



# VETERANS' ORGANIZATIONS

by

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DETROIT 4. MICHIGAN



Veterans of Foreign Wars

American Legion

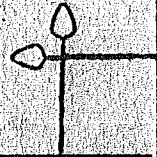
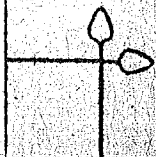
American Veterans of World War II

Plus Their Auxiliary Organizations If They Have Them



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During the past five years about 15 to 20 thousand men and women of our Wisconsin Synod have served in the armed forces. Approximately 60 percent of them have returned to their home congregations and to civilian life. Having spent so much of the last five years in military service, it is only natural that many of them are interested in joining some veterans' organizations. Through that medium they hope to continue the friendships with people of every walk of life - friendships which were made very often under the most trying conditions. Some of them feel too, no doubt, that these veterans' organizations can be a force for good on the political scene of the United States. Many of them have traveled over a sizable portion of the world and have under military discipline been forced to put United States political practices into effect. They themselves have often been the brunt of peculiar legislation with which they have not been in sympathy. They feel that some changes are necessary in American political life if the United States is to continue as a stronghold of democracy. They are convinced that as individuals they can effect nothing. The gravitation, therefore, is towards veterans' organizations.

It has already been mentioned that our men and women home from the wars hope to continue friendships made during wartime service by active participation in veterans' organizations. Perhaps a few more words on that particular phase of the matter would not be out of place. We know from experience that our veterans are loathe to talk about their war experiences with people unfamiliar with what they have gone through. In fact, they often hesitate to go anywhere where there is a possibility that they might have to go through intensive grilling. A few of my veterans have told me that at first they even hated to come to church because their fellow-Christians, well-meaning as they are, constantly asked them questions about the war, their reaction to battle and other things which in general only those who have had similar experiences can understand. On the other hand, as you perhaps have already noticed too, veterans among themselves talk a great deal about their military experiences, and to the casual observer it seems that they enjoy such conversations immensely. That too causes a gravitation towards veterans' organizations. There among people with similar experiences they have an emotional outlet for pent-up feelings.

We have mentioned these things briefly in order to show in a small measure why veterans' organizations are popular. Such organizations have grown up with our country and in many respects have played an important part in the history of our nation. One of them, which had a tremendous amount of influence and which is remembered by some for its typical lodge activities, is the Grand Army of the Republic - an organization of Union soldiers and sailors of the Civil War. The war with Spain gave birth to two more organizations: The United Spanish War Veterans and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Others that came into being after World War I are: The American Legion (1919), Disabled American Veterans (1921), Allied American Veterans of all Wars (1922), American Veteran's Association (1932), and the Regular Veterans' Association (1934).

Of those organizations the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion are the best known and have the largest memberships. According to 1945 figures of the World Almanac the Veterans of Foreign Wars have about 450,000 members and the American Legion about 1,500,000. Needless to say, both organizations are very active at the present time in efforts to garner new members. One report states that both organizations together have so far received about 600,000 veterans of this war into membership. Recently Drew Pearson in his Washington-Merry-Go-Round column had some interesting things to say about the membership drives of both these organizations. He wrote: "One of the most important behind-the-scenes struggles for post-war power is being waged between the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Both outfits know that the group which speaks for the veterans may well dictate to Congress and the nation after the war. Both are jockeying for that advantage.

Actually, the Veterans of Foreign Wars are in a better position than the Legion to get a head start on recruiting veterans of World War II. The VFW charter from Congress permits recruiting men before they are discharged, while the Legion must wait until a man leaves the service.

Fact is the VFW has picked up more than 400,000 new members since Pearl Harbor, while the Legion's gains have been relatively paltry. At the start of the war, the Legion had more than 1,000,000 members, the VFW a quarter million. But today the VFW magazine has the largest overseas circulation of any non-governmental publication and is now read by 300,000 men monthly. As a result, VFW is picking up members at the rate of 5,000 a week, while Legion officials fret, plan their own recruiting drive later."

Walter Davenport wrote in a similar vein in the Nov. 11, 1945 issue of Colliers: "Both the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars are sending missionaries into the field. The Legion is the more active, its scope being wider. The VFW accepts only men who have served overseas, just as the smallest of the three old agencies, the Disabled American Veterans with a membership of about 35,000, is limited to men with service-incurred disabilities.

The Legion, with its \$100,000,000 worth of property, its 58 departments and 13,000 posts, its scores of welfare, rehabilitation, Americanization and auxiliary activities, has given membership to about 350,000 veterans of World War II.....

When we got into this war, the Legion had a membership of 1,300,000. It expects that the new veteran members will presently far outnumber the old. Like the VFW, the Legion concedes that its control will be taken over in due time by the kids. Its officers go further than that. They predict that out of the 12,000,000 will rise leaders who will sit in Congress and doubtless control that body; that to a degree never dreamed of by the old veterans, the new veterans will become governors, mayors and legislators, that they will write and adopt national legislation, that presently they will elect a president, that they will control the political destinies of the United States for many years to come.

The Legion, a conservative body, sees in all this a tremendous task for its current set-up. It is convinced that it is up to the Legion to steer the youngsters away from both Fascist and Communist influences, to keep ever before young eyes old-fashioned Americanism.

The VFW, making no pretense to the wealth and activities of the Legion, claims to have already increased its prewar membership of 230,000 by the addition of 400,000 veterans of World War II. Thousands of the new veterans have joined both old organizations.

Neither the Legion nor the VFW believes that its current drives for young membership will discourage the formation of a World War II

organization. Both of them profess to believe that there should be one. But in the meantime they are working hard to maintain their own influence socially and politically. Between them they wrote the G.I. Bill of Rights, which is the foundation on which future legislation for veterans will be built. Legislation for World War I veterans fills an oversize book of almost eight hundred pages, and none of these concessions to old servicemen are in danger of being written off by anything short of the death of these veterans."

World War II has given birth to at least 16 new veterans' organizations. Two of these have already gained some national recognition. The two are: The American Veteran's Committee and the American Veterans of World War II, better known as the AMVETS. So far the AMVETS seems to be the larger group and seems to have the possibility of the largest growth. The Secretary of this organization recently wrote to the Missouri Synod's Bureau of Information on Secret Orders as follows: "We have made arrangements for a broader union of other veterans' organizations...to be completed early in August." Should those plans materialize, the AMVETS will undoubtedly become in the course of time the largest and most influential of all veterans' organizations.

Other and not so well-known veterans' groups which have been organized since the outbreak of World War II are the following: Nationalist Veterans of World War II; the Protestant War Veterans; American Order of Patriots; Southern Defenders of America; the Christian Brotherhood of War Veterans; George Washington's Bodyguards; the Legion of Christ; the Sons of Robert E. Lee; and the Sebastian Society, sponsored by Fr. Chas. E. Coughlin in Detroit.

For a more complete picture we might add that during the course of this war auxiliary organizations have come into being whose membership consists of relatives of service men and women, such as the American War Dads; the Navy Mothers' Club; Blue Star Mothers, Inc. of America; Mothers of World War No. 2, Inc.; United Service Women of American, Inc.; etc.

In general it can be said that the primary objective of all these veterans' organizations is to promote and protect the civic and economic welfare of its members. In other words, they are chiefly devoted to certain material interests and not to fellowship, brotherhood relations, character building, or preparations for the life to come. They do, however, have some kind of ritual. In some of these, objectionable religious features are more prominent than in others. Some veterans' organizations and auxiliaries make the use of the ritual mandatory, others leave it optional. Those are the factors that demand our attention now so that we may have some definite information when dealing with veterans. We'll take a look first at the

#### VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

Even before World War II this organization caused our pastors a great deal of difficulty. Efforts were made repeatedly by the Missouri Synod to induce the VFW to drop their ritual or at least to make it optional. Similar efforts have been made in the past few years without success. In January of 1943 a representative of the Missouri Synod's Bureau of Information on Secret Orders had an interview with the Adjutant General of the VFW in regard to the advisability of adopting a set-up similar to that of the American Legion, but to no avail. In 1945 a group of pastors in Minnesota sought to remedy the

situation through the State Convention of the VFW. They too were unsuccessful. Last year the Missouri Synod Bureau with the cooperation of a number of pastoral conferences again sought to have the VFW drop its ritual or at least make it optional, but they got nowhere. In reporting these attempts, Missouri Synod's Bureau added the following: "Perhaps these repeated efforts are partly responsible for the insinuating remark which appeared in the November, 1944, issue of Foreign Service, a monthly publication of the VFW: 'And, by the way, there are still some religious sects in this country of the type condoning conscientious objectors that disapprove of their members joining any kind of secret fraternal society, and they're prone to class the VFW in that category. We wonder how any patriotic, law-abiding citizen of these United States can take exception to the first paragraph, for instance, of the VFW obligation to which a man must take oath before he can belong to the Gold Stripe Fraternity!' More about that later.

That brief quotation does much to show the attitude of this organization over against conservative church bodies and also shows that it has no intentions whatsoever of dropping objectionable features.

The purposes of the VFW, according to its Constitution and By-Laws, as amended to September 4, 1942, are the following: "The purposes of this corporation shall be fraternal, patriotic, historical, and educational: to preserve and strengthen comradeship among its members; to assist worthy comrades; to perpetuate the memory and history of our dead, and to assist their widows and orphans; to maintain true allegiance to the Government of the United States of America and fidelity to its constitutions and laws; to foster true patriotism; to maintain and extend the institutions of American freedom; and to preserve and defend the United States from all her enemies, whomsoever."

The Constitution and By-Laws contain no religious elements with the exception of references to services to be performed by the chaplain. However, the Ritual of the VFW, as amended to September 18, 1936, is strongly religious in nature. It features prayers by the chaplain and contains a complete burial service. In the prayers, for example, there is no reference to Jesus Christ. God is addressed as Lord of Battles, Commander of the Universe, Captain of our salvation, Lord of Lords. In brief, they are the kind of prayers you would expect in an organization of people from all walks of life and with all sorts of beliefs and disbeliefs. They are typical lodge prayers which are made general enough to offend no one but a person who devoutly believes that any prayer not addressed to the Triune God of the Bible is a sin against the First Commandment.

If anything, the burial service of the VFW is even more objectionable. The burial service contains numerous references to eternal life and also exhortations to the survivors to live a life which will make them worthy (sic) to enter it. The following is quoted from the burial service: "Let us live so that when our summons comes, we may depart with the testimony of a good conscience, in the comfort of a reasonable religion (sic), and a holy hope in favor with God, and perfect charity with all mankind.....p. 79

"Heavenly Father, bless our Country with freedom, peace and righteousness, and through Thy Sovereign and Holy Spirit's favor, may we all meet at last before Thy throne of grace in heaven.....p. 80

"May each of us, when our voyages and battles of life are over, find

a welcome in that region of the Blest where there is no more storm-tossed sea, nor scorching battlefield....p. 90

"Let each one be so loyal to every virtue, so true to every friendship, so faithful in the remaining marches, that he will be ready to fall out and take his place in the Great Review hereafter; not in doubt, but with faith that the merciful Captain of our salvation will call him to that fraternity which on earth and in heaven remains unbroken.....p. 90

"Help all of us to gather inspiration from this Memorial and grant that all of us may assemble at last in the star tended fields of Thy infinite love....." p. 91

Compared to the rituals of typical lodges such as the Masons and Odd Fellows, this ritual is mild. However, that does not mean that it is not objectionable nor does it mean that it is one in which a Christian, as we understand the term, can take part. The excerpts from the VFW ritual just read have a strong flavor of salvation by character and certainly leads one to believe that Christianity is more or less a system of morals. Its thoughts on salvation and how to obtain it are certainly not in keeping with established Biblical principles. It is hardly necessary to quote more than one or two Bible passages to prove that. In John 3, 36 we read the following: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." Matthew 15, 9: "In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." What are those teachings or commandments of men in this case? They are salvation by character or good works. What does the Bible say? Ephesians 2, 8:9: "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." II Timothy 1, 9: "God hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." And finally: Acts 4, 12: "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

After comparing the VFW Ritual and merely a few Bible passages, only one conclusion can be drawn: We cannot identify ourselves with an organization whose religious flavor, as shown in its ritual, is so anti-Biblical. When we join that organization, we are identifying ourselves with its ritual and tacitly at least agreeing to its contents, thereby denying in substance what the Bible teaches. Here it might be well to quote the well-known words of Christ, as found in Matthew 10, 33: "But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."

There are those, of course, who will say that it is possible to belong to that organization and still not subscribe to the ritual. They will say that they do not have to take part in the ritual in any way. That is not true, however. Any applicant for membership in the VFW has to sign an obligation in which a solemn promise and declaration is made that the applicant will comply with and be loyal to the Constitution, By-Law and RITUALS (sic). The obligation reads as follows: "In the presence of Almighty God, I do, of my own free will and accord, solemnly promise and declare that: I will bear true allegiance to the Government of the United States of America, and I will always be loyal thereto, and will never bear arms, nor in



any way use my influence against its Laws or Institutions.

"I will comply with the Constitution, By-Laws and Rituals (sic) of this Order; and I will always be loyal thereto; that I will never wrong nor defraud this Organization, nor a member thereof, nor permit any wrong to be done to either, if in my power to prevent it. I will never propose for membership any person not eligible according to our Constitution, nor one whom I know to be unworthy.

"I will never make known to anyone not authorized to receive it any of the work of this Order, secret or written. Should any affiliation with the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States cease, in any way, I will consider this pledge as binding outside the Order as though I had remained a member of the same. All this I promise and pledge upon the honor of a true Comrade and a citizen of our great republic."

We note very readily in what has just been read that an oath is taken in regard to a number of varied promises. The oath is taken in connection with many things that the applicant knows nothing about. It is an oath in uncertain things, strictly forbidden in God's Word. It has to be classed as a frivolous oath, for that is just exactly what it is. In this connection too we do will to call to mind certain Bible passages. Matthew 5, 33-37: "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths. But I say unto you, Swear not at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." Those are clear, unmistakable expressions. If we try to evade them, we make ourselves guilty of the kind of casuistry on this subject for which Christ roundly rebuked the Pharisees in Matthew 23, 16-22. Those words are an amplification of Christ's words in Matthew 5, previously quoted.

There we have general Biblical regulations laid down in regard to oaths. If we want to be more specific in condemnation of oaths taken in uncertain things, we again have a Word of God. In Leviticus 5, 4-5 we read: "Or if a soul swear, pronouncing with his lips to do evil, or to do good, whatsoever it be that a man shall pronounce with an oath, and it be hid from him; when he knoweth of it, then he shall be guilty in one of these. And it shall be, when he shall be guilty in one of these things that he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing." What does that tell us? Simply this. "When organizations demand oaths of those who join them, their demand brands them as ungodly. And when they exact oaths for promises, the contents of which are still unknown to the person concerned, they show themselves as doubly ungodly. To promise what one does not yet know is to forswear one's self, as Leviticus 5 shows. Every oath of this kind has no binding power, should be repudiated and confessed as sin, that God's pardon may be secured." (Lenski) For further Scriptural substantiation we need turn only to James 5, 12: "But above all things, brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea by yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation."

In view of the VFW's ritual and in view of its sinful oath, there is only one thing that we can do, if we are to abide with sound Scriptural teaching, and that is to warn our members not to affiliate themselves with this organization. Through the ritual of the VFW and through its oath of obligation we would be yoking ourselves unequally

with unbelievers, and of that again God's Word says, II Corinthians 6, 14 ff.: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will be their God and they shall be my people."

But now, what about those of our members who have already affiliated themselves with this organization? II Corinthians 6, 17 gives us the answer: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord." That is always the answer where any Biblical principle is involved.

We are now acquainted with the Biblical principles involved; but how are we going to handle the situation? With my inexperience I certainly am not going to make any effort to tell you that. However, I would like to direct your attention to a few salient points. Some of the VFW's local organizations drop the ritual entirely and no one is obligated to take part in the memorial services and in other prayers. In handling this situation it will make some difference whether a person belongs to a post which practices promiscuous prayer and whether he takes part in that, or whether he belongs to a post which has dropped this feature. In the one case it is easy to show a person that he is violating the express command of Scripture. In the second case he must be shown that his Order insists on a practice which is contrary to Scripture, even if his local post does not conform to that practice. Both cases call for very tactful handling and instruction. Let's not forget that the VFW cannot be put on the same level with typical lodges, for it is essentially a veterans' organization created to safeguard the rights and privileges of war veterans. That is not said to serve as an "out" for evading the issue, but it is simply offered as a word of caution to proceed carefully and with due instruction.

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#### LADIES' AUXILIARY OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

The VFW has a ladies' auxiliary. A few words will suffice for this organization. In reply to a question about the religious elements in its ritual, the National Secretary wrote Dr. Graebner, December 19, 1938, a rather lengthy reply. It is necessary to take only a few excerpts from that letter: ".....It is mandatory upon the Auxiliary as a body to follow the ritual. The penalty for disobedience being suspension and cancellation of the Auxiliary charter." In view of the prominent religious features of this organization, no more need be said. For your additional information, however, I'll quote what Dr. Graebner wrote after an interview with the National Secretary of this organization in January of 1943: "A visit to headquarters and a conversation with Mrs. Davis left me with the impression that the entire influence of headquarters is imbued with the lodge spirit which stresses just the religious features as one of the purposes of the Order....I would certainly advise every Lutheran woman to stay out of this Auxiliary."

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## DAUGHTERS OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

This organization also has a strongly religious ritual. It is apparently a feeder for the Ladies' Auxiliary. For reasons mentioned before, we cannot permit girls of our churches to become affiliated with the organization.

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## THE AMERICAN LEGION

If you have the book entitled "The Secret Empire", written by Dr. Graebner, you really have all the information that is necessary. What he wrote at that time is still pertinent. However, for your information the following can be said. The American Legion was an outgrowth of World War I and came into being in the year 1919. It was and still is simply a patriotic organization composed of men and women who served in the armed forces of the United States beginning with World War I. According to its official statements its chief purpose is the cultivation of 100 percent Americanism. This organization has no ritual in the accepted sense, but rather a ceremonial. Whenever a prayer is printed in the Manual of Ceremonials, the following note always appears: "In case any member of the Post objects on conscientious grounds to prayer being offered, it shall be omitted, and in its stead the members shall stand in silence for thirty seconds, provided the same is ordered by the majority of the members present."

It might be added too that according to reports some local posts of the Legion simply open their meetings with a recitation of the preamble to the Constitution. All posts of the Legion have rites at the graves of members, especially when requested, but they are military in nature. However, if you have a burial in which an American Legion Post is taking part at the grave, it is taking the proper precautions to remind them that their participation is to be only military in nature, lest some overzealous Legionnaire add a little religion to it.

In general it can be said that it is possible for veterans of our churches to affiliate with the Legion. We ought to remind Legionnaires or prospective Legionnaires of our congregations, nevertheless, of their constitutional privilege to protest against the use of prayer in any meeting in order to warn them against engaging in any unionistic practice.

In concluding our remarks on the American Legion proper, attention should be called to the fact that the conduct of Legionnaires at their conventions sometimes violates every sense of decency and respect. It might be well, therefore, to warn the veterans of our churches who belong to the Legion not to participate in social activities of the Legion which are inconsistent with their Christian life.

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## THE FORTY AND EIGHT

This is a special society organized by the American Legion or at least under its supervision. Its name was derived from the freight cars used in France during World War I, for the transportation of troops. These cars were capable of holding forty men and eight

horses. As far as can be learned, this society has no ritual or religion connected with it. However, Dr. Graebner writes: "Whether their activities can stand the light of day is another matter. I know that in some towns they have some pretty rough entertainment."

One of the officers of this society wrote the following in a letter to newspapers: "The Society of Forty and Eight is non-sectarian, non-political and non-partisan, and its paramount interest is the welfare of the American Legion and the ex-servicemen of the late war." On the basis of available information at least, our church can hardly take a stand against this society, unless it would be on the basis of its occasional torrid social activities, and that would vary with different groups.

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### WOMEN'S AUXILIARY OF THE AMERICAN LEGION

This organization is composed of female relatives of servicemen. Its avowed purpose is to aid disabled soldiers and to aid hospitals, sanitarium and the like. The Manual of Ceremonies contains the usual unionistic prayers and the highly generalized religion of the lodge. However, the introductory paragraph reads as follows: "This Manual of Ceremonies has been compiled to aid Units of the American Legion Auxiliary desiring the use of a ritualistic form in the conduct of their Unit meetings. The use of the ritual in the form presented is not required by any official action of the National Organization. The manual is intended only to provide suggestions for the guidance of Unit officers and may be altered to meet Unit desires."

That, of course, makes the use of the ritual entirely optional. While there are inherent dangers of course, it would seem from all available information that Lutheran women could join an Auxiliary Unit which has adopted no ritual of any kind. The only argument that could be raised against their joining under those circumstances would be this, that they would be affiliating themselves with the National Organization and that some of the Units of the National Organization use the ritual. It seems that an objection of that kind could only result from rather specious argumentation, however. That is merely a personal opinion and there are some who may not agree.

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### SONS OF THE LEGION

This is a juvenile organization belonging to the Legion. It has a ritual containing definite lodge features, such as prayers and the misuse of God's name. The prayers are through and through deistic. Article X, Section 2 of the Constitution says: "All Squadron meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the ritual of the organization." Largely through the efforts of the Missouri Synod this group, some years ago passed a resolution to insert with every prayer a note that it shall be omitted if there is any objection for reasons of conscience. Since then, the ritual has been optional. Therefore, the same conclusion is drawn here that was made in connection with the Women's Auxiliary of the American Legion.

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## AMERICAN VETERANS OF WORLD WAR II

As was stated at the beginning of this report, this organization, better known by its abbreviated name of AMVETS, has a good opportunity of becoming the largest and most powerful of all veteran's organizations. Since it is now in the process of organizing nationally, not too much is known about those things which might be objectionable from a Biblical standpoint. The Missouri Synod's Bureau of Information on Secret Orders has made available the following information taken from a pamphlet received from the National Commander, Elmo W. Keel:

The American Veterans of World War II (AMVETS) was established at a conference held in Kansas City, Missouri, December 9th and 10th, 1944. Independent veterans' groups from every section of the United States were in attendance and merged into one national group known as the AMVETS, with National Headquarters at 1507 M. Street, N.W. Washington 5, D.C. Officers were elected and all members were directed to engage in a positive progressive program with the view of making the AMVETS the outstanding veterans' organization in the United States.

Any American Citizen shall be eligible for membership in the American Veterans of World War II who was regularly enlisted, inducted or commissioned and who was accepted for active duty in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps or Coast Guard, the Women's Army Corps, Waves, Spars, Army Nurse Corps, the Coast Guard Temporary Reserve of the Armed Forces of the United States, or our Allies; on or after September 16, 1940, and who served during some period between this date and the date of cessation of hostilities. Those who are qualified for membership by date of service under limitations indicated above, who have been separated from active service, must have been honorably discharged or must have been separated from active service under honorable conditions in order to be eligible for membership.

## THE PREAMBLE READS:

We, the American Veterans of World War II, fully realizing our responsibility to our country, State, and nation, associate ourselves for the following purposes: To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; to safeguard the principles of freedom, liberty and justice for all; to promote the cause of eternal peace and good will among nations; to maintain inviolate the freedom of our country; to preserve the fundamentals of Democracy and Americanism; to perpetuate the friendships and associations of the Great War of Liberation, and to dedicate ourselves to the cause of mutual assistance.

## ARTICLE II READS:

The aims and purposes of this organization are as follows:

1. To build and maintain the welfare of the United States of America toward lasting prosperity and peace for all of its inhabitants.
2. To encourage, in keeping with the policies of our government, the establishment of a concrete plan to secure permanent international peace.
3. To inspire in our membership a sense of responsibility, and to develop leadership, for the preservation of our American democratic way of life.
4. To aid in promoting a lasting peace among nations predicated upon honesty, justice and understanding of mutual rights, duties and problems,

5. To help unify divergent groups in the overall interest of American democracy.

6. To train our youth to become purposeful citizens in a democracy with full knowledge of the responsibilities as well as privileges of citizenship.

7. To co-operate with all duly recognized existing Veterans' Organizations in the furtherance of the aims of World War II veterans. We feel strong bonds of friendship for the men of our country who fought in the first World War and the previous wars of our history. We recognize and appreciate the unity, interest and strength they lend to all movements for veteran welfare. In our common efforts to achieve benefits for veterans and to protect the rights of our comrades still under arms, we are eager to cooperate.

8. To insure the orderly return of the Veteran to civilian life by protecting his rights as an individual while he is still in uniform.

9. To expedite and assist in the rehabilitation of the Veteran by maintenance of employment services, sponsoring educational opportunities and providing counsel for insurance, housing, recreation and personal problems.

10. To act as a liaison agent between the Veteran and the Government.

11. To seek community planning for the adequate care of all disabled Veterans and the general welfare and rehabilitation of all Veterans.

12. To provide an organization to encourage fellowship among all Veterans of World War II.

13. To keep the public forever reminded that the Veterans of World War II fought to served to preserve peace, liberty and democracy for their nation.

In Article VI, Section I there is a reference to a chaplain. Under "Instructions for Forming Local Posts" occurs the statement, "The AMVETS is a non-partisan, non-political and non sectarian." The National Commander also wrote the following to the Missouri Synod's Bureau; "We have no religious or racial prejudices. We are, however, bound with the spirit of cooperation of all freedom-loving peoples everywhere." Brig. General H. C. Holdridge, National Executive Secretary of the AMVETS wrote the following to the Bureau: "The question of a ritual has not been disposed of.... Suggestions will be given the most careful consideration.... We have no desire to offend the religious beliefs of any of our members."

If we have veterans who are interested in joining the Amvets, perhaps it would be best to advise them to hold off joining until a definite policy regarding rituals and religious features of the organization have been announced.

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In summing up our remarks in regard to the three veterans' organizations which will concern us most in our work, the following can be said:

I. The ritual and oath of obligation of the VFW are contrary to definite Biblical principles and therefore it is not an organization for conscientious Lutheran Christians to join.

II. Under certain circumstances a Lutheran Christian may affiliate himself with the American Legion without compromising his faith and without violating Scriptural principles.

III. The AMVETS may turn out to have no objectionable features about it at all; but until a definite policy regarding rituals and religious features has been announced, it is advisable to refrain from joining them at the present time.

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The following is additional information regarding the AMVETS and the V. F. W. which has come into my hands since this essay was originally written.

#### THE AMVETS

In the January 30th issue of the Grand River Record - a weekly community paper of this section of Detroit - it was stated that in the past six weeks alone the AMVETS have organized 32 posts in Michigan. By the end of February (1946) this organization hopes to have over 25,000 members in Michigan alone.

In announcing the State Convention for February 23rd and 24th, it was stated that Navy Chaplain, Father O'Callaghan, Congressional Medal of Honor winner and National Chaplain of the AMVETS would fly here for the Convention.

It is evident from that report that the AMVETS has some religious features, otherwise it would be utter foolishness to have a National Chaplain. Just what part religion plays in this organization I do not know as yet, having been unable to learn anything definite. Nevertheless, the fact that a Catholic priest is its National Chaplain is very significant and is a warning in itself for us to discourage our veterans from joining until pertinent information is obtained. Such information will be available shortly after its National Convention in Des Moines, beginning June 12, 1946.

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#### VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

Nothing does more to substantiate what has been said regarding the VFW in this essay than does the following. Here follow some excerpts taken from a letter written on April 16, 1946 and emanating from the VFW's national headquarters in Kansas City, Mo. It was sent to a Lutheran pastor in answer to his voiced disapproval of the ritual.

".....I regret that there appears to be no way we can remedy the situation of which you complain without action of our National Encampment which is scheduled to meet September 1, 1946, and then only if the National By-Laws thru due process or the Ritual changed to eliminate the "prayers" and all reference to the Deity.

It seems too bad that any group that voices its desire for divine guidance so that its members may live lives of stainless integrity, should have to abandon these reverent petitions even though they are actually only recitations in a ritualistic ceremony.

I believe your church adheres to the Christian faith and that Trinitarianism is one of your tenets. You may be interested to know that ALL REFERENCE TO CHRIST OR THE TRINITY WAS ELIMINATED TO MEET OBJECTIONS RAISED BY NON-CHRISTIANS. It seems too bad that we should be asked to adopt a Godless as well as a CHRISTLESS ritual." (Capitalization the essayist's)

This letter is on file, as well as the correspondence accompanying it. If anyone has been in doubt about our Church's stand in respect to the VFW, this letter surely erases all doubt and serves to prove even more conclusively that it is not an organization to which a professing Lutheran Christian can belong.

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## LATER GENERAL INFORMATION

From the June, 1946 issue of Pageant in an article by Arnold Perl the following is taken: "The biggest and most powerful pressure group in America is in the process of formation...veterans' organizations.... By the end of 1946 their potential membership will exceed 13,000,000 - more than the combined totals of the AF of L, CIO and Railroad Brotherhoods...The Legion, largest organization in the field (2,500,000 on March 1) reports that 11,000 new Legionnaires are signing up every day... The VFW, with a membership of 1,300,000 (on February 1) boasts that one million of its members are veterans of World War II....The programs they adopt will tend to shape American political life for the next 25 years..."

Unfortunately nothing was said in the essay proper regarding veterans' organizations as "pressure groups". Some attention should have been given to that particular phase in the body of this essay. Perhaps two sentences will suffice now. Pressure groups have no place in a democracy. They are not only a definite danger to democracy itself, but also a potential threat to religious liberty.

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Every faithful pastor owes it to himself and to the flock which the Lord has entrusted to his care to acquaint himself thoroughly with the various veterans' organizations. Moreover, it is his duty to instruct his people in these matters not next year, but NOW. Perhaps a suggestion is not out of order. Get your veterans together and talk these organizations through with them. Don't simply tell them that they cannot join this or that organization. Patiently show them why they can't. Any delay in doing that will eventually lead to a number of "headaches" and will quite likely lead to some disruption in congregational life also. The time is NOW. Let's not put it off!