

FOR GOD AND COUNTRY:
RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM
IN THE U.S. MILITARY

**A POSITION PAPER FROM
THE CENTER FOR INQUIRY
OFFICE OF PUBLIC POLICY**

**IN COOPERATION WITH THE
MILITARY RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOUNDATION**

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AUTHOR: JAMES E. PARCO, PhD

DATED: FEBRUARY 2013

**REVIEWING COMMITTEE:
MICHAEL DE DORA, MA;
STEVEN FOX, JD;
RONALD A. LINDSAY, JD, PhD;
D. EDWARD BECK**



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ABSTRACT: Tension over what constitutes proper religious expression within the United States military has significantly intensified over the past decade. This paper examines and analyzes recent reports and several prominent cases, revealing how religiously motivated behavior has increased over the years and remains either tacitly or overtly endorsed by senior military leaders. In light of increasing religious fundamentalism within the ranks, coupled with a lack of social and political will to affect change, the cultural reticence to hold commanders accountable for inappropriate behavior remains an obstacle. The paper concludes with actionable recommendations.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...

Excerpt, First Amendment
United States Constitution

Go ye therefore and teach all nations.

Matthew 28:19
The Holy Bible (KJV)

Jefferson and Madison did not bequeath us a “Christian nation.” The United States has never had an established church, and our Constitution grants no special preference to Christianity. In fact, there is only one reference to religion in the Constitution proper: Article VI bans “religious tests” for federal office. The Constitution contains no mention of God.¹

Rev. Barry Lynn
Executive Director
Americans United for Separation of
Church and State

It is the job of an evangelical Christian chaplain to evangelize. It’s protected by the First Amendment’s guarantee of free exercise of religion.²

Tom Minnery
Senior Vice President
Focus on the Family

SECTION I: PROBLEM DEFINITION

In December 2012, West Point Cadet First-Class Blake Page resigned from the United States Military Academy just months prior to his graduation. Page stated that he could no longer stay at West Point and endure the organizational climate that endorsed fundamentalist Christianity.³ Page's story was another in a series of similar stories in an on-going, decade-long saga of growing religious fundamentalism in the U.S. military. In an interview with the author of this paper, Page described the cultural fabric at West Point — one of the nation's most preeminent military commissioning sources — as imbued with implicit expectations that cadets have particular religious beliefs. Page explained:

“You know, it really hurt, and it shouldn't be this way at West Point, but it is, and it needs to change. I didn't want the public display that my story has been. I simply wanted the senior leadership of the Army to know what's going on in hopes that they can change things to match with what they say.”⁴

It is uncommon to hear stories from junior military members like Blake Page, and yet there are hundreds, if not thousands, of people who feel the same way and yet continue to serve in silence.⁵ “Speaking out” is considered unprofessional behavior, even when such speech is an honest effort to inform leadership and the public of inappropriate behavior inside the military. The unspoken message is clear: if you know what's good for you, you'll keep quiet, and if you don't, you'll pay the price — the Blake Page price.

In the pages that follow, this paper will describe the current military environment as it pertains to religious expression. After providing several prominent examples of overtly inappropriate behavior, three case studies will be discussed that showcase some of the most egregious examples of leaders putting their religious beliefs before their professional duties, and in most cases, getting away with it.

In the Beginning...

The argument over what constitutes permissible religious expression in regards to members of the military has ebbed and flowed since our nation's birth. It prominently re-emerged during the 2000 presidential debates, with then-Texas Gov. George W. Bush remarking in Iowa that Jesus Christ was his “favorite philosopher.” He explained, “When you turn your heart and your life over to Christ, when you accept Christ as the Savior, it changes your heart and

changes your life and that's what happened to me.”⁶ This raised the eyebrows of both secularists concerned with keeping religion and government separate and Christian leaders seeking to combine the two.

In January 2001, Bush became the 43rd President of the United States, thus also Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. armed forces.⁷ Nine months later, the U.S. would suffer its greatest domestic attack since World War II.⁸ The result was the country involved in two wars and the United States again relying on its military to pursue its interests. Given Bush’s proclivity for mixing politics with religion,⁹ few were surprised when he framed America’s reaction to the 9/11 attacks as “this crusade, this war on terrorism.”¹⁰ Cloaking political rhetoric in religious language, the Commander-in-Chief insinuated that religion *did matter* in the military operations to come. This sentiment was made even clearer by Air Force Major General Glen Shaffer, the Director of Intelligence. General Shaffer had been responsible for producing the daily Worldwide Intelligence Update circulated within the Pentagon and briefed to the President during the early days of the Operation Iraqi Freedom. Normally, cover sheets had featured significant images from the previous day’s war effort, but in the days following the initial U.S. attack on Baghdad, Biblical verses and selectively chosen photos began to appear on these highly-classified official government documents.

As an example, the March 31, 2002, cover page included a photo of a tank racing through the Iraqi desert with a caption that read, “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”¹¹ The following week, under a dictatorial pose of Saddam Hussein read the phrase “It is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.”¹² And, when the Americans had taken Baghdad three days later, the caption below the picture of a fallen Saddam Hussein statue read, “Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him... to deliver their soul from death.”¹³ Not everyone who saw these reports was comfortable with this sort of religious framing. Yet, when questioned about the appropriateness of this behavior, General Schaffer “politely informed them [dissenters] that the practice would continue because my seniors [JSC Chairman Richard Myers and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld] appreciated the cover pages.”¹⁴

Outside the walls of the Pentagon, a “third front” was emerging in the Global War on Terror. This front has since raged quietly beneath the veneer of military professionalism, between soldiers who believe the United States is primarily a Christian nation with her military a

force for Christianity, and soldiers who seek to keep their religious beliefs and military duties completely separate and maintain the military as a force for American ideals. For many fundamentalist Christians who serve in uniform, they aren't merely serving their country: in their hearts and minds they are serving both God and country—in that order of priority.¹⁵

My God Is Bigger Than Your God

General Shaffer wasn't alone in his zeal to promote Christian fundamentalism in an official capacity, nor was he the first. One year earlier, U.S. Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence and Army Lieutenant General Jerry Boykin took to the microphone to outline his strategy for defeating the enemy in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Appearing in his military uniform, he told attendees of the Southern Baptist Convention's National Faith Institute in January 2002, "Bin Laden is not the enemy. No mortal is the enemy. It's the enemy you can't see. It's a war against the forces of darkness. The battle won't be won with guns. It will be won on our knees."¹⁶

Later that year, in June, speaking from the pulpit at a Baptist church in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, Boykin showed photos he had taken in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1993. He had noticed a dark mark in a photo and had his intelligence imagery specialists examine it to determine its origin. Boykin revealed to the congregation, "Ladies and gentlemen, this is your enemy," pointing to the dark image over the photo. "It is a demonic presence in that city that God revealed to me as the enemy."¹⁷

Continuing his religious tour in uniform, at a sermon at the First Baptist Church in Daytona Beach the following January, Boykin told the story of Osman Atto, a Somali warlord who taunted U.S. allies that they would never capture him because he knew Allah would protect him. Boykin concluded, "Well, you know what I knew, that my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God, and his was an idol. But I prayed, Lord let us get that man." As it turned out, Osman Atto *was* captured, and when Boykin finally had the opportunity to confront him, he recounted saying, "Mr. Atto, you underestimated our God."¹⁸

Boykin's comments generated a firestorm of criticism and prompted an investigation by the Department of Defense's Inspector General. A year later, investigators concluded, "as described throughout this report, LTG Boykin's speeches to religious-oriented groups were a personal activity... and the circumstances of their presentation (in military uniform, introduction by rank/position) created a perceived association with his official duties."¹⁹ In addition to failing

to properly disclose a \$520 travel expense, Boykin was found to have violated Defense Department regulations pertaining to the release of official information by failing to clear his speeches with proper Defense Department authority, and failing to preface his remarks with a disclaimer, for which the Secretary of the Army was ordered to take appropriate corrective action against him. Congress reacted by calling on President Bush to censure Boykin for his actions and words, including his claim that the United States' "spiritual enemies will only be defeated if we come against them in the name of Jesus."²⁰ Yet nothing came of the call, and the lack of consequences for Boykin's actions sent a very clear message to thousands of uniformed American religious fundamentalists that such behavior would be condoned.²¹

Despite Boykin's desire for a crusade, he had overlooked the lessons learned from his centuries-old brethren crusaders. In a sharp departure from Christian doctrine, Pope Urban II called on his followers in 1096 to join the military ranks and march to the aid of fellow Christians in the East. Promoted as the culmination of a peace movement, Urban declared a cessation of all Christian-vs-Christian hostilities. The Pope understood the power of incentives, and thus, offered an automatic "indulgence," or remission of temporal punishment, for anyone who joined his crusade to fight the "real" (non-Christian) enemies. Historians attribute many proximate causes for the Crusades, but there is a general consensus that religious hysteria combined with a sense of nationalism fueled the fires of war for the ensuing century. Despite the complexity and devastation of these holy wars more than 900 years ago, one lesson is certain: when military power is combined with a nationalistic fervor, *especially* religiously tinged, crisis looms large.

The Great Debate Over Separation of Church and State

Fortunately, the lessons learned from the holy wars, so common throughout Europe's past centuries, were not lost on America's Founding Fathers. When it came to the proper interplay between religion and government, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison collectively forged the philosophical underpinnings that eventually became manifest in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In just sixteen words, the proper place for religious behavior in a governmental context was defined: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The founders recognized what would happen if and when religious fervor met state power, including military force, within a nationalistic society. After exhaustive deliberations, they concluded the best position for a free society would be to keep

government and religious authorities out of each other's business. Both would be allowed to flourish without either entangling with one another.

However, the First Amendment could not be expected to resolve all possible church-state questions. In 1971, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its seminal decision in *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, which clarified the relations between religion and government. In their ruling, the Court held that for any statute to be constitutional in respect to the Establishment Clause, it must pass a three-part test:

1. It must have a clear secular purpose;
2. It must not have a primary effect of either advancing or inhibiting religion;
3. It must not foster excessive entanglement with religion.

Although this so-called "Lemon Test" focused on the constitutionality of statutes, it also informs behavior of any government official who is in a position to create or enforce policy. Simply put, when dealing with matters of religion and religious expression, neutrality is the only viable policy.

The great debate regarding church-state relations remains far from settled. Two of the most prominent contemporary voices on the proper role of religious expression in the military have been Jay Alan Sekulow, chief counsel for the Christian legal advocacy group American Center for Law and Justice,²² and Barry Lynn, executive director of the church-state watchdog group Americans United for Separation of Church and State.²³ In 2010, both Sekulow and Lynn authored chapters in an Air Force publication outlining the basis of their respective positions.²⁴ Whereas Sekulow is chiefly concerned with promoting unregulated religious speech of chaplains and military members, Lynn sees the entanglement of government and religion as the most vexing threat.

Sekulow believes that one's religious beliefs are often inextricably tied to the person's desire and willingness to serve, and thus, it is unthinkable to make a distinction between religion and military service. Although he offers a series of examples that demonstrate patently inappropriate behavior, he also has no issue with commanders speaking openly and freely about their religious values and beliefs in a public setting or in official capacity.²⁵

Lynn, on the other hand, is far more concerned about current trends in the military that abuse the Establishment Clause. Through the lens of an extensive body of case law, he contends there should be a strong line separating issues of religious expression and one's professional

duties and speech — a line that Sekulow outright rejects. Lynn argues that Sekulow’s position on the right to free speech cannot be considered in isolation of the Establishment Clause.²⁶

Although there is considerable common ground between Sekulow and Lynn’s perspectives, they diverge rather dramatically on two specific issues. First, they differ in their opinions on the permissibility of chaplains to proclaim their personal religious beliefs in their professional capacity as a military chaplain. While Sekulow advocates for chaplains to have near unrestricted speech, context matters to Lynn. Lynn acknowledges the importance of an individual’s right to freedom of conscience — whether that means to express one’s religious beliefs or no beliefs at all — but this freedom is rightfully restricted during official duties especially when coercion may exist or when an individual cannot opt out of the discussion. Sekulow and Lynn also differ on the permissibility of external religious organizations’ affiliation with military organizations. While Lynn is a leading advocate on strict neutrality,²⁷ Sekulow argues that in the current environment, such a distinction is impractical.²⁸

Through the lens of the Sekulow-Lynn debate, the most prominent issues that have received national attention are presented in Section II as three separate case studies. These case studies illustrate clear patterns of religiously expressive behavior in the professional military realm in the areas of (1) training and education; (2) deployed presence overseas; and (3) leadership. Collectively, these case studies provide some of the most compelling evidence by which to analyze the merits of the competing philosophical perspectives on the proper role of religious expression by men and women in uniform. Analysis presented in Section III demonstrates the extent to which Christian fundamentalism has grown over the past decade. Section IV provides actionable recommendations that can be immediately implemented and Section V is the conclusion.

SECTION II: EVIDENCE

CASE STUDY #1: The United States Air Force Academy

The United States Air Force Academy (USAF A) has had a disproportionate number of allegations of religious endorsement as compared to its sister-service academies at West Point and Annapolis for two primary reasons. First, the sheer density of ultra-conservative religious organizations surrounding the Colorado Springs institution provides a religiously aggressive environment. These organizations, many of which are *headquartered* in Colorado Springs, include the National Association of Evangelicals, Focus on the Family, the Navigators, and the

renowned mega-church founded by fallen-from-grace pastor Ted Haggard.²⁹ Watchdog groups, such as the Military Religious Freedom Foundation and the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers,³⁰ levy persistent allegations, based upon complaints received from students, that fundamentalist Christian organizations are tacitly given inside access to interface with cadets on campus grounds. Moreover, senior leaders, who themselves were fundamentalist Christians, have systemically sanctioned efforts to evangelize to others when their official positions yielded them an opportunity and ability to do so, while others failed to stop efforts when opportunities arose.

Before serious charges of religious intolerance began to emerge in 2004, the Air Force Academy was already mired in troubling allegations of sexual harassment and assault. On January 2, 2003, an anonymous e-mail using the pseudonym Renee Trindle was sent to the Secretary of the Air Force, his Chief of Staff, both U.S. Senators from Colorado and the House member in whose district the Academy is located, alleging that there was a significant sexual harassment and assault problem at the Air Force Academy, and that senior leaders were ignoring it. Twelve percent of the women who graduated from the institution had reported they were the victims of rape, and of all the female students, 70% claimed they had been the victims of sexual harassment.³¹

The Air Force's reaction was deliberate and swift. Integral to its efforts was the immediate replacement of all Air Force Academy senior leaders. As part of this sweeping change, Brigadier General Johnny Weida arrived at the Air Force Academy in April 2003 as the Commandant of Cadets, taking charge of all aspects of cadet training. However, because a three-star superintendent had not yet been named, Weida temporarily assumed command as the Acting Superintendent, a job he would hold for four months until the permanent three-star general would assume command of the school.

Weida understood the gravity of the problem and recognized the need for strong, principled leadership to return to the institution to its core values to regain the public trust. However, like all senior leaders, Weida was left to his own judgment as to how best to move the organization forward. Two specific examples shed insight on the path he would choose. What would later become apparent is that, in the Air Force's desire to regain the public trust over the sexual harassment and assault scandal, the institution fixed one problem while inadvertently creating another.³²

In his first month on the job, Weida issued his Superintendent's Guidance reminding cadets they were "accountable first to your God" and that "He [God] has a plan for each of us."³³ Later that summer, speaking at a Protestant religious service during basic training, he told the cadets in attendance the New Testament parable about the two men who built their houses: one on the sand, and the other on the rock.³⁴ He then instructed them that whenever he appeared in front of the student body and yelled "Airpower!" they were to reply "Rock sir!" This would cause others to ask what this chant meant, providing cadets with an opportunity to help them "find salvation in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."³⁵

Weida never shied away from an opportunity to instill Christianity into cadets as a proxy for morality. During National Prayer Week he sent a note to all cadets instructing them to "ask the Lord to give us the wisdom to discover the right, the courage to choose it, and the strength to make it endure."³⁶

In the fall of 2003, Lieutenant General John Rosa arrived as the institution's newest superintendent and by the following summer, he had become completely established as the Air Force Academy's senior leader.³⁷ As a college president-equivalent, Rosa regularly fought internal fires, but until in particular a meeting with two prominent alumni in July 2004, he had been completely unaware that his institution was on a collision course with Christian fundamentalism. He also could not have imagined that one of his very own subordinate generals would lead the charge for the opposition he would eventually face.

Knowing that the topic of the meeting would involve alumni complaints of religious intolerance, Rosa asked his newly assigned head chaplain to attend. During the course of the discussion, the two alumni who had requested the meeting produced documents that substantiated an undeniable embedding of Christianity in many facets of the organization. After a two-hour meeting, Rosa looked to his head chaplain and said, "Well, this certainly seems to have become a problem and we need to fix it." Then, turning to the two alums, he continued, "But it's obviously going to take us some time, and I ask for your patience."³⁸

Over the next five months, Lieutenant General Rosa and his head chaplain made the development of a comprehensive religious tolerance training program their top priority. Recognizing the importance of good marketing, they gave it a bumper sticker-style slogan, "RSVP: Respecting the Spiritual Values of Persons." More than two-dozen personnel were assigned to the development, including members of both the commandant's training staff and the dean's faculty.

Shot Heard ‘Round the World

After months of development, the Air Force Academy’s staff chaplains unveiled the abridged version of the RSVP program in November 2004 to a special group of 300 of the institution’s most senior leaders.³⁹ Seated at the front of the audience were the Academy’s three general officers: the superintendent (Rosa), the commandant (Weida) and the dean (Born). Throughout the rest of the room sat all cadet commanders, officers and senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs). After a 50-minute presentation by two staff chaplains, the vice-commandant took the microphone to field questions from the crowd. After several minutes of questions, a cadet commander stood up and asked the vice-commandant, “Ma’am, in light of this training, I’m curious, can we have Bible studies in a Cadet TV room?”

The colonel froze for several seconds not knowing how to answer. The point of the training had been to create an awareness of religious tolerance. Behavior had not been addressed. Sensing her unease, the head chaplain rescued his colleague. He stood up, took the microphone from her hand, turned to the student, smiled and replied:

“It’s a very good question. You see, here at the Air Force Academy, we are blessed to have a great deal of resources available for religious expression. For instance, we have the Oasis Club in Sijan Hall with many rooms for gatherings. We have the Cadet Chapel with the Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and all-faith areas. In each Cadet Group, we have a dedicated chaplain with a conference room. Thus, given the availability of all these resources for worship or spiritual gathering, it would probably be inappropriate to use common use room for religious purposes if it disenfranchised the use to other cadets who didn’t want to participate.”⁴⁰

As the cadet said “Thank you, sir” to the head chaplain for what most everyone in attendance later regarded as a superb answer, General Weida rose from his chair, took the microphone from the head chaplain’s hand, turned to face the crowd and said, “I’ll give some guidance here. You wanna have a Bible study in a Cadet TV Room? No problem.” He handed back the microphone to the head chaplain who stood there speechless and sat back down — directly next to his boss, General John Rosa, the three-star superintendent. For several seconds, no one moved or knew what to say, until finally one of the junior chaplains who had moderated the training leaned forward into the podium and said, “Thank you all for coming. This concludes our training.” Within a week, the story became public, placing USAFA back in the eye of public scrutiny for not only religious fundamentalism prevalent in its culture, but for the complacency of the institution's senior leaders who allowed it to happen on their watch.⁴¹

Reflecting back on the Academy's initial response to allegations of religious promotion and intolerance, RSVP was a monumental failure. What the Air Force failed to learn from the sexual harassment scandal was that a permanent solution could only be grounded in immediate practical boundaries with accountability through reprimands for bad behavior. The "increase awareness" and "spiritual tolerance" nonsense was doomed from the start. When organizations face problem of an abuse of freedoms, leaders cannot fix them by merely promoting more freedoms.

The Mothership Responds

Months later, in January 2005, following a steady flow of complaints of religious bias and intolerance emanating from the emerging culture of proselytization by faculty, staff and students at the USAFA, the Pentagon dispatched a task force led by another Air Force three-star general to investigate.⁴² The resulting 91-page report effectively concluded that the allegations were not sufficient to recommend any substantive changes. Once again, bad behavior was sanctioned, further emboldening religious fundamentalists throughout the ranks. All senior leaders kept their positions, no additional policies were issued and business continued as usual. Not surprisingly, the number of allegations of pressuring cadets by fundamentalist Christians has only increased over the past eight years.

Apologists argued that the situation, alleged by anonymous sources, was overblown. However, substantiation of the allegations from anyone personally affected was unlikely; anonymity was the only option for victims who wanted to avoid reprisal. The case of Air Force Captain MeLinda Morton is illustrative of how the organization can end the career of anyone who dares to come forward openly.

In May 2005, as one of the principal architects of the RSVP training, Captain Morton, a Lutheran chaplain, went public. For years she had worked as a staff chaplain for the Air Force Academy and recognized the blatantly corrupt practices endorsed by both the chaplaincy and senior leadership. Morton was one of the most knowledgeable staff members at USAFA, having been assigned there for several years. At the height of the crisis, when senior leaders began to embrace the excuse that there were really nothing more than a few disgruntled individuals seeking their fifteen minutes of fame, Captain Morton made the ultimate career sacrifice. To counter the arguments and preserve her own integrity, she agreed to an interview with the *New York Times* in May 2005. In it she described how the highest levels of senior leadership not only

failed to create a climate of religious pluralism and inclusion, but also acted to make matters worse.

For example, Morton described how one month before the debut of RSVP, the Air Force Chief of Chaplains visited the Academy to preview the training program. At the conclusion, he asked, “Why is it that the Christians never win?” The end result was to cut the program from 90-minutes to 50-minutes and remove segments on Buddhism, Judaism and Native American spirituality.”⁴³

Within one week of the interview being published, Chaplain Morton was fired.⁴⁴ Facing national scrutiny, General Rosa went public and spoke openly and honestly about the religious intolerance crisis he faced. In a speech to the Anti-Defamation League he told the audience “I have issues with my students, I have issues in my staff, and I have issues in my faculty—and that's my whole organization.”⁴⁵ He also noted the problem would take at least six years to fix. However, he knew he would not be the one to fix them for he had accepted a post-retirement position to become the 19th President of The Citadel. Chaplain Morton was reassigned to a remote overseas station, but instead elected to resign her commission in protest of the retributive action.⁴⁶

Soon after Morton’s revelations, the Air Force’s Headquarters Task Force⁴⁷ published the final report airbrushing the entire scandal.⁴⁸ By June 2005, the institution saw to it that the case was effectively closed, with the exception of the senior officer who started it all. In August 2005, the press reported that Brigadier General Weida’s name had been pulled from the promotion list to receive his second star.⁴⁹ After a sufficient cooling-off period, when the events were finally below the public radar, Weida was quietly promoted to major general in May of 2006.⁵⁰ The message communicated by Air Force leaders was clear: be whatever you want, but it is best if you are Christian. Despite the allegations and on-going public pressure, the organization continued to quietly sanction command-directed Christianity and reward its chief architects and practitioners.

When General Rosa retired in October of 2005, he passed command of the Air Force Academy to Lieutenant General John Regni. Shortly thereafter, investigative journalist Jeff Sharlet interviewed Regni about the religious crisis that had embroiled the institution for the previous eighteen months. Sharlet wrote:

“I began our phone conversation with what I thought was a softball, an opportunity for the general to wax constitutional about First Amendment freedoms. ‘How do you see the balance between the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause?’ I asked. There

was a long pause. Civilians might reasonably plead ignorance, but not a general who has sworn on his life to defend these words: ‘Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.’ ‘I have to write those things down,’ Regni finally answered. ‘What did you say those constitutional things were again?’”⁵¹

Eight years and two superintendents later, the situation at the Air Force Academy remains largely unchanged. In June 2009, Lieutenant General Michael Gould, yet another self-acknowledged fundamentalist Christian, was appointed as General Regni’s successor.⁵² As far as the Air Force was concerned the problems were solved when 100% turnover had been achieved. To this day, they still do not recognize it as a subsisting cultural problem. In November 2012, local media reported on a summit of twenty-religious leaders who met at the Air Force Academy to review the Religious Respect Training program for cadets.⁵³ Despite the institutional review stating, “we have a great story to tell here,” the truth is that overtly religious training still effectively imparts the corrosive understanding that to be a “good officer,” one needs to ascribe to a religious code.

CASE STUDY #2: Military Missionaries

Embedded journalists have become a staple of American media serving a nation at war. Although the practice emerged with the major news networks, over the years covering the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the method has spread to a variety of media venues. In September 2008, the *Discovery Channel* aired a two-hour program entitled *God’s Soldier*.⁵⁴ Filmed on-site at a forward operating base in Iraq, the film had been produced “with the full cooperation of the 2-27 Infantry Battalion” according to the program’s credits. *Travel the Road*, another popular Christian reality television show ended their second season with several episodes filmed on location in Afghanistan. When *ABC News Nightline* did an investigative report on the connection between the program, which was owned by the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), and the U.S. military, one of the missionaries acknowledged: “They [military commanders] knew what we were doing. We told them we were born again Christians, we’re here doing ministry, we shoot for this TV station and we want to embed and see what it was like.”⁵⁵

As the military faced criticism for its complicity in giving preferential access to fundamentalist Christian organizations, in May 2009 the public affairs arm of the Army announced that it would be destroying thousands of Christian Bibles sent by a private American religious organization to a chapel at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan.⁵⁶ These particular Bibles

had been printed in the local Pashto and Dari languages, and critics argued the intent behind them was clear — private religious organizations in the United States were using the US military as taxpayer-funded international missionaries.

Yet, others argued that these Bibles given out by American chaplains to American service members were protected speech under the First Amendment, and the confiscation and destruction of the books amounted to government censorship and deprivation of private property.⁵⁷ The leading voice of opposition was former U.S. Navy Chaplain Gordon James Klingenschmitt. Klingenschmitt gained national notoriety in 2006 when he was found guilty at a general court martial of disobeying a lawful order.⁵⁸ Klingenschmitt had reasoned that General Order No. 1B, which “prohibits proselytizing of any religion, faith or practice”⁵⁹ does not include evangelism, which according to Klingenschmitt, unlike proselytization, is not forcible.⁶⁰

Although this distinction has never been codified in law, the U.S. government continued to distribute Bibles, printed in English with camouflage covers brandishing official military insignias on their covers, to American troops overseas.⁶¹ One only needs to read through the volumes of Christian soldier blogs to see first person testimonials, such as from a chief warrant officer from the 101st Airborne Division:

“The soldiers who are patrolling and walking the streets are taking along this copy [official Bibles] and they are using it to minister to local residents,” and he continues, “The soldiers are being placed in strategic places with a purpose. They’re continuing to spread the word.”

Such evidence demonstrates the how little regard fundamentalist Christians have for government regulations when those regulations are seen to conflict with the belief that he or she answers to a higher authority, beyond his or her chain of command.⁶²

Jesus Rifles

Despite the prohibitions of General Order 1B, these examples are only a small sampling of a much larger collection that has emerged illustrating the growing influence of fundamentalist Christianity in the military. *Harper’s* published a stunning article in May of 2009 entitled “Jesus Killed Mohammed,” in which the author (again, Jeff Sharlet) describes how the title comes from actual words, in red Arabic lettering, painted on the side of a Bradley Fighting Vehicle in Iraq.⁶³ The article revealed that this inscription was only one of many inflammatory crusader-tinged messages that had been openly displayed on military equipment.

Later that year, *ABC News* broke a story about the Michigan-based rifle-sight manufacturer Trijicon, which had been inscribing Bible verse numbers on rifle sights sold to the U.S. military under a \$660 million contract.⁶⁴ At the time of the report, these rifle sights were already widely used in Iraq and Afghanistan by U.S. Marines, Soldiers, and members of allied militaries. Facing scrutiny, the company announced plans to provide kits to remove the inscriptions from the 800,000 sights already sold.

Spiritual Fitness

General David Petraeus, then-commander of the military's Central Command (CENTCOM, responsible for Iraq and Afghanistan operations) commented that the spiritual fitness issue was "disturbing...and a serious concern for me." However, it's not clear why Petraeus found the story so concerning. Unaware observers were likely to have taken the commanding general's comments on face value, but Petraeus himself was known by insiders to be part of the problem, due to his strong commitment to "spiritual fitness."

The Department of the Army's Spiritual Fitness Program provides commanders "with a definition of spiritual fitness and suggest[s] alternatives to enhance the soldier's total well-being increasing spiritual fitness."⁶⁵ Spiritual fitness came to the forefront in 2009 when the U.S. Army unveiled a \$125 million "holistic fitness" program intended to address the growing issue with post-traumatic stress disorder cases. The program aimed at teaching soldiers how to become "psychologically resilient" emotionally, physically, family-oriented, socially and spiritually in dealing with traumatic events. However, the online assessment tool included in the program assessed a soldier's spiritual fitness by using "questions written predominantly for soldiers who believe in God or another deity, meaning nonbelievers are guaranteed to score poorly and will be forced to participate in exercises that use religious imagery to 'train' soldiers up to a satisfactory level of spirituality."⁶⁶

Spiritual fitness wasn't a new concept. Dating back to the 1980s, Army regulations have described and encouraged spiritual fitness as:

"All aspects of total wellness addressed by the Army Health Promotion Program come under the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of human beings. A great amount of training time is devoted to physical health and conditioning. This is a positive effort and appropriate for our mission accomplishment, however, TOTAL fitness also involves emotional and spiritual aspects!"⁶⁷

Moreover, specific religious devotionals and prayers were listed in the military regulation itself, in an appendix. As an example:

C-1. By the grace given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, . . . Don't you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. (*1 Corinthians 10-11, 16-17*)

C-2. Our society's emphasis on physical fitness and other ways to benefit ourselves leads one to conclude that "do your own thing" is the best way to go. Our scripture lesson provides an important reminder that our "own thing" must be built on the foundation which God provides—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

On multiple occasions, General Petraeus had expressed support — as an active-duty four star general — for such "spiritual fitness" evaluation programs and social events. He had first been implicated in endorsing fundamentalist Christian events that targeted soldiers in 2007, when his photo and endorsement appeared on the Eric Horner Ministries website, praising Horner's Christian rock concerts on military bases.⁶⁸ Then, in the August 7, 2008 edition of *Air Force Times*, Army chaplain Lieutenant Colonel William McCoy took out a half-page ad promoting his book *Under Orders: A Spiritual Handbook for Military Personnel*, which promoted Christianity and asserted that non-religious service members had no defense against sin and could therefore cause the failure of their units.⁶⁹ As reported by religious watchdog author Chris Rodda, the book was endorsed by none other than Gen. Petraeus, whose blurb on the book's cover read: "*Under Orders* should be in every rucksack for those moments when Soldiers need spiritual energy."

In the November 2011 issue of *Baptist Press*, Colonel Brent Causey, who had been the top chaplain to Petraeus in Afghanistan, exclaimed, "Gen. Petraeus played a leadership role in stressing the importance of spirituality." Specifically:

"It was incredible to see the growth of Bible studies and the growth of conversions among our own service people — not just battlefield conversions but the maturity of faith and development of mentorship at all levels. We started out with four of us in Bible study and when I left, 85 percent of our leadership were active in dynamic Bible study -- 18 out of 22 of Petraeus' directorates (direct reports). It's always an impact when anyone comes to Jesus Christ as Savior, but I saw guys aged 45 and above making first-time commitments to Christ, and at least 40 percent of service people were attending chapel."⁷⁰

As the senior military commander in the Middle East, for years Petraeus had turned a blind eye to evangelical Christian fervor under his command, while ironically leading others in battle against a different type of religious zealotry.

Nuclear Ethics

Ethics and nuclear weapons are two areas that any military commander takes very seriously. So it came as a surprise to Air Force Chief of Staff General Norton Schwartz when, after a journalistic investigation in July 2011, he had to suddenly account for the odd details of the “nuclear ethics program” used in the nuclear weapons training school at Vandenberg Air Force Base.⁷¹ The training, which had been in place for more than two decades, included an Air Force chaplain instructing future missile launch officers on the moral justification for the use of nuclear weapons. The program materials, which included more than a dozen Biblical references, also included a statement by former Nazi scientist Wernher von Braun—cited as a moral expert—claiming, “We wanted to see the world spared another conflict such as Germany had just been through and we felt that only by surrendering such a weapon to people who are guided by the Bible could such an assurance to the world be best secured.”⁷² General Schwartz immediately put an end to the religious-based nuclear ethics training program⁷³ and soon thereafter issued an unprecedented warning to all Air Force commanders to refrain from endorsing any specific religion, or religion in general.^{74, 75} Not surprisingly, the one Air Force installation where the letter was not widely distributed was none other than the U.S. Air Force Academy. After four weeks of zero effort on the part of the then-current superintendent⁷⁶ to disseminate the memo throughout the service academy, the Military Religious Freedom Foundation rented a billboard outside the school’s gates prominently displaying it.⁷⁷ Bowing to local pressure, General Gould finally distributed the memo three days later.⁷⁸

Military commanders have to make ethical and moral judgments every day, but with the growing religious fundamentalism in the officer corps, the criteria by which these judgments are made are of increasing concern. When commanders make it clear to their subordinates that “spiritual fitness” is on par with physical fitness, neutrality between religions—and more specifically, between religion and non-religion—is put at risk. More and more, military leaders are confusing their own personal religious beliefs with their moral duties as commanders. To them, it is very difficult to separate religious belief from ethical action, blurring the lines

between their duty to their god, their duty to their subordinates, and their duty to their superiors and country.

CASE STUDY #3: Faith-based Leadership Development

Glen Shaffer, Robert Boykin and Johnny Weida may have been among the first prominent generals to capture public attention for promoting their own personal religious beliefs in the course of their official duties, but they certainly aren't isolated cases. Air Force Major Generals Jack Catton and Cecil Richardson provide two additional examples of unapologetic zeal by senior leaders in promoting their fundamentalist religious beliefs to those serving under them. Appearing in uniform and sitting behind his desk in 2006, Catton invited in the *Christian Embassy*, an unofficial, but government-sounding organization that is a part of *Campus Crusade for Christ*,⁷⁹ to film his testimony on the need to “build disciples of Christ.”⁸⁰ Also appearing in the video with Catton were another Air Force major general and two Army brigadier generals, along with Peter Geren, then acting Secretary of the Army.⁸¹ Unlike the findings at the Air Force Academy a year earlier, the Department of Defense's Inspector General deemed that these senior officers endorsing a private organization in uniform was a breach of ethics, and recommended “corrective actions” be taken.⁸² Although Catton's career ended when he retired in 2008,⁸³ Geren was named to a permanent post before the investigation was completed, and Robert L. Caslen Jr. was named as the next Commandant of Cadets at the West Point. Unsurprisingly, Caslen was eventually promoted to lieutenant general in March 2010, following his tenure as the Commandant of the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College.⁸⁴ After seven months as Chief of the Office of Security Cooperation — Iraq, in January 2013 it was announced that Caslen was being promoted to the prestigious post of Superintendent (commanding officer) of the United States Military Academy at West Point,⁸⁵ an institution that has itself recently suffered complaints of Christian bias.⁸⁶

With so much ado about religious expression in the military, many might wonder where the chaplains were in all of this. Not to be left out, and staying in lock step with his boss, Major General Charles Baldwin (who quietly ordered the RSVP training at the Air Force Academy to be “more Christian,”), then-Brigadier General Cecil Richardson (the second highest ranking chaplain for the Air Force) told the *New York Times* in a 2005 interview following the Air Force Academy scandal, “we will not proselytize, but we reserve the right to evangelize the unchurched.” In Richardson's defense, he wasn't speaking off the cuff, but rather reading from

leadership guidance.⁸⁷ Reacting to a firestorm of criticism, the Air Force pulled the guiding document, which had been an official part of its “code of ethics” for chaplains. Although never sanctioned by the Air Force or the Department of Defense, the document written by an outside private organization had been routinely given to chaplains at their initial training under the auspices of official policy. Once again, few critics were surprised.⁸⁸

But the story with Richardson did not end there. Three years later, after having been promoted to the highest position in the chaplain corps, the *Air Force Times* interviewed Major General Richardson and asked him about his philosophy on pastoral care of junior military members. The reporter inquired, “Say a Christian chaplain is visited by a troubled airman who isn’t interested in hearing about religion. Do you trust your chaplains to advise that airman without steering him toward Jesus?” Without pause, the general smiled and replied, “Well, you know, sometimes Jesus is what they need.”⁸⁹

Such a view—as articulated by the highest-ranking chaplain in the Air Force—is not merely his own opinion, but rather an articulation of policy. Part of the reason that unofficial documents and statements such as Cecil Richardson’s take on the role of policy is partly a function of the disproportionate over-representation of fundamentalist Christian chaplains currently serving on active-duty. According to a 2011 report from *The Christian Century*:

“...government statistics show that the nation's corps of chaplains leans heavily toward Christianity, failing to mirror the military it serves. Even though just 3 percent of the military's enlisted personnel and officers call themselves Southern Baptist, Pentecostal or some form of evangelical, 33 percent of military chaplains are members of one of those groups, according to the Pentagon. The disparity could soon widen: data from the Air Force indicate that 87 percent of those seeking to become chaplains are enrolled at evangelical divinity schools.”⁹⁰

The overrepresentation of evangelical Christian chaplains took root during the Vietnam War. According to historical scholar Anne Loveland, while many mainline Protestant churches opposed the Vietnam War, many evangelical churches supported it to show their patriotism and oppose communism.⁹¹ While applauding the war effort at home, they commissioned chaplains to minister to the American soldiers abroad. Having gained a foothold in the military arena, their political influence increased throughout the 1970s, and flourished in the 1980s.⁹² Under the Reagan Administration, regulations for the endorsement of chaplains were modified to make it easier for evangelicals to increase their numbers, and increase their numbers they did. Today Christians fill 98% of chaplain billets, even though the general military population is only 68.6%

Christian.⁹³ Likewise, of that group, fundamentalist Christian chaplains are disproportionately represented.⁹⁴

Recent research also indicates that religious messages are beginning to migrate not just into commander's offices, but also into the military schoolhouses as well. A 2011 Harvard study found significant evidence of Christian themes present across the professional publications of the Air Force. In a 138-page report, the author summarized his findings:

“The evidence found in the professional journals of the USAF included unique Christian terminology and general themes used in the evangelical Christian subculture. While the majority of the articles in the professional journal of the USAF contained material on air, space, and cyber issues, there was enough evidence to determine that the proselytizing of Christian messages helped contribute to the current environment of evangelical Christian influence in the USAF.”⁹⁵

Although the author of the study found no direct evidence of systemic proselytization within professional military educational organizations, the body of evidence clearly illustrates the pervasiveness of Christian fundamentalism in course materials.

Evidence also suggests that senior military leaders have taken action to withhold from public view some of the most egregious instances of religious promotion within the education and training realm. A prime example comes from a 2006 paper entitled “*Don't Ask, Don't Tell: A Strategic Consideration.*” The research was conducted by a senior Coast Guard officer who authored a paper as a student thesis at the U.S. Army War College, which argued against the repeal of the military's gay ban. It cited evidence that “anal sex leads to leakage of fecal material that can easily become chronic.”⁹⁶ Furthermore, the author cited the Bible and numerous fundamentalist Christian sources to condemn homosexual behavior as immoral.⁹⁷ Although the document had not been officially classified, it was categorized in such a manner that it was neither searchable nor accessible to anyone outside of official military channels. It remains available to faculty and students who wish to access it for their own “research” needs, but held in a secure area with all other classified material.

These examples illustrate the extent to which religious dogma is creeping into the military educational realm with such “research” going unchallenged. Recent calls for Congress to close the military's war college system are due partly to the military's inability to self-correct.⁹⁸ As a former war college faculty member puts it, “military culture has become far out of sync with the culture of the society that pays its way.”⁹⁹

SECTION III: ANALYSIS

The case studies presented in this paper are neither isolated nor happenstance aberrations. They illustrate how effectively the fundamentalist Christian movement has been integrated into the culture and structure of the U.S. military in recent years. To test a hypothesis of pluralism, an informal study was conducted in 2010 with groups of officers from across the military services using the “The Oath of Equal Character.”¹⁰⁰ Although the oath was originally authored from a Christian’s perspective, one could substitute their own belief set, as applicable. Simply put, the oath is as follows:

“I am a <Christian>. I will not use my position to influence individuals or the chain of command to adopt <Christianity>, because I believe that soldiers who are not <Christians> are just as trustworthy, honorable and good as those who are. Their standards are as high as mine. Their integrity is beyond reproach. They will not lie, cheat or steal, and they will not fail when called upon to serve. I trust them completely and without reservation. They can trust me in exactly the same way.”

When informally responding in a military academic setting, 35% of mid-grade military officers admitted that they could never affirm the oath because “it isn’t true.” In other words, they believe that someone who doesn’t share their own faith cannot be as trustworthy as someone else who does.¹⁰¹ This was a remarkable finding given that trust underpins nearly every aspect of military command. There are officers in command at all levels who believe, in stark contrast to the constitutional prohibition against religious tests for any and all public offices, that religious belief congruence among group members is *necessary* to attain mutual trust in an organization.¹⁰² For this group of officers, the guiding leadership principle is *not* one based on professional ethics, but rather a variant based on a narrow, sectarian, religious-moral view.

One of the more clever arguments supporting the religious-moral view is rooted in Sekulow’s “warrior ethos.” To those who ascribe to this view, one’s moral character is synonymous with his or her religious devotion. The religious-moral view contends that: (1) one must be moral to be a military professional; (2) those who are not religious are of a lesser moral fitness; therefore, (3) those with the strongest religious convictions are “best fit” to serve in the military, particularly in a position of authority or command. This religious-moral view underlies the “warrior ethos” characterized into “three disciplines: physical, mental and moral.”¹⁰³ To preserve the moral standing of the warrior ethos, it becomes necessary to prevent all external influences from meddling with the existing organizational culture¹⁰⁴ — the same culture in which the fundamentalist Christian movement has been so effective in infiltrating.¹⁰⁵ This is one

reason why there was such animosity within the senior ranks of the military toward the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy in 2011, allowing homosexuals to serve openly. Because many adherents to the religious-moral view see homosexuality as “an abomination unto their particular God,” homosexuals are thus felt to be immoral and, therefore, unfit to serve *or* lead.¹⁰⁶ Among the many problems with relying on a religious-moral view,¹⁰⁷ two of the most critical are (1) the role of organizational exemplars in the socialization process; and, (2) the structural exclusivity created by fostering a strong internal culture with deeply-embedded sectarian religious values.

Theoretical Considerations

The military socializes its members as well as any institution or organization could. As part of the socialization process during basic military training, individuals are stripped of their identities and intensely subjugated to those senior to them in the chain of command. Once an individual is appropriately “broken down” and has relinquished his or her personal identity in the basic training environment, the military trainers begin the process of building the trainee back up into a collective identity.¹⁰⁸ During this stage, individuals engage in a sense-making process to better understand how to deal with the nascent complexity of adopting the new attitudes, beliefs and behaviors.¹⁰⁹ Organizational exemplars become a profound influence, particularly in military training. As part of the sense-making process, individuals identify those around them who best epitomize success in the organization. With such a limited scope, the exemplars chosen are often the military training instructors and training commanders themselves. The resilience of the development that occurs during initial organizational socialization¹¹⁰ cannot be overstated. Thus, when military training leaders, such as many of those identified in this paper, contaminate the socialization process with their own personal beliefs, individuals cannot effectively make a distinction between the exemplar’s personal and professional attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. As the individuals internalize and emulate the behaviors of the organizational exemplars, a fractal, self-replicating effect takes hold. The fundamentalist Christian movement, understanding of the power of exemplars in the socialization process, is clearly on par with the military. Not only do they accommodate the system-socialization process as well as any military training organization, they have also been able to infiltrate and co-opt certain facets of military training itself at all levels, and thus perpetuate the religious-moral view within the military.

The second major concern with a religious-moral view is rooted in its desire for exclusivity, a characteristic embraced by both military and religious organizations alike. The

very nature of the evangelical Christian tradition is to save the souls of everyone outside the set of already professed Christians.¹¹¹ One is either in the group or not in the group. Examining the religious conflicts between Protestant and Catholics, Sunnis and Shiites, or the recent division in the American Episcopal Church, exclusivity defines the boundaries of religious groups.

Likewise, the culture of the military has become increasingly exclusive. Conservative activist Elaine Donnelly, like Sekulow, argues for the necessity to maintain the status quo within military culture to preserve the military's effectiveness. Regardless of the veracity of the argument, they contend that military commanders should be trusted to train their troops as they see fit without any unwanted outside influence of any kind.

One critic of this argument, international relations scholar Andrew Bacevich warns of the danger of "praetorianism, warriors becoming enamored with their moral superiority and impatient with the failings of those they are charged to defend."¹¹² Reflecting on the civilian-military relations crisis instigated by General Stanley McChrystal that led to his firing in 2010 (after a *Rolling Stone* magazine expose), Bacevich explains:

"The smug disdain for high-ranking civilians casually expressed by McChrystal and his chief lieutenants — along with the conviction that 'Team America,' as these officers style themselves, was bravely holding out against a sea of stupidity and corruption — suggests that the officer corps of the United States is not immune to this affliction."¹¹³

Just as with fundamentalist Christian organizations who view themselves as possessing a superior belief system, even absolute truth, the parallel belief within the military holds that only members of that culture represent the true America — "*Team America*."¹¹⁴ Although McChrystal's words and deeds had nothing to do with religious fundamentalism, they are indicative of the widening gap between military culture and American culture in general. Any added layer of religious fundamentalism only promises to increase civil-military tension, especially when espoused by those who view God as a higher authority than the chain of command. Soldiers are taught to "obey any lawful and moral order."¹¹⁵ However, allowing the word "moral" to take on a dogmatic religious connotation opens a Pandora's Box of sectarian rivalry and institutional fracture.

Thus, civilian leaders must proactively and preemptively draw a clear line for senior officers who believe that they must, in their official capacity, win hearts and minds for their particular god. Such a challenge to a democratic body becomes especially difficult to meet when many of those elected leaders have the same sectarian religious convictions as the military

leaders under their charge. The evidence has shown that too often problems with commanders who endorse fundamentalist Christianity in their professional roles are not only overlooked, but in some cases, defended or endorsed.¹¹⁶ The following section proposes several ways in which this might be corrected.

SECTION IV: RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopting any of the following recommendations would be an important contribution to restoring behavior that avoids the improprieties of official endorsement of religious beliefs. Whether it comes from the Executive or Legislative branches (preferably both), positive action is needed to establish clear behavioral limits and proscriptions for military members at all levels.¹¹⁷ None of the recommendations offered here would prevent anyone from expressing his or her own beliefs just because they don a military uniform. However, because religious beliefs are a deeply personal and unavoidably divisive and sectarian matter, they must remain personal and completely out of the professional realm, where neutrality must be the primary goal.

1. **Beware claims of false progress.** As noted by Blake Page at West Point, the nonreligious still have little voice, little support and little respect. Likewise, the Air Force Academy's declaration of "Mission Accomplished" with respect to religious diversity misses the point. We need to call a charade a charade and hold military leaders accountable for real change that eliminates all religious tests for military service, most critically the implicit tests that so many aspiring young service members face on a daily basis. The point is beyond just tolerance of religious beliefs or lack of religious beliefs, but rather *strict and clear institutional neutrality* on the matter of religious belief overall. To this day, the Air Force Academy specifically, and the military services generally, have failed to adequately understand this most basic premise.

2. **Stop treating command-sponsored functions like sporting events.**¹¹⁸ Everyone has the right to bow their head and silently pray in any way they see fit. A moment of silence allows for all to observe it without any undue influence or seeming endorsement of a specific sect or religious belief in general. When it comes to religious rights, majority rule is irrelevant. At private events, where there really is a way for individuals to freely opt in or out—and without

professional repercussions—judgment should be left to those organizing the event.

3. Hold commanders accountable to a “Grade School Standard” for inappropriate speech.¹¹⁹ No longer should coercive evangelizing or proselytizing result in a promotion or pay increase. A junior military member can be courts-martialed for inappropriate speech to a senior leader. The same standard should be held in the other direction. In fact, senior enlisted and officers should be held to a higher standard. Whether insubordination or abuse of rank and authority through coercive evangelizing, inappropriate speech that undermines good order and discipline should never be tolerated, and always be punished. We don’t let privates speak out of line without firm consequences. We should hold colonels and generals to an equal, if not more exacting standard.

4. “Reprise: Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” As a commander, this is the best advice to guide discussions of your own spiritual beliefs or those of your subordinates—stop assuming others think like you, and don’t ask if you suspect they don’t. What religious beliefs they may or may not hold do not matter, precisely because the Constitution and human decency says they do not.

5. If someone suggests it would be a good idea to rename your unit “The Crusaders” as you deploy to the Middle East, don’t. Commanders continue to find creative ways to promote their religious beliefs and make the act seem official. It is not, and they must stop pretending it is. “Tradition” is often nothing more than a thinly veiled excuse to keep doing what you want to do without having to appropriately justify it. Past violations of the Constitution do not excuse continued violations of the Constitution.

6. The Golden Rule applies to you, too. Violations are violations, even if the majority of people do not express concern. You tolerate a certain behavior likely because you just happen to agree. If you did not, you would be the loudest voice in the opposition.

7. Not everything looks better in camouflage. Stop printing official military logos on Bibles and other religious paraphernalia to give them the appearance of

“military issue” literature. If you think this is not a problem, consider doing the same thing with the Holy Qur’an and distributing it. If you find *this* idea offensive, you get the point.

8. **The show must not go on.** It almost defies understanding how, in 2010, Army leaders engendered controversy by sponsoring the “Rock the Fort” evangelical concert at Fort Bragg in North Carolina. When challenged, they responded that any group who wanted to put on a concert to promote their beliefs would receive equal support. That was until Sergeant Justin Griffith planned a pro-atheism event called “Rock Beyond Belief.” The event was nearly cancelled when Army leadership refused for months to provide support.¹²⁰ These controversies illustrate the wisdom of neutrality. It is time to put an end to all command-endorsed religious activities, evangelistic rallies, prayer breakfasts, and command-advertised religious retreats. There are few clearer examples of government entanglement with religion and religious organizations—a clear and present affront to the very First Amendment the military is tasked with defending.

9. **Consider reforms to the chaplaincy.** The military should explore options on how to best provide secular members of the armed forces with the same rights and benefits that religious members receive, including the possibility of instituting a secular program similar to the religious chaplaincy program. One of the more prominent recommendations by Jason Torpy of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers is to include a population of humanist chaplains in the chaplain corps of all services, to serve the needs of *all* service members, not just the religious ones. Having metastasized with fundamentalist Christianity, measures are necessary for military organizations to bring the proportions of spiritual leaders into better alignment with the population being served. Relying on lessons learned from a recent debacle involving the Department of the Army, Arlington National Cemetery and the funeral of a nonreligious WWII veteran, the military must afford respect to all who serve in uniform, regardless of one’s religious or irreligious beliefs.¹²¹

10. **End the quasi-official status of evangelical groups.** The best way to adhere to guiding legal prescriptions is to let religious organizations do as they

wish, but do not help or hinder them. As a commander, what you do for one, you must do for all, and if you cannot do for all, do not do for any.¹²²

11. Before you can take command, publicly affirm the Oath of Equal Character. When they take command, officers and senior enlisted individuals should acknowledge that those under them have no obligation to change their belief systems. A good Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine, or Coastguardsman can hold a variety of beliefs or a variety of doubts, and commanders and leaders should publicly acknowledge this before being entrusted with responsibility over them.^{123, 124}

12. Stop the next Crusade before it begins. Change the wording of General Order 1B to “*evangelizing or proselytizing of any religion.*”¹²⁵ Although a very simple change, banning any sort of aggressive recruitment of military members in another country, for reasons of national security, just makes sense.

SECTION V: CONCLUSION

“Let me give you a word on the philosophy of reform. The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims, have been born of earnest struggle. If there is no struggle, there is no progress. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to — and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong, which will be imposed upon them. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”

—Frederick Douglass, August 3, 1857

The inappropriate behavior of fundamentalist Christian military leaders will not likely change on its own. Ample rules and regulations remain in place to appropriately separate the religious beliefs of military leaders from their official duties and responsibilities. Most lacking, however, is the social and political will to enforce the existing rules and hold military commanders accountable for breaches of conduct.

The cases outlined in this paper raise the fundamental question captured by the classic Latin dictum, *quis custodiet ipsos custodes* – *who will guard the guards themselves?* Based on the evidence presented herein, the status quo remains resilient. Military institutions have shown significant reticence to discipline any of their own who use the power of their official positions

to promote their own fundamentalist religious beliefs. Fundamentalist Christianity continues to run rampant through the senior ranks of the military simply because it is allowed to do so. After all, every system is perfectly designed to yield the behaviors observed.

The answer to this dictum is that the American people, both elected officials and ordinary citizens, are tasked with guarding the guards. As the previous pages make clear, there is a serious problem with religious endorsement in the U.S. Armed Forces which needs to be immediately addressed and changed. It is up to those with social and political power to demand this action. If this problem persists, members of the military will continue to face hostility and indoctrination, and the U.S. government will continue to experience public relations problems in future military missions. If it is addressed, the U.S. military could become a neutral and safe space for members of all religious backgrounds, and none at all, and the image of the America, as seen through its military forces abroad, could change from one of Christianity to one of a diverse people united for liberty and justice for all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James E. Parco is an associate professor of economics and business at Colorado College. He graduated with bachelors' degree in economics from the U.S. Air Force Academy and was commissioned in 1991. He went on to earn an MBA from the College of William & Mary and a PhD from the University of Arizona, where he studied under Amnon Rapoport and Nobel Laureate Vernon Smith. After completing his doctorate, he returned to the faculty of the U.S. Air Force Academy from 2003-2007.

Prior to that, he served on the National Security Council at the White House during the Clinton Administration as well as in a diplomatic capacity overseas with the American Embassy in Tel Aviv. He received the Thomas Jefferson National Award from the Military Religious Freedom Foundation in 2008. In 2009, he was awarded the Military Officers' Association of America's Outstanding Faculty Award for his work at Air Command and Staff College, and in 2010, was named educator of the year for the U.S. Air Force's education and training command.

He retired from active duty as a lieutenant colonel in 2011.

Parco is a co-author of four books:

[The 52nd Floor](#): Thinking Deeply About Leadership

[Attitudes Aren't Free](#): Thinking Deeply About Diversity in the US Armed Forces

[Echoes of Mind](#): Thinking Deeply About Humanship

[The Rise and Fall of DADT](#): Evolution of Government Policy Towards Homosexuality in the US Military

He can be reached at jim.parco@coloradocollege.edu

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¹⁰³ Sekulow and Ash, *ibid.* 104.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ For the sake of space, the religious connection is not explicated here but is very well articulated by the authors themselves as evidenced by their chapter’s title “Religious Rights and Military Service.”

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