

To His Excellence  
Abraham Lincoln  
President of the United States

Sir

When the forces of the United States, arrived at this place, they found, as they must have expected to find, many persons, who whether mistakenly or not, had been conscientious adherents of the Confederacy – but who had made up their minds to submit to the power of the U.S. & who therefore remained. Their remaining indicated nothing more than submission. It did not indicate change of opinion. Nor do I suppose that the U.S. proposes to itself to force change of opinion. – All that it can accomplish by arms is submission.

Among those thus remaining, were the pastor of St. James Prot. Epis. Church and more than 80 families of the congregation. In anticipation of the Federal occupation of their city, Authority had been obtained from the Bishop, to omit the prayer for the Confederate Authorities. They were also at liberty, under the Bishops sanction, to modify the prayer so that it should be for “those in rightful authority” or “Those in civil authority”. This was all the Bishop or clergy of the Diocese had the right to do. In accordance with this, the Rector proposed to open the church, the

- 2 next Sunday & say prayer with the modifications referred to – or omitting the morning prayer altogether & commencing with the Litany, or the auto communion. The liberty to do this, was at first granted by the Provost. But before the hour of service, it was revoked & the key of the church demanded. Since then, the church has been closed by military authority, till Friday April 7<sup>th</sup>, when it was seized for a hospital – entered by a crowd of soldiers & its internal arrangements removed. At the time of doing this there were - & there still are – upon the same street & within three blocks 2 other unfinished & unoccupied churches. The temple of our fathers, where the present generation has been baptized, married, & received to the communion & whence the dead, for twenty five years, have been buried – the principal church of the Diocese, has with every circumstance of irreverence, been torn to pieces with pickaxes & hammers, and as we think, needlessly. As the House of Most High God, it was scarcely a suitable object off political or military vengeance. As the sanctuary, around which so many associations of the people clustered, it's (sic) desecration & destruction were scarcely consistent with the spirit of conciliation, or paternal government. Yet all this has been done.

But this is not all. As pastor of that

3 congregation, I remained with my flock, hoping by observing a conscientious neutrality, to be permitted to supply their Spiritual wants. When the church was closed by order of the Provost Marshall, I still hoped to be permitted quietly to labor among them – to baptize them, to administer the communion from house to house, to pray at the bed side of the dying & to bury them when dead. I have abstained from the exercise of political influence, - I have in many instances declined giving political advice when consulted. I have referred those consulting me to their own consciences & while avoiding all hypocritical concealment of my own opinions, have endeavored to give no handle against myself.

Yet now I am notified to have leave the lines; & my flock is about to be subjected to the rigors of an interdict – cut off, essentially, from all religious privileges; only because my mental convictions – unaccompanied by any overt acts alleged against me, are on the side of the Confederacy.

This too seems adapted to produce an effect the very opposite to that of conciliation. – Nor does it seem to me consistent with the magnanimity of a great nation, feeling itself upon the eve of crushing its enemies, to treat thus non combattants (sic), who are rendering a practical submission to their conquerors & whose sole remaining fault is a deference of opinion.

4 The redress I solicit at your hands is two fold. I ask:  
1<sup>st</sup> that that House of God under my care, be restored, & in the condition in which it was when taken – with permission to resume the public services therein, upon the condition of omitting the prayer for the President of the Confederate states – but without requiring the insertion of that for the President of the United States; - or upon that of praying for “those In civil authority” - or “those in rightful authority.”

2 That as the ambassador of Christ and a non-combattant (sic), I may be permitted to remain among my people & minister to them in Spiritual things, upon the condition that in doing so, I observe a conscientious neutrality as to political matters.

As to the first of these – I suppose that the military authorities here, may feel a delicacy in seeming to yield any thing pertaining to the respect they feel to be due to yourself - & therefore I have thought that the appeal might be made with greater propriety to your Excellency in person.

If what I ask does not commend itself to You upon its face, without further consideration; Permit me to urge:

1<sup>st</sup> that to require of us the prayer in question, (however appropriate it may be in itself – and we mean no dis-respect (sic) to you Sir in saying this) it to im-

5 pose an insincere prayer; which would therefore be insulting to our common Maker

2 That to require it, is an infringement of the great constitutional principle of Religious Freedom.

What is ~~required~~ proposed, is not, to restrain the Church from uttering prayers hostile to the Gov't, but to require the Church to offer prayers specifically in its favor.

The Church and the State, are two co-ordinate but distinct and independent branches of Government. each should acknowledge and respect the other neither should interfere aggressively with the other. In the event of conflict however, God must be obeyed rather than men. But the church should not dictate to the State, in matters of state policy, nor interfere with the action of the State, except in so far as the State may assail the Church, or intrude upon questions of Religion or Morality belonging to the province of the Church.

The State should not dictate to the Church in matters of Church polity (sic), or Religion, nor interfere with the action of the Church, except in so far as the Church may assail the State, or intrude upon political or secular questions belonging to the State.

The State however is not bound to approve all that the Church may do in religious matters.

Nor is the Church bound to approve all that the State may do in secular matters.

The Church was not bound to approve the action

6 of the State in the matter of Secession. Nor by parity of reasoning – is the Church now bound to approve what may be done in the State, in the matter of re-construction.

While therefore each may resist aggressions by the other, upon its (sic) own domain, neither can dictate to the other, its (sic) action upon that others' domain.

The State may forbid the hostile prayers, but cannot dictate favorable ones. The Church may resist laws assailing Religion, but cannot dictate laws for its (sic) support or enforcement.

To admit any further interference would be to establish – pro tanto – a union of Church and State. To require any particular church to pray for the State, - especially when the question: What is the State? is being submitted to the arbitrament (sic) of War – is to make it – pro tanto – a State Church. And then the State becomes responsible for the pecuniary support of the Church. If the Congregation are not free as to their prayers, then it cannot be expected of them to support the Church pecuniarily (sic), except as citizens, by taxation.

Even therefore, though the Church sympathize with

the State, she cannot, without surrendering the Constitutional principle of Religious Liberty, accept the dictation by the State of her prayers. Therefore were it the Confederacy in place of the United States, requiring the prayer in question, the Church in the Confederacy, could not admit the dictation without surrendering

- 7 Liberty of Religion and of the Church. Let me add, that if the Confederate Government had required this of me, without Sanction of the Church, I would have been bound to decline compliance equally as now.

But even if there were no dictation, - Even if the proposed prayer were such as I and my congregation could offer sincerely, - Even if I were anxious to offer it yet.

4<sup>th</sup> I could not introduce it, without the action of the Church in General Council.

The Protestant Episcopal Church is fundamentally a Liturgical body, and the power of framing its prayers is vested in it's (sic) General Councils.

This power resides originally in the Episcopate, But in this country & elsewhere, the Bishops & their Dioceses have agreed to refer the matter, for all ordinary purposes, to the General Councils reserving however to the Bishops, the right to prepare special prayers for extraordinary occasions.

Under this rule even the Bishop stipulates not to make fundamental changes in the Liturgy of his own Diocese, without the consent of the Bishops & Diocese in union with himself. But this does not prevent the Bishop of any Diocese, from meeting emergencies, by adaptation of the existing prayers, or by new prayers, not inconsistent with the Liturgy of the Province to which he belongs.

The Protestant Episcopal Church of America, South Of the British possessions, is divided into two provin-

- 8 ces. In this Country – where Church & State are disunited the Church is legally & politically free to divide or combine upon her own motion only, - ex niero niotes Ecelesiae (sic) – This has been done in many religious bodies other than our own, with the full admission of the part of the State of their right to do so

The Church in the Southern States, has thought it right and best to separate provincially from her sister Diocese of the North. – Nor is this of necessity, an active participation in the political contest. As the Church is not at liberty to produce, so neither is she at liberty to resist purely political changes. She can only adapt herself & her services to the political facts outside of herself. Whether or not she should hereafter follow the fortunes of the Southern Confederacy, she has the right for her own purposes – at least so far as the control of the State is concerned – thus to Separate. It is a step – the propriety of which, it is in the province of

the Church alone to decide.

And whether or not, the Church at the South had the right to pray for the Confederacy, she did have the right to omit or modify the prayer- for the President of the United States; just as she had the right to modify her liturgy in other respects.

9 She did decide to do two things.

1<sup>st</sup> To omit the prayer for the President of the United States.

2<sup>nd</sup> To introduce a prayer for the President of the Confederate States.

I submit, that the former was an unquestionable right, - nay more, - that it was a duty, even as seen from a standpoint outside for the Confederacy.

The Church of the Confederacy ought not to have enforced prayers, upon State topics, contrary to the opinions of any large proportion of those who worshipped at her altars.- She was not a political body, or a ~~state~~ State Church. (In my own opinion, she would have done better to have dropped all Specification of governments and prayed in general terms for those in "civil authority." But she saw fit to introduce specific prayer for the Confederacy) And now, even the Bishop cannot entirely reverse the change, without taking his Diocese out of the Southern Province.

Muchless can his Presbyters or any inferior ministry. Muchless can the congregations, as such, by any Congregational action.

There remain however certain inherent rights in both Bishop & Presbyters. The Presbyter has the right to drop a prayer, which from Providential circumstances, becomes impracticable, or absurd. The Bishop has the ~~further~~ right to order such prayers to be dropped. The Bishop has the further right either to modify existing prayers, so as to meet

10 a temporary emergency of the sort at present occurring, or to prepare new prayers, which shall not be inconsistent with the Liturgy of the Province to which he belongs.

Fundamentally however, to change the Liturgy so as to make it pray for that against which it prayed before, - or against that for which it prayed before, belongs only to the Church in General Council.

No matter therefore how well disposed the Bishop or clergy of any Southern Diocese may be toward the authority of the U.S. they cannot, of themselves, lawfully re-insert the prayer for the President of the U.S. They may however drop that for the President of the C.S. so long as they may be within the Federal lines.

The Bishop of the Diocese of N. Ca. has authorized his clergy, falling within the military lines of the U.S. either to omit the prayer in question altogether, or to modify it, so as to give no just cause of offense, to persons attending our services and acknowledging

allegiance to the U.S.

This I offer to do. It is all that I have the right to do. and it is all that is required of other, - even of Roman Catholics, who have a liturgy like ourselves. Roman Catholics Presbyterians Methodists Baptists, are none of them, compelled to what is required of us. They all did pray, more or less openly, for the Confederacy – and the R. Catholics did this by a form – how they omit to do so – or pray for those in civil authority, or use some corresponding phrase.

- 11 They are, none of them, required to pray for the President of the U.S. We alone are excepted from the liberty extended to them. Are we to be made a State Church I submit that even-handed Justice would grant us ~~what we have~~ the liberty which we have seen Religious ~~Liberty~~-Freedom to require.

I ask therefore to have my church restored to me & to be left free to worship there, with my congregation upon the condition, that I do not assail the government of the U.S. in the services or sermon – on the grounds

1<sup>st</sup> of Reverence for Almighty God: - the King of Kings whose temple it is ; - & whose ambassador I am & who should not be mocked by enforced & insincere prayers.

2<sup>nd</sup> of Religious Freedom:

3 of Law & Order: inasmuch as I have no authority to insert the prayer proposed.

4 of Justice:- Since the same privilege has been granted to all the Religious bodies around us, & especially since it has been granted to the R. Catholics who, like ourselves, use a Liturgy.

5 of Mercy – to a congregation otherwise placed under partial Interdict with respect to the 2<sup>nd</sup> matter upon which I solicit redress. Vis: my threatened banishment & the suspension of all religious privileges from my Congregation, I will merely submit, that while I have not disguised my convictions as a member of the Confederacy, (I do not suppose that I would

- 12 recommend myself to your Excellency or to any right minded person by doing so,) I am yet ready to admit my obligation to neutrality, while within your lines & asking your protection. – Such neutrality I have endeavored to observe, - that I might be enabled to stay among my people & to minister to them – I have uniformly maintained the moral obligation of the oath of allegiance when taken. – Moreover, - if the object be to influence the Congregation, favorably to the government of the U.S. it seems to me that that affect will be secured much more effectually by leaving their pastor among them, in the quiet performance of his work, - than by violently rending the tie: - thus rousing their feelings against the Government – giving them

new cause of complaint, & raising up a new grievance to have its effect in other parts of the South.

I have the honor to be

Yours respectfully

Alfred A Watson

Rector of S James Ch

Wilmington

N. Ca.