



CATHOLIC LEAGUE

*For Religious
and
Civil Rights*

August 5, 2020

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The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Esper:

As president of the largest Catholic civil rights organization in the United States, and as a U.S. Air Force veteran of the Vietnam era, I am deeply troubled by the Army's appeasement of the anti-Christian activist Mikey Weinstein and his Military Religious Freedom Foundation. I ask that you address concerns Senator Ted Cruz raised in his recent letter to you.

Weinstein and his minions target the religious freedoms of those serving in our Armed Forces, and I have long documented these numerous assaults. I hope you will assist in ensuring our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines will not have their religious liberties infringed by a radical trying to force the secularization of our nation's military.

Over the years, Weinstein has made outrageous claims that shock all people of faith. In 2006, he said Christian Evangelicals in the Department of Defense posed "a national security threat every bit as bad as al-Qaida." In 2007, he stated, "We are facing an absolute fundamentalist Christianization—a Talibanization—of the U.S. Marine Corps, Army, Navy, and Air Force." In 2010, complaining about an invitation to Franklin Graham to speak at the Pentagon for the National Day of Prayer, Weinstein lamented that a "contagion of unconstitutionality by people that want to kill us, or have their version of Jesus kill us, if we don't accept their Biblical worldview" had infected the military.

Today, Weinstein and his henchmen are at it again. At Fort Drum, New York, chaplains posted a series of videos on social media inviting others to pray. Weinstein complained that these videos amounted to "illicit proselytizing" and demanded they be removed "to ensure church-state separation." The Army yielded, and the posts were removed. At Camp Humphreys, South Korea, an Army

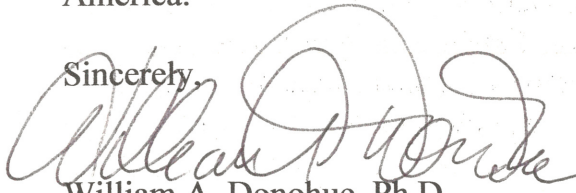
chaplain recommended a Christian themed book by email to fellow Christian chaplains. Weinstein demanded that the chaplain be disciplined, and the Army subsequently investigated the chaplain's actions. At USAG Stuttgart, Germany, a chaplain hosted a "Sunday Christian Porch Preaching" on the balcony of his apartment. After Weinstein complained, the command at USAG Stuttgart halted the services.

Weinstein maintains that his objections are rooted in his fidelity to the establishment provision of the First Amendment. He is wrong. Madison wrote the First Amendment, and he made it clear that the establishment provision prohibits the federal government from creating a national church and bars favoring one religion over another. Importantly, it was written to complement, not contradict, the free expression of religion provision of the First Amendment. What Weinstein is trying to do is negate both the religious liberty *and* the free speech rights of our armed forces personnel.

Clearly, the ability of these soldiers to freely practice their religious beliefs and express themselves were violated as a result of Mikey Weinstein. If our Armed Forces lack the moral courage to oppose Weinstein's threat to religious liberties, how can we expect them to defend our other freedoms from far greater foes?

Therefore, I ask for your assistance in ensuring radicals like Weinstein cannot limit the religious freedoms of our military personnel. As a combat veteran yourself and someone highly regarded for your dedication to our men and women in uniform, I hope you will resist these pernicious efforts to deny religion to our service members who rely on faith to complete their mission of defending America.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "William A. Donohue", written over a horizontal line.

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.
President

CC: Senator Ted Cruz