

Military Evangelism Deeper, Wider Than First Thought

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For US Army soldiers entering basic training at Fort Jackson Army base in Columbia, South Carolina, accepting Jesus Christ as their personal savior appears to be as much a part of the nine-week regimen as the vigorous physical and mental exercises the troops must endure.

That's the message directed at Fort Jackson soldiers, some of whom appear in photographs in government issued fatigues, holding rifles in one hand, and Bibles in their other hand.

Frank Bussey, director of Military Ministry at Fort Jackson, has been telling soldiers at Fort Jackson that "government authorities, police and the military = God's Ministers,"

Bussey's teachings from the "God's Basic Training" Bible study guide he authored says US troops have "two primary responsibilities": "to praise those who do right" and "to punish those who do evil - "God's servant, an angel of wrath." Bussey's teachings directed at Fort Jackson soldiers were housed on the Military Ministry at [Fort Jackson web site](#). Late Wednesday, the web site was taken down without explanation. Bussey did not return calls for comment. The [web site text](#), however, can still be viewed in an archived format.

The Christian right has been successful in spreading its fundamentalist agenda at US military installations around the world for decades. But the movement's meteoric rise in the US military came in large part after 9/11 and immediately after the US invaded Iraq in March of 2003. At a time when the United States is encouraging greater religious freedom in Muslim nations, soldiers on the battlefield have told disturbing stories of being force-fed fundamentalist Christianity by highly controversial, apocalyptic "End Times" evangelists, who have infiltrated US military installations throughout the world with the blessing of high-level officials at the Pentagon. Proselytizing among military personnel has been conducted openly, in violation of the basic tenets of the United States Constitution.

Perhaps no other fundamentalist Christian group is more influential than Military Ministry, a national organization and a subsidiary of the controversial fundamentalist Christian organization Campus Crusade for Christ. Military Ministry's national web site boasts it has successfully "targeted" basic training installations, or "gateways," and has successfully converted thousands of soldiers to evangelical Christianity.

Military Ministry says its staffers are responsible for "working with Chaplains and Military personnel to bring lost soldiers closer to Christ, build them in their faith and send them out into the world as Government paid missionaries" - which appears to be a clear-cut violation of federal law governing the separation of church and state.

“Young recruits are under great pressure as they enter the military at their initial training gateways,” the group has stated on its web site. “The demands of drill instructors push recruits and new cadets to the edge. This is why they are most open to the ‘good news.’ We target specific locations, like Lackland AFB [Air Force base] and Fort Jackson, where large numbers of military members transition early in their career. These sites are excellent locations to pursue our strategic goals.”

Mikey Weinstein, the founder and president of the government watchdog organization the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, whose group has been closely tracking Military Ministry’s activities at Fort Jackson and other military bases around the country, said in an interview that using “the machinery of the state” to promote any form of religion is “not only unconstitutional and un-American but it also creates a national security threat of the first order.”

A six-month investigation by MRFF has found Military Ministry’s staff has successfully targeted US soldiers entering basic training at Lackland Air Force Base and Fort Sam Houston, with the approval of the Army base’s top commanders.

“I’ve said it before and I will say it again,” Weinstein said. “We are in the process of creating a fundamentalist Christian Taliban and somebody has to do something to stop it now.”

Weinstein points out that on Fort Jackson’s Military Ministry web site, the basic training battalion commander, Lt. Col. David Snodgrass, and the battalion’s chaplain, Maj. Scott Bullock, who appear in uniform in a [photograph](#) with Bussey, is a clear-cut violation of Military rules. MRFF contacted Bussey via email on Wednesday to request information about the “similar programs” he claimed Fort Jackson has for soldiers of other faiths. Bussey, responding to MRFF via email, did not provide an answer to the watchdog group’s question, but, instead, he fired back a query of his own asking MRFF Senior Research Director Chris Rodda to direct him to the place in the Constitution where it states there is a “separation of church and state.”

Clause 3, Article VI of the Constitution forbids a religion test for any position in the federal government, and the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights says Congress shall make no law regarding an establishment of religion.

A spokesperson for the Fort Jackson Army base did not return calls for comment. Earlier this week, after MRFF exposed the potential constitutional violations between Military Ministry and the Fort Jackson Army base, Bussey added language to Military Ministry at Fort Jackson web site in the form of a “notice to MRFF and ACLU types” in bold red letters that says the Bible study classes are strictly voluntary, not command directed in any way, allows soldiers to exercise for themselves the right of freedom of religion ... and similar programs exist on Fort Jackson for Soldiers of all faiths.”

In July, the Pentagon’s inspector general (IG) responded to a complaint filed a year earlier by MRFF that accused Pentagon officials of violating the federal law governing the separation of church and state. The IG did not address the church/state issue, but he issued a 45-page report admonishing several high-level Pentagon officials for participating, while in uniform and on active duty, in a promotional video sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ’s Christian Embassy group. The IG report quoted one high-ranking military official as

saying he believed his participation in the video was acceptable because Campus Crusade for Christ had become so embedded in the Pentagon's day-to-day operations that he viewed the organization as a "quasi federal entity."

The IG report recommended the military officials who appeared in the video be disciplined, but the Pentagon would not say whether it has in fact punished the military officers who appeared in the video.

MRFF uncovered another recent Campus Crusade for Christ [promotional video](#) filmed at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs that would appear to violate the same military rules detailed in the IG report. Cadets and academy officials appear in uniform discussing how Campus Crusade for Christ helped strengthen their bonds with Jesus.

Scot Blom, the Campus Crusade for Christ director assigned to work at the Air Force Academy, says in the video the organization "has always been very intentional about going after the leaders or the future leaders" and that's why Campus Crusade for Christ picked the Air Force Academy to spread its fundamentalist Christian message. Every week, according to the video, cadets are encouraged to participate in a Bible study class called "cru" short for "crusade."

"Our purpose for Campus Crusade for Christ at the Air Force Academy is to make Jesus Christ *the* issue at the Air Force Academy and around the world," Blom says in the video. "They're government paid missionaries when they leave here."

Weinstein said the recent promotional video for Campus Crusade for Christ, and the photograph of US soldiers holding Bibles in one hand and rifles in the other posted on the Fort Jackson Military Ministry web site, gives the impression the Pentagon endorses the fundamentalist Christian organization and underscores that the occupation of Iraq and the war in Afghanistan appears to be more of a modern-day fundamentalist Christian crusade. That message, Weinstein said, could lead to more "jihad" against the United States.

Indeed. Weinstein, a former White House counsel during the Reagan administration, former general counsel to Texas billionaire and two-time presidential candidate H. Ross Perot and a former Air Force Judge Advocate General, said he had an "unexpected" telephone conversation with several senior Bush administration intelligence officials this week who encouraged him "to continue to fight for the separation of church and state in the US military" because, these senior administration intelligence officials told Weinstein, US troops are being put in harms way.

Weinstein said the senior administration intelligence officials told him they too have been tracking Islamic web sites where people have been discussing on message boards the fundamental Christianity issues Weinstein has raised within the US military. The intelligence officials told Weinstein they are concerned the fundamentalist Christian agenda surfacing in the military could lead to attacks against US soldiers. Weinstein said he could not identify the senior Bush intelligence administration officials he spoke with because they contacted him with the understanding they would not be named.

Fundamental Christianity's Influence on the Bush Administration

While Weinstein has worked tirelessly the past four years exposing the Christian Right's power grab within the military, he says the White House continues to thumb its nose at the

constitutional provision mandating the separation of church and state.

Indeed. This week a US District Court judge ruled the White House must disclose its visitor logs showing White House visits by nine fundamentalist Christian leaders.

The ruling was issued in response to a lawsuit filed by the government watchdog group, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), and could very well show how much influence fundamental Christian leaders such as James Dobson of Focus on the Family, Family Research Council president Tony Perkins, Gary Bauer and Moral Majority co-founder Jerry Falwell have had on the Bush's administration.

"We think that these conservative Christian leaders have had a very big impact," said Melanie Sloan, executive director of CREW. "The White House doesn't want to talk about how much influence these leaders have, and we want to talk about how much they do have."

Bush has been vocal about his fundamentalist Christian beliefs and how God has helped him during his presidency. A couple of weeks ago, the White House sent out Christmas cards signed by President Bush and his wife Laura that contained a Biblical passage from the Old Testament:

"You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you."

The inclusion of the Biblical passage caught the attention of longtime broadcaster Barbara Walters, who was a recipient of the presidential Christmas card.

Walters said she doesn't recall receiving "religious" holiday cards from past presidents and she wondered how non-Christians would receive such an overtly religious greeting.

"Usually in the past when I have received a Christmas card, it's been 'Happy Holidays' and so on," said Walters. "Don't you think it's a little interesting that the president of all the people is sending out a religious Christmas card? Does this also go to agnostics, and atheists, and Muslims?"

The Biblical passage inside the Christmas card did not amount to a constitutional violation because it was paid for by the Republican National Committee, but Weinstein said it's intolerable, nonetheless, because military officials believe they have the approval of the White House to allow fundamentalist Christian organizations and their leaders to proselytize in the military.

Recently, Bush nominated Brig. Gen. Cecil R. Richardson, the deputy Air Force Chief of Chaplains, to replace the outgoing Air Force Chief of Chaplains, and is in line to be promoted to Major General. [Richardson was quoted](#) in a front-page, July 12, 2005, New York Times story saying the Air Force reserves the right "to evangelize the unchurched." The distinction, Richardson said at the time, "is that proselytizing is trying to convert someone in an aggressive way, while evangelizing is more gently sharing the gospel."

Weinstein filed a federal lawsuit against the Air Force in October 2005 after Richardson's comments were published alleging "severe, systemic and pervasive" religious discrimination

within the Air Force. Weinstein is a 1977 graduate of the Academy. His sons and a daughter in law are also academy graduates. [Weinstein's book](#), "With God On Our Side: One Man's War Against An Evangelical Coup in America's Military," details the virulent anti-Semitism he was subjected to while he attended the academy and the religious intolerance that has permeated throughout the halls over the past several years.

The federal lawsuit Weinstein filed was dismissed, but the Air Force agreed to withdraw a document that authorized chaplains to evangelize members of the military. Still, Weinstein said MRFF would lobby senators to oppose Richardson's nomination because of his past statements Richardson has refused to retract.

"The Military Religious Freedom Foundation will do everything in our power to convince the United States Senate to reject the nomination of Brig. Gen. Cecil R. Richardson to become the chief of Air Force chaplains and his promotion to the rank of major general," Weinstein said in an interview. "We view Richardson as the prototypical poster child of the type of constitutional rapist we are trying to eradicate from existence within the US military."

In September, MRFF filed a lawsuit in federal court against Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and US Army Maj. Freddy Welborn, on behalf of an Army soldier stationed in Iraq. The complaint filed in US District Court in Kansas City alleges that Jeremy Hall's an Army specialist currently on active duty in Combat Operations Base Speicher, Iraq, First Amendment rights were violated when Welborn threatened to retaliate against Hall and block his reenlistment in the Army because of Hall's atheist beliefs.

"When You Join the Military, Then You Are Also in the Ministry"

The executive director of Military Ministry, retired US Army Major General Bob Dees, wrote in the organization's October 2005 "Life and Leadership" newsletter, "We must pursue our particular means for transforming the nation - through the military. And the military may well be the most influential way to affect that spiritual superstructure. Militaries exercise, generally speaking, the most intensive and purposeful indoctrination program of citizens...."

Moreover, Military Ministry's parent organization, Campus Crusade for Christ, has been re-distributing to military chaplains a DVD produced a decade ago where Tommy Nelson, a pastor at the Denton Bible Church in Denton, Texas, tells an audience of Texas A&M cadets and military officers when they join the military "then you are also in the ministry."

"I, a number of years ago, was speaking at the University of North Texas - it happens to be my alma mater, up in Denton, Texas - and I was speaking to an ROTC group up there, and when I stepped in I said, "It's good to be speaking to all you men and women who are in the ministry," and they all kind of looked at me, and I think they wondered if maybe I had found the wrong room, or if they were in the wrong room, and I assured them that I was speaking to men and women in the ministry, these that were going to be future officers," Nelson says in the DVD.

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