case of an American missionary school at Vellore, and the Bihar Government in the case of an S.P.G. school in Ranchi. It is perhaps significant that all these are cases of rural schools where new methods are being employed and experiments conducted. Officials recognize that a keen missionary or Indian Christian educator is in a better position to undertake experiments than is a man who is in Government employment.
The question of the introduction of a Conscience Clause was, I believe, only brought into prominence in 1917, largely owing to a pamphlet on the subject by Mr. Srinivasa Sastri, who succeeded Mr. G. K. Gokhale in the leadership of the Servants of India Society. The line taken by those who first advocated the establishment of a Conscience Clause was as follows: No school or college, they said, which receives a grant from the public funds, ought to make compulsory the attendance of all its students, Christian and non-Christian alike, at Christian teaching. They freely admitted the right of a Christian institution which took no Government grant to compel the attendance of all students at Christian teaching, but held that such a right could not be conceded where public funds were taken and where, as in certain provinces was notably the case, missionary schools could not be carried on without the extensive support given by Government. In 1917 a proposal for the introduction of a Conscience Clause into the educational code of the United Provinces was put forward and defeated by the official votes, though largely supported by the Indian members of the Council. (In 1917 the Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme of Reform had not been mooted and education was not as yet, as later it came to be, a "transferred subject" under the control of the Provincial Council and the Minister.)

A very general discussion on the merits of the Conscience Clause proposal was carried on throughout missionary circles in India and also in England and America. One may attempt to sum up the general feeling at that period by saying that there was a belief that conscientious objection on the part of students or their parents to Christian teaching hardly existed, and that if a Conscience Clause were imposed probably missionary schools and colleges should refuse Government grants and if need be close down. A resolution passed in April 1917 by the United Provinces Representative Council of Missions not unfairly represents the general attitude:

"The Council considers that in the event of a Conscience Clause being introduced into the educational code missionary societies should close down (except in very special cases) such schools and colleges as cannot be carried on without Government grants, but that in view of the place which is now held by the missionary institutions in the educational system of the country it would be just to Government and to the public not to close down any colleges or high schools till two years from the date on which the Conscience Clause comes into effect."

In 1919 the Government of India Act was passed whereby the Dyarchical System of Reform was instituted; education was
a "transferred subject" controlled by Ministers responsible to Provincial Legislatures having an elected majority. It happened that the first Ministers of Education in the United Provinces and in the Bombay Presidency had been prominent in the agitation for the Conscience Clause.

The question, therefore, began to assume a practical bearing, and one may mention also that the Non-cooperation Movement of 1920–1922, and strong anti-foreign feeling which in many cases accompanied it, rendered the task of foreign missionary educators extremely difficult. A meeting was held in Poona at the end of 1920, representative of missionary colleges in all parts of the country, but not so fully representative of schools. The following resolution was agreed to unanimously:

"The principle involved in missionary education is that the missionary is bound, and therefore must be free both in teaching and in personal influence and work, to impart a Christian education to all those entrusted to his care; so that any conditions imposed in missionary colleges which would make that no longer possible would compel missionary societies to close them."

While this was seen to involve the inclusion of Bible teaching as an essential part of a college curriculum, opinions differed as to the necessity of insisting on the compulsory attendance of all students at such teaching. Many felt that the Christian influence of missionary institutions could be developed in many ways besides the formal instruction in class, and that the acceptance of the Conscience Clause might not in practice be a compromise of missionary principles, while it might by the removal of the sense of compulsion render the Christian teacher more free in making his presentation and appeal. This same trend of thought may be illustrated by a resolution passed by the missionary section of the Lucknow Diocesan Council in February 1921, stating that, while the purpose of missionary education "involves the provision of instruction in the Christian faith, we no longer consider it advisable that such Christian teaching should be made compulsory, at any rate in colleges."

So far I have described only the attitude of missionary bodies towards the suggestion of a Conscience Clause to be imposed in the future. It will be seen that opinions varied, but there was undoubtedly a large mass of opinion which viewed with great misgiving any concession to the Conscience Clause idea, and which, moreover, regarded the institution of a Conscience Clause as a departure from the fundamental grant-in-aid principle.
I turn now to the situation as it is to-day, when in certain provinces a Conscience Clause of one kind or another has been introduced. It will be best to give the actual text of the Clauses as they stand.

THE UNITED PROVINCES. A resolution was passed in the Legislative Council in August, 1921, and a clause inserted in the revised Code, taking force from October, 1922, as follows:

(a) No one shall be compelled to attend any religious instruction or observance as a condition of his admission into or continuance in an aided educational institution if he, or his parent or guardian if he is a minor, objects to it and informs the authorities of the institution of his objection in writing.

(b) The time or times during which any religious observance is practised or instruction in religious subjects is given at any meeting of an aided educational institution shall be in the beginning or at the end or at the beginning and end of such meeting.

Note. Exemption from religious instruction or observance shall take effect from the commencement of a school or college term. Applications for exemptions should, therefore, be made at the commencement of a term. But, with the sanction of the headmaster or principal, exemption may take effect at any time during the currency of a term.

This clause has since been accepted by almost all the Missions in the United Provinces. It is the universal testimony of all those who have adopted the clause that the religious usefulness of their institutions is in no way lessened, and that virtually no exemptions have been claimed. In St. John's College, Agra, for instance, five students out of four hundred took advantage of the exemption in the first year, 1922, and no further applications for exemption have been received. At a recent Conference on Christian Education in the United Provinces, held at Lucknow, March 2-4, the following resolution was passed:

"The Conference records its sense of gratitude at the fact that the introduction of a Conscience Clause in the Province has not circumscribed the religious opportunity or impaired the efficiency of the religious teaching of the schools and colleges which have accepted it."

BOMBAY. The following resolution was passed by the Bombay Council in October, 1922:

"This Council recommends that the Government should see its way to introduce the following rule in the Grant-in-Aid Code: 'That in all schools and colleges (which are either the only institutions of their kind in the neighbouring area or which are not purely denominational) which receive Government aid in any form whatsoever, the attendance of students to any class of special religious instruction, which the parents or guardians of such students shall not have sanctioned, should be perfectly voluntary and that no payment in grant-in-aid should be made to any institution which will contravene the provisions of the rule.'"

Note. The clause in brackets was added by way of amendment on the motion of the minister of education. It is a little difficult to understand, but means, roughly, that it applies to missionary schools in single school areas. This modified Conscience Clause has been in operation for a year. Its operation has been accompanied by difficulties which have arisen chiefly from an explanation issued by Government, as follows:

"This rule does not preclude an aided school or college maintained by a particular religious community from enforcing attendance of pupils of other religious communities at instruction in its own religion, provided that (1) the written consent of the parents or guardians of the pupils is first obtained, and (2) no discrimination is made against pupils whose parents or guardians are willing to give such consent."

Representations were made to Government pointing out the extreme difficulty of working under this Clause, and Government agreed to amend the Clause as follows:
"(1) No pupil shall be asked so to attend, whose parent or guardian has expressed an objection to his attendance, and (2) no discrimination is made against pupils whose parents or guardians have expressed such an objection."

**Burma.** Recently there has been some Buddhist agitation for a Conscience Clause, owing, apparently, in part to apprehensions aroused by a series of special evangelistic meetings held in a high school of the American Baptist Mission.

Enquiries have been made by Government as to the attitude of the managers of schools towards a Conscience Clause. The Draft Clause tentatively suggested by the Government of Burma is as follows:

"The management undertakes that no pupil shall be compelled to attend classes in which religious instruction is given, or to take part in any religious exercises, if the parent or guardian has communicated to the school authorities in his own writing or in person his wish that the pupil should not be so compelled. The management also undertakes that no pupil absenting himself from religious instruction or religious exercises by the wish of his parent or guardian expressed as above shall suffer any disability on that account. The management further undertakes that (after providing for the needs of the community by which the school is carried on) no pupil shall be refused admission to the school because exemption from attendance at religious exercises or religious instruction is claimed under this clause.

"(Note. All applications for exemption from religious instruction must reach the principal or the managers within one week after the beginning of the school year or be made at the time of the admission of the pupil.)"

The two passages in brackets were added to the Clause by the Anglican Diocesan Council, which expressed a view that, while not considering that any need exists for a Conscience Clause, if one were imposed, they would accept it if the two passages in brackets were inserted.

Later, the following resolution was passed (after consultation with all the bodies concerned) by the Education Committee of the Burma Christian Council, and forwarded to the Director of Public Instruction:

"We are willing to accept the Conscience Clause on condition that application for exemption from Christian instruction be made annually and personally by the parents or guardians concerned."

"We cannot, however, accept the application of the Conscience Clause to those living in our hostels. In the event of undue pressure being brought to bear upon parents by political associations, we reserve the right to reconsider this decision."

It was perhaps to be expected that a considerable number of pupils would be withdrawn from Christian instruction, in view of the virulence of the agitation which took place in Rangoon. The Cushing High School of the American Baptist Mission voluntarily adopted a Conscience Clause, but only one boy was withdrawn, and he has since returned to the Bible classes, preferring them to the study of ethics.

**Madras.** The Madras Elementary Education Act of 1920, ch. vi, provides as follows:

"53. (1) If, at any elementary school under private management and in receipt of aid under section 42, the children are required to be present during religious instruction based on the distinctive doctrines or creed of any particular religion, sect or denomination, and not less than ten guardians of children attending such school make application in writing to the district educational council for the provision of elementary education, in such a manner as to obviate their compulsory presence during religious instruction, the district educational council, on being satisfied that the requisite provision does not already exist in some other neighboring elementary school, shall require the manager of the school to enter into an agreement for the exemption from presence during religious instruction of all children whose guardians make a written request therefore."
(2) If, within the time prescribed, the manager fails to enter into such an agreement, the district educational council shall arrange with the local authority concerned for the establishment of an elementary school within one mile or such other distance, as may have been notified under the explanation to sub-section (2) of section 45, from the residence of every child in respect of whom alternative educational facilities are requested.

(3) Every agreement made under sub-section (1), shall be for a stated period, on the expiry of which it shall, at the option of the manager, be determined or renewed for a further period, on such terms as may be arranged.

(4) If the agreement is determined under sub-section (3), the district educational council shall make arrangements as aforesaid for the establishment of a new elementary school.

"54. If an elementary school, the manager of which refuses to enter into an agreement under section 53, or exercises his option of determining such an agreement, continues to comply with the conditions on which recognition has been granted under section 41, it shall nevertheless be eligible for such grants-in-aid as may be admissible under section 42."

The question of a more general Conscience Clause has been raised in the Madras Legislative Council and also in the Senate of Madras University. In each case the proposal was decisively rejected.

The Missionary Educational Council of South India has expressed itself as being in entire sympathy with the policy regarding single school areas embodied in the Elementary Education Act.

Ceylon. Section 15 of the Education Ordinance, for Ceylon, reads as follows:

"It shall not be required as a condition of any child being admitted into or continuing in an assisted school, that he shall attend or abstain from attending any Sunday school or any place of religious worship, or that he shall attend any religious observance or any instruction in religious subjects in the school or elsewhere, from which observance or instruction he may be withdrawn by his parent or guardian, or that he shall attend the school on any day exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the parent belongs."

Then follows a clause providing that the time of any religious observance or instruction in assisted schools shall be either at the beginning or end of the day, that attendance at such is strictly voluntary.

The foregoing account, if carefully studied, reveals certain facts of great importance. In the first place the whole discussion of the introduction of any kind of optional principle into mission schools has taken on a new phase with the actual introduction of Conscience Clauses in certain provinces and the evidence of the practical effect of these Clauses. It is a notable fact that the discussion of the subject in Christian circles in India now is much more concerned with the practical effects of a Conscience Clause, and much less with the theoretical objections to or arguments for a Conscience Clause, than was formerly the case; nor is such an attitude to be condemned, for experience sometimes reveals realities which are not clear to speculative discussion before the event.

One thing has become abundantly plain. There are very few people indeed in India who send their boys to mission schools and colleges and who at the same time desire to withdraw them on conscientious grounds from the teaching of the
Christian religion. It may fairly be said that experience has proved this, and no single fact is more responsible for the change—I do not think it can be denied that there has been a considerable change—in the missionary attitude towards the subject. The forebodings which were expressed when the matter was first mooted, have now been shown to be groundless. There may be objection to compulsory religious teaching, but experience suggests that to religious teaching in itself there is virtually no objection. I do not think that this discovery is in any way surprising, for it is one of the standing criticisms against the Government schools and colleges that as Government must be neutral in religion the Government schools and colleges are secular and give no place to the religious aspects of life.

The other practical consideration which a study of the Conscience Clauses reveals is that from the point of view of the Christian educators literally everything depends upon the nature of the Clause which is imposed. If, for instance, the Conscience Clause enacts that the principal of a missionary school must show that all the pupils, or the parents of all the pupils, who attend Christian teaching desire such attendance,—if that is to say the onus probandi is thrown on the head of the institution—a situation is created which will quite infallibly lead to a very great diminution in the number of pupils attending Christian teaching. There is a certain human unwillingness, widely distributed among all races, to sign documents, and the average parent or guardian simply cannot be got to sign a statement that he wants his boy to go to the Christian teaching. If, on the other hand, as in the Conscience Clauses now established, the onus of showing that the pupil is to be withdrawn on conscientious grounds is thrown upon him, or his parent or guardian, an entirely different situation is created. The latter kind of Conscience Clause is alone fair and just. A missionary school exists with the purpose of conveying a Christian education, and it is right that any student who desires not to receive specifically Christian instruction while subjecting himself to the general Christian atmosphere of the institution should have to make his case for exemption. As I have shown, such exemption is practically never claimed.

It is, moreover, important to realize that the acceptance of a Conscience Clause under the conditions described above is really a quite different thing from the institution of what may be fairly called a "voluntary" system. If, for instance, a student at St. John's College, Agra, does not claim exemption from the Bible classes at the beginning of the session, he is supposed to attend them. It is possible for a college to do, as
some have done, and to go further than the Conscience Clause requires, so as to institute a truly voluntary system allowing students from day to day to attend the Bible classes or not. Such a plan will undoubtedly result in very numerous abstentions, but I observe that those who have adopted it appear to be satisfied, for they find that the complete absence of any kind of compulsion increases the spiritual receptiveness of the students, besides acting as a tonic to the efforts of the staff.

While, as I have indicated, the Conscience Clause has been accepted by the great majority of missionary schools and colleges in those provinces where it has been enacted, I do not wish to suggest that there is not still strong opposition to such acceptance. Some of the leading missionary educationalists in India are opposed to the acceptance of the Conscience Clause. Nor do I feel that the abstract justice of a Conscience Clause is quite clear. It would, I think, be quite clear, if Government were able, as for instance is the case in England, to provide public places of instruction for the whole population. In India this is not the case, and there is to my mind undoubted force in the contention that the missionary schools and colleges offer a certain type of education to which the element of Christian teaching is essential, and that as Government needs the help of such schools and cannot cover the ground without them, it is right that they should be helped without further condition. At the same time it is to be recognised that, while all missionary and Indian Christian educators are as united as ever they were in the view that the only kind of education in which they are interested is Christian education, there is an increasing feeling that this principle is not in practice infringed by the acceptance of a Conscience Clause, whereby parents and guardians, or students themselves who are majors, may on proof given of conscientious objection be exempted. There is abundant evidence to show that such exemptions will be non-existent where the Christian spirit and influence of the school is strong.

Many of us in India recognise that if the non-Christian public wishes to destroy missionary education, or at least the education of non-Christian in missionary institutions, it can do so, and nothing can prevent it. It is by the goodwill of the Hindu and the Mussulman public that hundreds of thousands of their boys attend Christian schools and are subjected to Christian influences. If, apart altogether from any Conscience Clause, a widespread feeling of antagonism to Christian institutions should arise in India, nothing that missionaries could do could keep the non-Christian pupils in the schools and colleges.
This is fundamental and must be recognised. We have, to my mind, abundant reason for thankfulness that there is so little desire for secular education and so little desire to withdraw boys from Christian teaching, when they are sent to Christian schools.

It is also to be recognised that the only practical possibility of missionary and Christian institutions continuing to educate the enormous numbers of non-Christians which they now do lies in the continued acceptance of Government subsidy. I may perhaps be lacking in faith, but I do not believe that the missionary boards in Great Britain and America will as a matter of permanent policy devote to the education of non-Christian boys and girls the large sums which are now found by Government; neither, supposing they are willing to do so, would the bulk of missionaries agree to so large a proportion of the total available missionary funds being devoted to the education of non-Christians. It appears to me to be self-evident that the dropping of Government subsidy on account of the imposition of a Conscience Clause would, in the case of a great majority of missionary schools and colleges which are largely composed of non-Christian pupils, mean, sooner or later, the closing of those institutions, and that Christian education in India would become predominantly a matter of the education of Christian boys and girls. With Government grants, the education in Christian schools of non-Christian boys and girls costs comparatively little to the missions. But, to repeat what I have already said, it cannot be done without the consent of the non-Christian public.

It would not be proper for one who knows nothing of China's conditions to offer any comments on the problem as it is presented to Christian educators in China, but I may venture to close with two points which our experience in India suggests as important.

In the first place, our experience points to the probability that if the teaching of Christianity is made an elective subject, in the sense that no one will undertake it who does not specifically express his desire to do so, the numbers of those who undertake it will be small; whereas if Christian institutions base themselves on the principle that they are prepared to give a Christian education and no other, that they will try to imbue the whole life and teaching of the school or college with the spirit of Christianity, and that they are prepared to accord exemption to those who conscientiously desire it, the situation may be entirely different.

The second point is that, in spite of all the defects of Government control, with its inevitable officialism and rigidity,
few missionary educators, in my experience, would wish to be free from it, and those who do are rarely the best. Government control means, after all, the maintenance of a certain standard. It is possible, indeed it is probable, that some of our best missionary schools and colleges would do better if they were free from the system. I am equally certain that many would be worse. When all is said and done, the Christian community in India is a part of India, Christian education in India is a part of Indian education, and our future lies in throwing ourselves into the system which prevails in the country and doing the best we can within it, to bear our distinctive witness and to interpret the Spirit of Christ through the magnificent and entirely appropriate instrument of education.
# Bulletins of the
## China Christian Educational Association

### 1924

- **No. 1.** College and University Finance in China  
  By E. H. Criss, B.D.  
  Cost: 10 cents
- **No. 2.** Criteria of a Standard College  
  By N. Gist Gee, M.A.  
  Cost: 10 cents
- **No. 4.** The Contribution of Christian Colleges to the Church  
  By T. T. Lew, Ph.D.  
  Cost: 10 cents

### 1925

- **No. 5.** The Place of Private Schools in a National System of Education  
  By E. W. Wallace, M.A.  
  Cost: 10 cents
- **No. 6.** A School Health Program: The Report of a School Health Conference, Shanghai, December, 1924  
  By R. C. Armstrong, Ph.D., & C. J. L. Bates, D.D.  
  Cost: 10 cents
- **No. 7.** Christian Education in Japan  
  By R. C. Armstrong, Ph.D., & C. J. L. Bates, D.D.  
  Cost: 10 cents
- **No. 9.** Tentative Standards for Christian Middle Schools  
  By H. B. Grathrel, M.A.  
  Cost: 10 cents
- **No. 10.** The New System Curriculum in the Christian Schools  
  By H. B. Grathrel, M.A.  
  Cost: 10 cents
- **No. 11.** Bibliography of Textbooks for the Primary School  
  By Y. F. Tien, B.A.  
  Cost: 10 cents

### 1926

- **No. 12.** The State and Christian Education in India  
  By William Paton, M.A.  
  Cost: 20 cents
- **No. 13.** Bibliography of Religious Education for Schools and Colleges (With annotations)  
  By C. S. Miao, Ph.D.  
  Cost: 20 cents

## Christian Education Monograph

- Education and Chinese Agriculture  
  By Kenyon L. Butterfield, LL.D.  
  Cost: 25 cents

---

**China Christian Educational Association**  
23 Yuen Ming Yuen Road  
Shanghai