

THE THREAT OF AN EVANGELIZED US MILITARY

By

A. Hewitt Rose, III

Coercive evangelizing and official promotion of evangelical Protestantism is rife and systemic within the US military. Soldiers at Ft. Eustis who would not volunteer to attend a command-sponsored evangelical concert were marched to their barracks and punished with a lockdown until the concert ended. US taxpayers partially funded and Ft. Bragg chaplains co-sponsored an evangelical rally held on Fort Bragg's Main Parade Field and intended to take "the Christian message to all of Fort Bragg and the surrounding community." Officers gave evangelical missionaries from the Gideons both an introduction and preferential access to enlisted recruits. Cadets at the U.S. Air Force Academy face a gauntlet of evangelical professors, staff, chaplains, and upper class members, with command authority, who pressure them to attend worship services, receive evangelical instruction, and evangelize their fellow cadets. Commanders pressure soldiers to attend marriage conferences run by the evangelical Focus on the Family, which has a Department of Defense contract to host the conferences.

Some 60% of military chaplains are evangelical, while only 40% of active duty personnel are evangelical. Many of the evangelical chaplains see their mission not as meeting the diverse religious needs of those in the service, but rather converting those not yet "born again."

Members of the US Military and civilian missionaries, backed and protected by the US military, also illegally evangelize foreign civilians at gun point. In Iraq, soldiers drove a Bradley fighting vehicle around in Samara with the phrase "Jesus killed Mohammed" painted on the side in Arabic. More than two million Arabic-language Bibles were distributed in Iraq by some 40 military chaplains. In Afghanistan, Colonel Gary Hensley, a division chaplain for the 101st Airborne and the chief Army chaplain for all of Afghanistan, was filmed in a service in Bagram's main chapel surrounded by Bibles translated into Pashto and Dar and telling soldiers to get out there and "hunt people for Jesus." The military allowed two civilian missionaries to be embedded with US troops in Afghanistan so they could evangelize Afghans.

Religious discrimination against non-evangelicals is also rife in the US military. Atheist Army specialist Jerry Hall, a turret gunner on his second tour in Iraq, was denied a promotion and then was hounded out of the Army by death threats and taunting soldiers chasing him and threatening to beat him up. A Mormon former Marine said that half of the eight chaplains he met while in the military tried to convert him and described his faith as "wicked" or "Satanic." Army Specialist Zachari Klawonn, a Muslim, was harassed and taunted by fellow soldiers, had his Koran torn up, and was ordered not to fast and pray. The USAF Chaplain of the Year explained to Air Force Academy cadets that those not "born again will burn in the fires of Hell."

Evangelical groups have explicitly targeted the US military in order to establish a base from which they can convert the US government and the rest of the world. For example, the Officers' Christian Fellowship, with 15,000 members and active in 80% of military bases, has a vision of a "spiritually transformed military, with ambassadors for Christ in uniform." The aim of the Military Ministry of the Campus Crusade for Christ, located at all the military academies and basic training

centers, is to “Evangelize and Disciple All Enlisted Members of the US Military” so as to “[t]ransform our culture through the US Military” and to “[b]uild Christian military leaders and influence our nation for Christ . . .” Their ultimate vision is “[t]ransforming the nations of the world through the militaries of the world.”

Much of the military’s coercive evangelizing, promotion of evangelical Protestantism, and discrimination against non-evangelicals is illegal. Military regulations bar religious discrimination and promote religious equal opportunity, but the regulations are often ignored or neglected by commanders and frustrated by the broken military complaint system. Military sponsorship of evangelical concerts and rallies, religion-specific public prayer by military chaplains at events with mandatory attendance, privileged access for evangelical missionaries, superior officers evangelizing their subordinates, chaplains evangelizing outside of worship services, and toleration of discrimination against non-Evangelicals are all an immoral and unconstitutional establishment of religion by government authority. Nevertheless, enforcement of the law is difficult, because civilian courts treat the military as a specialized society and defer to military necessity and judgment.

An evangelized military is also dangerous. A religiously co-opted military serving as armed warriors for Christ and formulating and following its own policies would destroy civilian control of the military and threaten a domestic religious tyranny. If we are propelled into foreign armed crusades for Christ, then the US in principle becomes no different than Radical Islam.

An evangelized military is militarily ineffective. If it limits itself to evangelical warriors, then it excludes needed personnel and talent and narrows military judgment. An evangelical US military cannot be trusted in non-evangelical countries, particularly in Islamic countries. Attempted conversions at gunpoint breed hatred and resistance.

Evangelicals argue that God comes before country. Their argument is either an argument for an evangelical theocracy or a vague and ill-thought-out argument for personal civil disobedience. By law, members of the armed services must take an oath of office to “support and defend the Constitution;” that is, country first. Otherwise, they would be paid vigilantes on their own mission, or worse, the organized means for a tyrannical ends. If a service member believes that they have a supervening duty to coercively evangelize, then they should exercise their moral choice by not serving in the military.

Evangelicals also argue that evangelizing is part of their religion, a moral duty, and so is protected by the free exercise of religion clause of the Constitution. For coercive evangelizing, courts disagree. More importantly, such a binary formulation of tolerance—the tolerant must tolerate the intolerant, because intolerance is wrong—is paradoxical. Tolerance is a matter of degrees. Respect tolerance—you don’t have to agree with my belief, but you must treat it as worthy of discussion—is necessary for a society that values religious freedom and pluralism. Those Evangelicals who see only their rights instead of societal values are opposed to these fundamental American values.

There is no easy, speedy, or sure solution to a problem that has become entrenched in the US military over six decades. Any solution must come from within the military and from public and

governmental pressure. It is possible. Despite resistance, military culture has changed before on the integration of blacks, women, and homosexuals. Further, the ideal of an apolitical military under firm civilian control and loyal to the Constitution first and foremost remains a bedrock value in the military. In particular, the military must

- (1) Change certain military guidelines and regulations.
- (2) Investigate and publicize the problem of religious intolerance.
- (3) Change the make up and nature of military chaplains.
- (4) Reform the military culture.
- (5) Dismiss some Evangelicals from the military.

For more information, [follow this link](#).