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Adam's Columns

U.S. Navy: Stop praying in Jesus' name!

Sunday, January 01, 2006

I'm curious to see whether you can correctly answer a multiple choice question.

Why would the U.S. Navy fire a chaplain, evict him and his family from military housing, leaving him with no retirement after 14 years of glowing fitness reports?

A. He had an extra-marital affair with a female officer.

B. He posed nude in Playgirl Magazine.

C. He disobeyed direct orders to go to Iraq because of his pacifist convictions.

D. He prayed in the name of Jesus, quoted John 3:3 and John 3:36 during an optional memorial service in The Naval base chapel, declined to support mandatory attendance quotas at a pro-homosexual church and requested Kosher meals to feed a hungry Orthodox Jewish sailor who later lost 17 pounds.

Sadly, the correct answer is letter D!

Welcome to the politically correct insanity of today's military.

Despite the fact that Commander-in-Chief George W. Bush is an evangelical Christian, many senior chaplains in America's military are openly hostile to Jesus and those who follow Him.

Unbelievably, Admirals from the Pentagon have stripped 37-year-old Naval Chaplain Gordon Klingenschmitt of his uniform and forbid him to pray in the name of Jesus in public unless he is wearing civilian clothes.

This is a clear violation of Title 10 U.S. Code Section 6031 which states, "An officer in the Chaplain Corps may conduct public worship according to the manner and forms of the church of which he is a member." That's been the law since 1860.

On December 20th, Chaplain Klingenschmitt, a minister with the Evangelical Episcopal Church, appeared at a press conference in front of the White House asking President Bush to issue an immediate Executive Order allowing for military chaplains to pray according to their individual faith traditions.

In fact, 75 Congressmen, 4 Senators, 65 other chaplains and 160,000 concerned Christian Americans urged the President to remove the gag from military chaplains, protecting their First Amendment right to pray however their faith and conscience dictate.

Back in 1991, even our liberal leaning Supreme Court concluded in the Lee vs. Weisman case that "the government may not establish an official or civic religion as a means of avoiding the establishment of a religion with more specific creeds."

Chaplain Klingenschmitt, who served aboard the USS Anzio, concludes his prayers at public services and ceremonial events with the phrase "...we pray to you, Almighty God, and I pray in Jesus' name,

Amen," as a way to include diverse faiths yet remain true to his Christian belief.

I'm reminded of the explosive growth in the days of the early church and the response by the politically correct elite of that day.

The sheepish disciples had become bold witnesses for Jesus after they had been absolutely transformed by the multiple appearances of the resurrected Christ following His crucifixion, death and burial.

As a result, people were converting to Christianity by the thousands. Thus, the Pharisees recognized their political need to "stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name." (Acts 4:17)

The name of Jesus is just as powerful and dangerous today as it was back then.

In 1998 the Chief of Navy Chaplains signed a memo telling all Naval chaplains that if they must pray "in Jesus' name" that they "ought not to participate in the secular event as the prayer giver."

That nonsensical policy has since been upheld by the current Chief of Navy Chaplains Rear Admiral Lou Iasiello, a Catholic priest, who stated on August 23, 2005 that "any chaplain's insistence continued insistence on ending public prayers 'in Jesus' name' in all situations, without using discretion or regards to the venue or audience, could reasonably tend to denigrate those with different forms of faith."

These interim guidelines on religious expression released in August allow only a "brief nonsectarian prayer" during official ceremonies and events. The guidelines were developed in the wake of complaints from non-Christians at the Air Force Academy who believed Christians, both cadets and staff, were being too heavy-handed about their faith on campus.

I love Chaplain Klingenschmitt's response. He said, "Please understand. I pray 'in Jesus' name' not to offend those who choose to be easily offended, but because I love God, and simply want to obey Christ's teachings on how I must pray, as law allows, and my conscience dictates."

In my view, Klingenschmitt is a modern day Daniel. And his example should inspire all who name Jesus as Savior.

Until three years ago, he left the Air Force, where had been a missile officer for 11 years, joining the Navy as chaplain at which point he not only took a demotion, but a pay cut to serve God and country.

This man of God echoes the sentiment articulated by Peter and John from the pages of the New Testament who boldly declared: "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey [man] rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20)

Jesus Himself said in John 16:23, "Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you." And in John 14:6, Jesus remarked, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

On December 20, 2005, I interviewed Rev. Rob Schenck -- an evangelical minister and president of the National Clergy Council from Washington, D.C. -- on my KSLR afternoon talk show "Take A Stand."

He stated that "This new policy of the military is an outrage. We now have well-documented proof of this blatant violation of First Amendment guarantees. It is an egregious insult to the good men and women of every religious persuasion who serve in the chaplain corps."

In addition, Rev. Patrick Mahoney, a Presbyterian minister and director of the Christian Defense Coalition, who appeared at the press conference in front of the White House, said, "Sadly, we are witnessing a growing hostility toward expressions of faith in the public square. It is important the public be reminded that the First Amendment promises freedom 'of' religion not freedom 'from' religion. We call upon President Bush to issue this executive order allowing each military chaplain to pray according to their respective faith tradition, to ensure that religious freedom and the First Amendment are honored and protected.

"By forbidding Rev. Klingenschmitt to pray in the Name of Jesus, the government is crushing the First Amendment and trampling on religious liberty. It should never be the role of government to dictate to Americans or clergy on how they are to pray."

No one less than George Washington would shout a hearty "Amen!"

After all, our first President was the one who established the tradition of chaplains in the U.S. military, dating back to 1756 when he sought a minister for his regiment.

According to an August 30, 2005 Washington Post story, "In the early days of the republic,

commanders simply chose a chaplain who shared their beliefs. But with the expansion of the military in World War II, the armed service set quotas for chaplains of various faiths, attempting to match the proportion of each denomination in the general population.”

Since then, two developments are relevant. First, the strict numerical quotas for a religious variety of military chaplains were abandoned 20 years ago. And second, the number of evangelical chaplains has increased while the number of sideline Protestant ministers and Catholic priests has declined, reflecting America’s broader spiritual trends.

But, you must understand, that the growing hostility to Jesus in our military is not limited to how evangelical Christian chaplains conclude their prayers.

Chaplain Klingenschmitt was actually reprimanded for a Christ-centered sermon at the memorial service of a sailor who died in a motorcycle accident. The sailor, as a result of Klingenschmitt’s prior evangelistic outreach, professed “a born-again experience before he died.” In the sermon, the chaplain claimed with absolute certainty that the sailor was in heaven and, according to John 3:36, those who do not accept Jesus will go to hell.

Unbelievably, this past March, Klingenschmitt’s commander, after hearing the message which included references to Jesus as the only way to salvation, told the chaplain that memorial sermons should honor the faith of the attending audience, not the faith of the deceased!

The commander actually recommended against extending Klingenschmitt’s tour in the Navy, noting that he has “demonstrated recurring confusion concerning a chaplain’s role within a military organization.”

This Christian warrior told the Washington Post, “My sermon was in a base chapel, it was optional attendance, and it was by invitation. If we can’t quote certain Scriptures in the base chapel when people are invited to church, where can we quote them?”

Tragically, the Naval Chaplain School has endorsed Harvard Seminary’s Unitarian Universalist theology of Pluralism as the only approved message for all military ministry. Senior chaplains have abused their rank to enforce that non-Christian denomination’s views, advising Commanding Officers to censor the preaching of junior chaplains to remove Jesus from the message.

Contrary to the claims of Christ, religious pluralism posits that all religions are essentially the same and that all paths lead to heaven.

To his credit, Klingenschmitt ignored the unbiblical restriction on his preaching. He spoke the truth of John 3:3 where Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” and John 3:36 which says, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”

Because John 3:3 and 3:36 are not pluralistic Scriptures, Klingenschmitt was summarily reprimanded and punished.

During mandatory counseling he was told to attend after preaching that sermon, Captain Steve Gragg told Klingenschmitt, “You’re not supposed to preach John 3:36 when unbelievers are present because you might offend them.”

What foolishness!

Chaplain Klingenschmitt defended his decision to include the full counsel of Scripture in memorial services by explaining, “Public law allows, and my civilian endorsing bishop requires, that I preach all the scriptures in church, not just the ones unbelievers like to hear. I don’t wear the ‘P’ of Pluralism on my collar; I wear the cross of Jesus Christ. Totalitarian Pluralism is a false, government-sanitized religion. It’s unconstitutional for the state to enforce the Unitarian Universalist’s views upon my church, to dictate how I pray or preach, even in the military. They dishonored the faith of the deceased, they violated the Constitution and they broke public law.”

Not surprisingly, Americans United for Separation of Church and State is urging that the final regulations go further than the interim guidelines, suggesting that open evangelism by chaplains be expressly forbidden!

Congressman Trent Franks, a Republican from Arizona, was quoted on The 700 Club as saying, “I truly believe that the President of the United States, if he truly understood the realities that are present in this circumstance, would respond in an effective and decisive manner.”

Plus, Congressman Walter Jones, a Republican from North Carolina, who has received hundreds of similar complaints, said, the President “oversees the military as Commander-in-Chief, and he can say to the Department of Defense, ‘I want the chaplains in this military to have the right to pray as they see fit, based on their religion.’”

Even liberal Democratic Senator Hillary Clinton has expressed concern in a letter to the Navy dated May 20, 2005.

In their on-line petition drive signed by 160,000 concerned citizens, the American Center for Law and Justice proclaims that censoring "Christian chaplains is a disservice to the thousands of Christian soldiers in the military who look to their chaplains for comfort, inspiration, and support ... just as military soldiers of other faiths look to their chaplains."

At this writing, 2,178 American soldiers have paid the ultimate price through "Operation Iraqi Freedom." While our remaining soldiers serve overseas in harm's way, shouldn't they have the right to receive Biblical counsel from the chaplains of their faith?

The \$64,000 question remains. What is President Bush waiting for?

TAKE A STAND ACTION STEPS:

1. Ask President Bush to issue an Executive Order protecting the constitutional right of military chaplains and other members of the military to pray according to their faith. Christian chaplains should be able to pray in the name of Jesus. Call the White House at 202.456.1414 and e-mail president@whitehouse.gov.

2. Call Senator John Cornyn at 202.224.2934 and locally at 210.224.7485 and Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison at 202.224.5922 and locally at 210.340.2885 and urge them to ask President Bush to issue an Executive Order protecting the constitutional right of military chaplains and other members of the military to pray according to their faith. Christian chaplains should be able to pray in the name of Jesus.

3. E-mail Senator Cornyn at cornyn.senate.gov/contact/index.html and e-mail Senator Hutchison at hutchison.senate.gov/e-mail.htm

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Adam McManus hosts a weekday afternoon radio show called "Take A Stand" on AM 630, KSLR in San Antonio, Texas from 3-6 p.m. If you'd like him to speak to your group or you'd like to react to this column, call Adam at (210) 344-8481 ext 132 or e-mail adam@takeastand.net. Join 5,300 San Antonions and sign up for his weekday e-mail alert about upcoming guests, critical articles and action steps to make a difference Go to: www.TakeAStand.net and listen live at www.kslr.com

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