

The Military Chaplaincy

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The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod defends and actively supports the Government Institution, The Military Chaplaincy; the Wisconsin Synod rejects and condemns it as anti-Scriptural. If we continue to hold these divergent opinions and then practice accordingly, it certainly is a clear case of a severance of the bond of fraternal fellowship. It is impossible for two to walk together in the bond of faith where one says a matter is Scriptural, while the other emphatically declares it to be the opposite.

This is the situation as it prevails today. We have come to the parting of the way. Our pleas and admonitions to the Missouri Synod against this phase of its activities as a Church body have been persistently ignored, yes, quite definitely, rejected, and so it is evident we are no longer standing on common ground. We are here in these days, therefore, only in the desperate hope that one more such plea and admonition on the basis of Scripture will result in the blessed fruit of a change of mind and heart in Missouri.

Are there any grounds for such hope? It is common knowledge that many in the Synodical Conference have abandoned all hope in this direction. And certainly no one will dare say that they haven't been given ample reason for their suspicion.

Yet there seems to be a faint hope. For one thing, history *does* record the repentance of whole Church bodies. Above all, however this hope is based on the repeated assertion of the Missouri Synod that it has no other desire than to walk in the spirit of Samuel when he said, and subsequently practiced, "Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth," I Sam. 3:9,10.

In the prayerful hope that this spirit actually prevails among us we once again present our reasons for rejecting the institution of the Military Chaplaincy as established and regulated by the government.

We have no new facts or arguments to bring to bear on this subject. Nor are they necessary for a defense of our position. It is contended by some that our position in opposing the Chaplaincy is no longer tenable because the newest regulations for this institution eliminate the unionistic requirements for the chaplain. This, of course, is an admission that, up to the time of these supposed new regulations, our position *was* Scripturally correct, and, therefore, should now be as widely publicized as was the criticism leveled against us that, with callous indifference, we ignored the spiritual welfare of our personnel in the armed services. But are these requirements removed? That is the all-important question. Have the regulations been changed to conform to our confession?

Our objections to the Military Chaplaincy have always been based on the doctrines of State, Church, and Fellowship. A careful study of the latest Manual on this Agency will show that they are as valid and pertinent today as they ever were.

We look at these doctrines.

I Concerning the State, Romans 13: 1-7, gives us a complete picture of origin, authority, responsibility, and, not by any means to be overlooked, limitations or boundaries of activity of the government. The repeated emphasis on divine origin and authority strikes us: V.1, "no power but of God:...ordained of God;" V.2, "resisteth the ordinance of God;" V.4, twice, "the minister of God;" V.6, "God's ministers." This makes the closing admonition of V.7 doubly impressive, "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor." Jesus as a citizen, and all the great men of God in the Bible have given us splendid examples of conduct in honor and obedience to their government: Jacob before Pharaoh; Samuel and David in their relationship to King Saul; Paul as a Roman. Woe to him who despises to obey his divinely appointed government.

By the same token, however, the emphatic, specific assignment of duty, limited to the activity of maintaining order by force, to the extent of using the sword of death against the transgressor, if necessary, strikes us similarly: V.1, "Let every soul be subject;" V.2, "Whosoever therefore resisteth, resisteth the

ordinance of God;" V.4, "minister of God to thee for good beareth not the sword in vain: for he is a minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."

Divine authority, but definitely limited to one single function. Not a hint as to spiritual responsibility or privilege. And wherever this principle is violated Scripture severely rebukes it. Who can ever forget God's judgment upon Saul just because he violated this principle and stubbornly defended his act in the face of all admonition.

On the other hand, when it is observed God approvingly reports it for us. There is, for instance, the ruling of the townclerk at Ephesus against Demetrius and his mob, Acts 19:35-41. Note especially V.40 where he reminds them of the policy of their government not to meddle in spiritual matters. Particularly germane in this connection is the account of the final adjudication of the case of Jews vs. Paul before Caesar himself. All the government authorities participating in the case,—Felix, Portius, Festus, and Agrippa, rule the case out of court on the grounds that this is not the function of government since it concerns spiritual matters. Agrippa makes the flat declaration, Acts 26,32: "This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar."

II The doctrine of the Church is just as clearly defined. For the purpose of this study a brief restatement of a few basic facts will suffice.

As the government, so the Church was established by God; the former by His omnipotence, the latter by His grace, through the Word: 1 Cor. 6:19,20, "Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price;" namely, the price of blood, Acts 20:28, "The Church of God He hath purchased with His own blood;" Eph. 2:10, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus" (See context); and Ps. 119, 105, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

In like manner He preserves the Church. He assures us that He will graciously protect us against the evil will and counsel of the devil, the world, and our flesh. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (The Church); and in spite of all our weaknesses, temptations, and allurements of the world will keep and strengthen us in faith, through His Word: "My Word shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it," Is. 55: 11; "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," John 8:31,32; and "Teaching them (all nations) to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Again, as in the case of government, the Lord has given the Church definite, specific regulations as to its efforts and responsibilities for the maintenance of this institution to His glory. In one sentence He sums it up, Matt. 28:19,20: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, ... Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." On at least two occasions prior to this Jesus had reminded the disciples that *only* the preaching of the Word, nothing more, nothing less, was their responsibility as His disciples and apostles. James and John, "The sons of thunder," Mk. 3,17, desiring the destruction of the Samaritan village, are rebuked and reminded, as His apostles they are here to save people by the preaching of the Word and not to destroy them by the sword. The other, of course, is Jesus' rebuke to Peter wielding his sword.

Thus the conclusion is inevitable that the two institutions of State and Church are forever separate and distinct from each other in their functions. The area of privilege and duty is clearly marked and limited for both. Side by side they are to function in this world, honoring and supporting each other, but never mingling even their borderline activities, and certainly not meddling in one or another's affairs or dictating policy to each other.

Before applying this to the specific institution of the Chaplaincy, a few words about Fellowship. (Other essayists, will no doubt concern themselves with this doctrine at length.)

III Fellowship is the external, public declaration and demonstration of complete unity in faith: Acts 1:13,14, “And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room These all continued with *one accord* in prayer and supplication;” Acts 2:41-44,46, “Then they that gladly received His Word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers... And all that believed were together... And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple,... did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God.”

In such Fellowship we pray, worship, commune, work together as we have done in the Synodical Conference these many years. But where this complete unity in doctrine and practice is evidently not present Joint prayer, worship, and work is sinful Unionism, and therefore an offence, particularly to those who are weak in faith. Consequently we are continually exhorted to avoid any kind of Fellowship that might give the impression of unity when there is no such unity, and thus confuse the souls that are entrusted to our care to their eternal hurt. God could not have said it more succinctly than He did in Romans 16: 17, 18, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple;” and Titus 3:10,11, “A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.” Luke 10:1ff also applies. This is the story of the commissioning of The Seventy. They were sent, not to the heathen, but to fellow Jews. To them they were to testify “as lambs among wolves,” V.3. If their testimony was not received they were to “say, even the very dust of your city... we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.”

Witness for Christ: By all means, everywhere, anywhere, any time. But that means to say with Paul, Acts 20:27, “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God,” and never to give the impression of unity when there is none.

Now the application to the Military Chaplaincy. On the basis of the above doctrines the Wisconsin Synod has three times officially declared itself as unable to support this institution because of its anti-Scriptural origin and regulations. We *cannot* recede from that position today.

The Military Chaplain is definitely accepted and appointed to his post of duty as part of the government military service because he is a clergyman. According to the, pamphlet *The Military Chaplaincy*, A report to the President by the President’s Committee on Religion and Welfare in the Armed Forces, October 1, 1950 (hereafter referred to as Report), page 5, “In 1838, a law was passed providing for post chaplains in many regular Army posts.” This Law has never been rescinded, only expanded, and more clearly defined. On page 6, Report, we are informed, “The act of 1861 provided that these be ‘regularly ordained ministers of some Christian denomination,’ which was changed the next year to read ‘that no person shall be appointed a chaplain in the U. S. Army who is not a regularly ordained minister of some religious denomination and who does not present testimonials of his good standing as such minister.’” Page 11, Report, “The Military Chaplain is first and foremost a clergyman, in every sense of the word.”

The latest Army Field Manual, FM 16-5, The Chaplain, January 1952 (hereafter referred to as Manual), states on page 8, under Professional Functions; “The chaplain is the religious and spiritual leader of the military community,” and on page 9 speaks of him “in his capacity as a clergyman or spiritual confidant.”

As such a clergyman he is endorsed by his denomination, but *actually* commissioned and appointed by the government, Report, page 7 ; Manual, page 35 ; and verified by the last issue of The Lutheran Chaplain, page 1, “We have just received word from the Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, that our quota of chaplains for the period ending June 30, 1954, will be four. We still have places in the Navy to fill.”

The government pays the salary of the chaplain, Report, page 25.

The government terminates the call and between times promotes, demotes, advances and shifts from one field of labor to another, verified again by The Lutheran Chaplain, page 6.

In view of all this, how can we support this institution? This is an intermingling of the functions of State and Church, and if continued will certainly lead to the eventual loss of our unique and blessed constitutional privilege of absolute freedom of worship. Instances of this have already occurred in the government's arbitrary assumption of authority over the religious life of citizens in Federal Housing Projects.

It is often argued that by providing for all religions, even the smallest minority, this charge can no longer be raised against the institution as an objection. Even if this were true, the doctrines of State and Church would still be violated. But this argument is not according to fact, since every denomination is limited to activities as provided for by Law and therefore is actually restricted in the performance of its functions by the usurpation of authority on the part of the government which it does not rightly have. Report, page 27, "Manpower," states: "Proportional representation of denominations and faiths in the chaplaincy is maintained through quotas based on the size of membership."

Furthermore, the Chaplaincy is at times defended on purely sentimental grounds. The government realizes the value of spiritual ministrations to the men and women in its armed services, they say. What, then, could be more appropriate than provisions for such spiritual care? No one will deny the external value of such provision. Neither will anyone deny the actual salvation of some through the preaching of the Gospel by some of the chaplains. But neither can anyone deny the far greater number of lost souls by reason of compromising a Word of God. Anyone who knows the sad story of King Saul, and has any knowledge at all of Church history, should forever be frightened away from such sentimental arguments.

This should also silence the critics who say we are callously indifferent to the spiritual needs of our men and women in service. Real spiritual care is to teach "them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

Furthermore, what denomination has ever been able to provide a personal spiritual ministry to all its constituents? Report, page 4, emphasizes this, "The military authorities cannot possibly provide chaplains of every faith for the conduct of On-post religious services at all military installations."

Our most serious charge against the Military Chaplaincy has always been *Unionism*. Every official resolution by us on this subject has made this the basic fault of the institution. We would therefore be happy, indeed, if the latest Manual and recent directives had eliminated this soul destroying error. Sorry to say, it has not been removed. The demands on the chaplain for unionistic practice are as insistent as ever.

Undoubtedly the government is aware of the possibility of being charged with religious Unionism in its religious program. Consequently it makes concerted efforts to refute the charge. The Report, top of page 12, declares: "No chaplain is ever expected to do anything contrary to his faith." The Manual in enumerating the "Responsibilities" of the chaplain, page 3, says in clear, unmistakable language, point 7: "Each chaplain conducts such services and rites as his denomination requires;" point 9; "No chaplain is required to officiate jointly in a religious service with a chaplain or civilian clergyman of another denomination."

Knowing a Unionist for what he is and says, we ask, has he ever spoken a different language than this? Does he not always assure him who is hesitant in joining him in spiritual matters that he has no intention of ever placing him in a position of denying his faith and confessional principles? But isn't it also true that, in the subsequent development of the unionistic program, what he actually meant was said in the light of his own personal conception of faith and confession; rather than on that of the dissenter? This is invariably the case.

Also in the instance of the Military Chaplaincy. The statement of complete confessional privilege quoted above from Report, is the last sentence of a paragraph reading thus: "Chaplains are *required* to provide religious services for men of *all faiths*... Have an opportunity to serve all men and demonstrate the *essential unity* of *all races, faiths, and groups*. At all times, Protestant chaplains are expected to conduct a general Protestant service in addition to the service of their particular denomination." At the bottom of page 12 of Report we see most clearly what the Unionist-government means by confessionalism: "Being the servant of God for all, the chaplain cannot cultivate a narrow sectarian spirit."

Nor are such demands upon the chaplain made any less stringent by the 1952 Manual. The assertions for a strict adherence to confessional principles quoted above, are most effectively vitiated by a prior directive in point 4, page 2: "The chaplain is morally obligated to provide for the religious needs of the entire command;"

and page 4, “Sunday or Sabbath Services,” a. “A chaplain belonging to a denomination classified as Protestant provides a worship service which is acceptable and meaningful to the maximum number of Protestant personnel in the command;” and b. “In situations where personnel do not have the opportunity to attend a service of their choice, the chaplain conducts or arranges for a religious service which affords an opportunity for worship to all persons who wish to avail themselves of it.”

More such unionistic demands can be quoted from the Manual. The whole book is permeated with this unionistic spirit. Can anyone imagine the Apostle Paul becoming involved in such a web of mere sentimental, external form of godliness? See how he rebuked Peter for this very sin, Gal. 2:11ff. If Paul couldn’t, how can we?

The sad thing about Unionism is that its poison, unless eradicated immediately and completely, soon permeates the whole body, and soon manifests itself openly in varying degrees and commitments. A case in point is:

Articles of agreement between the Armed Services Commission, the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod and the Bureau of Service to Military Personnel of the National Lutheran Council.

Here we have all the ingredients of Unionism. There is the usual attempt to safeguard confessional principles: point 1, last phrase, “and is drawn in full recognition of the positions, rights, doctrinal expressions of each of the parties to the agreement;” point 4, “In this service, all those cooperating shall respect the confessional position of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod and/or the National Lutheran Council churches;” point 5, IRAs far as possible in each local situation...;” and point 6, “the normal procedure shall be that members of each group shall attend...”

The Unionist wholeheartedly agrees to all this, in this instance the National Lutheran Council whose guilt in this respect certainly no one among us will deny. Every Unionist believes in some kind of confessional principle. He knows very well, if he didn’t agree to such statements, no one who has any desire to safeguard at least a measure of confessional principle would have anything to do with him. But one thing the Unionist will never permit is the insistence for a confessional principle in any agreement he makes that will condemn his personal, emotional confessional principle predicated on the theory that, if necessary in times of stress and emergency, certain Words of God can be ignored, or at least interpreted in the light of the present situation.

This Communion Agreement is very clear in this respect. Already in those supposed safeguards quoted above this is evident. Point 1 is a frank admission of difference in doctrine and practice in the last phrase of the lengthy sentence. But even here we note the attempt to minimize the seriousness of this fact, reducing it to something quite unimportant, and thereby paving the way to effect the agreement they so earnestly desire. If not, why then precede this admission with the distressing picture in the first part of the sentence, “great emergency,” “severe testing,” “perilous times?” Nor could point 2, “The parties agree to a *cooperative* conduct of service;” point 3, “shall be concerned principally with a *spiritual* ministry;” point 4, “all those cooperating,” follow immediately if all the parties involved considered the difference in doctrine and practice of any great importance. How can anyone who still believes Matt. 5:18, “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled,” conduct a cooperative spiritual ministry with one who does not believe this?

The inevitable fatal result of all this is the final cooperative full agreement in points 7-11, which actually remove all the carefully worded supposed safeguards of the previous points.

Every faithful Gospel minister prays for the gift of an evangelical spirit towards sinners whom he must minister to. In view of the Malefactor, those who didn’t come into the vineyard until the 11th hour, and other examples, he will find numerous exceptional cases and will minister to them accordingly. But who of us will go around making agreements of cooperative practice with them? When we deal with them we dominate with our principles, they accept our services, – except they are hypocrites, and for that we are not responsible – but never do we for a moment leave them with the idea of agreement and cooperating with them. But this did not happen here. Not the faithful confessor, but the Unionist dominated and won the victory. Note the Unionist rejoicing,

Dr. Rees Edgar Tullos of Springfield, Ohio, one of the authors: “We wanted one idea in there – and it is there. That is that no one seeking to partake of the Lord’s Supper shall be denied it because of his synodical connections.”

As late as 1942 Missouri and Wisconsin walked together in the declaration that an agreement such as the above is Unionism. At Columbus, Ohio, Dr. Behnken asked in reference to Dr. Ryden’s remark about joint Communion “if cooperation in externals implied such joint Communion services,” and added, “are we expected to sacrifice principles in an emergency?” *Quartalschrift*, October 1942.

May the Lord grant our Missouri brethren the light to see the error into which they have fallen, to repent, and walk with us again in the former paths.