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6221 – Sermon on The Government Plan for Seizure of the Churches

Guest: Rep. Arthur Winstead (D-MS) and Rev. Robert Ingram (Rector, St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Houston, TX)

Morphew: Introduction...two outstanding patriots and both personal friends...to Ingram...recently you gave a sermon entitled, "The Government Plan for Seizure of the Churches," it has attracted wide attention across the nation and reprinted in excess of 100,000 copies...could you tell us a little about the thesis you make in this sermon?

Ingram: The sermon deals with what has happened in the civil defense program where there is an office of the director of religious affairs and that officer has outlined his program in a magazine article in *The Living Church*, a magazine for Episcopalians, and there he sets forth a plan of action which I interpret as amounting to nothing less than a government takeover of complete control of all the churches in an emergency.

Morphew: Well, we've all grown up and been taught to believe that our government was founded on the principle of separation of church and state and that this is one historic principle that's being maintained down until the present time, do you mean that it is in danger today?

Ingram: I think that it is very much in danger and I think partly because the general interpretation of the law, of the principle, has been that the church and God should be kept out of politics, whereas the constitutional amendment and the real principle is that the government should be kept out of the churches and here we have a complete, frank program which provides for the government to establish control over all of the clergy through requiring them to register. If they do not register they will not be permitted to perform their ministry in a disaster area in time of emergency.

Morphew: And this has been set up by the Office of Civil Defense?

Ingram: Yes, sir.

Morphew: And how does this plan work?

Ingram: Well, the plan is outlined by the man who was director, I say he *was* director because I've been advised indirectly that the office is being reorganized, is that all of the clergy are to register with the Office of Religious Affairs, Office of Civil Defense. When an emergency is declared, then nobody except, no minister except those who are registered, will be permitted to function in a disaster area. The Office of Religious Affairs has also stated that it is to be expected that the state will require the church buildings for its use. And furthermore, the officer has said that if Christian people do not approve of this program that clearly they are not taking advantage of an opportunity to worship God properly.

Morphew: Is the officer who announced this program himself a minister?

Ingram: Yes, sir, he is a Lutheran minister, the Reverend Fred Kern.

Morphew: To Winstead...I know this development has been shocking to most of us, you are a member of the Armed Services Committee which deals with the civil defense setup, had you heard anything about this before Rev. Ingram's sermon brought it to your attention?

Winstead: No, I'll have to be honest with you, Dick. I heard so much about civilian defense for the last few years and so much talk, so many plans, and so few people seem to know very much about what it's all about. I have not had an opportunity to go into this and I'm delighted to have the privilege to hear Dr. Ingram talk. I want the literature to be able to furnish me, as soon as we have completed with the Herbert subcommittee on this realignment of the National Guard and Reserve subject. I understand we'll have representatives before our full committee, not necessarily on the plan of organization but dealing with civilian defense. Did I understand you to say that it is your understanding they plan to organize this to such an extent that ministers would have to register with and become a part of the official body of civilian defense before they would permit them to participate in the relief of disaster in some given area?

Ingram: Yes, sir, that's what I said. Here is, actually, the statement as printed by Dr. Kern in this Living Church: he says, and I'm reading here, "If clergymen want to preserve their freedom of religion and their freedom to minister to the dying and distressed, it will be necessary for them to be registered with the Civil Defense organization."

Winstead: In other words, no church activity could participate in the disaster, else they, if I understand you correctly, if this should be put into force, they could prohibit the activity of the religious groups in a given community to relief, aid, and assistance in time of emergency.

Ingram: That is correct, and I heard Dr. Kern state before the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church that if a minister who was not registered insisted upon being admitted into an area, even though he were wearing clerical clothing or were personally recognized, that he would find a shotgun in his belly.

Morphew: To Ingram...is it not true that civil defense in addition to its function in time of enemy attack also is called into being at the time of some natural disaster...you were telling me about an incident that seemed to bear this out in the Houston area during the recent hurricane?

Ingram: Yes. Last fall, at the time of Hurricane Carla, the civil defense mechanism went into operation. Just a few weeks ago when I was in New Orleans and talked about this matter to a group of people there, a Salvation Army officer stood up and reported that he had gone over to Houston at the time of Hurricane Carla and had been denied admission into the area because he was not registered. He finally obtained admission after several long distance telephone calls, but even then, only on the proposition, or on the basis that the Salvation Army as a whole was registered.

Morphew: So actually this plan is already in effect?

Ingram: It would seem so, yes.

Winstead: Well, Dr. Ingram, naturally you know that our church people and most people whether they are devoted to religious, Christian people or not, most any self-respecting man has a lot of respect for Christian people and the influence they have and what they can do in emergencies or whatnot, but certainly they have more or less functioned on their own in the past, have they not?

Ingram: Well, not only have we functioned on our own but at least independently of government authority, but it seems to me that one of the, or perhaps the fundamental basis of all Christian work is that it is done in the name of Christ, not in the name of the law.

Winstead: It seems to me that if we had a national agency, call it Civil Defense, whatever you want to call it, and force every Christian leader to become a member of that organization to participate, that it's another good opening wedge of centralizing the propaganda that we might want to send to certain people along our political lines or other lines, if you're going to organize any kind of organization to that extent. I appreciate an opportunity to go into this because we certainly want to give it a look-over before such an organization could be created without people actually knowing what's happening.

Ingram: Well, I certainly appreciate your interest, Congressman, because I feel the matter is extremely important.

Morphew: To Winstead...is this a symptom of how big our government has become, that a plan so potentially dangerous or fraught with ill effect on the American public can actually put in operation without the people being aware that it's being done?

Winstead: Dick, I feel that year after year and for the last several years that we have seen this so-called centralized power of government grow in every walk of our life, and I'd say the last place we wanted to get the upper hand is in the Christian acts of the life of the people. This sounds to me that, if such an organization should go into effect, that it would be the opening way for a national organization that could be used with terrific political power and pressure, and I think certainly that every day we see our best Americans sometimes misled with the type of propaganda that's being shot on your television programs, your radio programs, your news commentators. We have business talk so much about so many...reporters this day and time that I want to ask business why do they pay for so many of these if they don't like so much of it...I think we are centralizing everything in Washington to such an extent that the average American, not all of course, but we're more or less taking what somebody else tells us, true organized effort, brainwashing our people on many subjects today, and I certainly want this to have a look-over before it goes into effect.

Morphew: To Ingram...in looking over your sermon, I noticed that you had mention of one time when this was tried before to a lesser degree and this was during the War Between the States...could you tell us about that?

Ingram: Yes, I just chose one particular incident for illustration. It has happened many times, there has been attempted many times. And perhaps we have been more fortunate in the United States than in any part of the Christian world in escaping it, but at that time, there was a Mr. McFeeders (sp?) in Missouri, a Presbyterian minister, who evidenced that he was not sympathetic to the northern cause and then went so far as to baptize an infant with the name of a southern general, so the provost marshal in that area removed him from his pulpit. Word came to President Lincoln who in turn remanded the order of the provost marshal and made a statement to the effect that the government had no business interfering in church affairs in that manner and then later on when the congregation wanted to remove Mr. McFeeders itself, an appeal was made to Mr. Lincoln to keep him and he refused to intervene in that case.

Morphew: Let's hope the same effect can be had this time.

Winstead: May I ask one other question? Did I understand you that Protestants, Catholics, and many religious leaders are also with you in opposing this type of movement at the present time?

Ingram: Yes, I am happy to say that I have been contacted from all over the country by clergymen of all denominations, many by long-distance telephone, mostly for just a confirmation of what they found difficult to believe or so, and then for permission to go ahead and use such information as I had given.