

March 2014

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## Armed Forces Becoming a Bible-Free Zone?

Air Force Academy promotes an atheist event, but drops hammer on Bible verses.

*"God who gave us life gave us Liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?"* —Thomas Jefferson (1774)

Interesting that much congressional attention is focused at the moment on the hostile Russian incursion into the Crimean Peninsula in the southern region of Ukraine, while another egregious and unprovoked campaign is quickly advancing just across the Potomac at the Pentagon. High-ranking military officials, are not-so-quietly resurrecting the infamous Clintonian "Don't ask, don't tell policy" for America's young men and women in uniform. Only this time, homosexuals are not being placed on notice. It is evangelical Christians who are being shoved into a closet.

The Air Force Academy is defending its promotion of "Ask an Atheist Day," which was advertised on Academy bulletin screens and by official email sent to the Cadet Wing. This, just one week after a Christian cadet was pressured into removing a Bible verse from his personal white board because it allegedly offended non-Christian cadets. All cadet doors are equipped with erasable whiteboards that are used for personal messages and statements. This cadet wrote: *"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me..."* (Galatians 2:20).

Following a complaint directed to the Academy's Superintendent, Lt. Gen. Michelle Johnson, it was promptly "suggested" to the cadet that he remove the Bible verse, even though such posts are common. "Johnson claimed, 'The scripture was below the cadet's name on a white board and could cause subordinates to doubt the leader's religious impartiality.'" <sup>1</sup>

A columnist for *The Patriot Post* asks: "Does Johnson plan to issue a standing order requiring adherence to a single uniform standard regarding all manifestations of expression associated with the culture, ethnic or religious background of a cadet so that none of those factors might be perceived as impartial?" Bet we can answer that one. A single uniform standard expression will henceforth apply only with respect to the Christian religion.

Another agitator feigning extreme offense at the posting of Galatians 2:20, is Mikey Weinstein who promotes himself as the head of the Religious Freedom Foundation. Weinstein told *Fox News* that the whiteboard posting "clearly elevated [fundamentalist Christianity] over all others at an already virulently hyper-fundamentalist Christian institution." Weinstein added:

"It massively poured fundamentalist Christian gasoline on an already raging out-of-control conflagration of fundamentalist Christian tyranny, exceptionalism and supremacy at USAFA. You cannot put a picture in front of your room of a white person whipping a black person. You can't put a picture of anything that's denigrating outside your room." <sup>2</sup>

So far, other Service Academies have not been burdened with Weinstein because he has made the AFA his testing ground for atheist challenges. But, apparently he has the ear of Barack Obama.

While Liberty Institute attorney Mike Berry believes the AFA actions are a direct violation of Section 532 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the Obama administration disagrees. During a private meeting with Col. Paul Barzler, the Air Force Academy Staff Judge Advocate, Col. Barzler is reported to have said [according to Obama's Department of Defense (DoD) policy], "the term 'religious exercise' does not include written or verbal speech." <sup>Ibid</sup>

However, during the rancorous debates that preceded passage of the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2014, President Obama agreed to an amendment designed to protect the *First Amendment* rights of members of the Armed Services. Section 532 which was signed by Obama in December of 2013, includes "protective rights language" proposed by Rep. John Calvin Fleming (R-LA). Fleming notes:

"The conscience rights of our men and women in uniform and their chaplains must be protected... This amendment is aimed at stopping the unjust threats and reprimands against service members who have been speaking or acting in accord with their deeply held beliefs, while ensuring that military necessity and readiness are not compromised." <sup>Ibid</sup>

Unfortunately, Section 532 is being disregarded along with other military ordinances the President doesn't personally support. An illustration is found in a follow-up press release by Lt. Gen Michelle Johnson, concerning the "Galatians" matter. She writes: "While we swear an oath to Support and Defend the Constitution of the United States, Airmen are also bound by [Air Force Instruction 1-1]." For the record, that is a 2009 Obama military regulation which was designed to suppress religious speech. But here's the kicker; even the *oath* itself that Gen. Johnson refers to, has been quietly modified.

In 2010, "somebody" at the AFA removed the words "So Help Me God" from the Officer and Enlisted Oaths in the AFA's official handbook—words that continue to be omitted in violation of federal statutes and the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

According to the *Patriot Post*, the "AFA's leadership malfeasance spilled over into recent Air Force budget testimony before Congress, with both Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James and Air Force Chief of Staff General Mark Welsh being asked for a detailed explanation of why the AFA is suppressing religious expression." <sup>Ibid</sup> Obviously flustered, Gen. Welsh responded that no religious purging is taking place. When asked by Rep. Randy Forbes (R-VA) what other inspirational quotes cadets have had to remove from their whiteboards, Welsh couldn't think of any specifics, but said there have been hundreds.

Concerning the purging of "So help me God," from the AFA's official handbook, Welsh said he was told that it was "a printing error on a wall calendar," not an intended omission. Believe that?

Former special ops commander Lt. Gen. William "Jerry" Boykin, (USA Ret.), says "The very troops who defend our religious freedom are at risk of having their own taken away." He is very concerned that if America's young soldiers with no particular beliefs are sent to confront committed enemies who have strongly held beliefs for which they are willing to die, no good outcome can be expected.

### **So what's next?**

Some AFA cadets have decided to stand their ground by posting "IN GOD WE TRUST" on their door whiteboards. We say, "God bless them." But, is it too far-fetched to wonder if Gen. Johnson will suggest even our National Motto be removed from her cadets' doors?

Maybe that's a good question for your congressman during his next local town hall meeting.

*Rick Forcier*

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander, Mark, "Obama's DoD v The Constitution," *The Patriot Post*, 3/19/2014

<sup>2</sup> Ibid