

U.S. Military's Middle East Crusade for Christ

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Last August the watchdog group, Military Religious Freedom Foundation, foiled a Pentagon plan that would have allowed the shipment of “freedom packages” to soldiers and Marines in Iraq. The parcels were put together by the fundamentalist Christian ministry, Straight Up, and contained Bibles, proselytizing tracts in English and Arabic, and the apocalyptic “Left Behind” computer game, in which Christian Tribulation forces convert or kill infidels—nonbelievers, Muslims and Jews.

On May 1 the Senate approved the promotion of Brigadier General Robert L. Caslen Jr. to Major General. Currently the commandant of cadets at West Point, he will become the commander of the 25th Infantry Division. He is also president of the stridently fundamentalist Officer's [Christian Fellowship](#), whose vision is a “spiritually transformed military, with ambassadors for Christ in uniform, empowered by the Holy Spirit”

General Caslen was promoted despite the Defense Department's recommended disciplinary action against him and several other senior military leaders because they had “improperly endorsed and participated with a nonfederal entity while in uniform” by participating in a promotional video for the Campus Crusade For Christ's Christian Embassy, an evangelical organization that ministers to Beltway politicians and sponsors weekly Bible studies at the Pentagon.

According to the DoD Inspector General's [report](#), one of the generals involved “asserted that Christian Embassy was treated as an instrumentality of the Pentagon Chaplain's office for over 25 years, and had effectively become a ‘quasi federal entity.’” Arguably, he believed his participation in the video was in the line of duty.

Considering both the Pentagon's evangelical proclivity and a 2006 Pew survey which found that of the major religious groups in America, evangelicals have the most negative views of Islam and Muslims, the U.S. sniper who was recently caught using the Quran for target practice in the Baghdad neighborhood of Radhwaniya might be excused for thinking the book was a legitimate target upon which to perfect his craft . . . excused for thinking he was acting in the line duty.

And is it any wonder that with evangelicals and fundamentalists at the very top of the military's officer corps —to say nothing of their Commander in Chief—that an enlisted Marine was passing out Christian “witnessing coins” inscribed in Arabic at a checkpoint in Fallujah? One side of the coin asked, “Where will you spend eternity?” An evangelical favorite, John 3:16, was on the flip side.

Sheik Adul-Rahman al-Zubaie, a tribal leader in Fallujah who was outraged by the Marine's

proselytizing said, “This event did not happen by chance, but it was planned and done intentionally.”

While the Marine’s proselytizing is not the official policy of the predominately Christian force occupying the predominately Islamic Iraq, it was done “in the line of duty” with a wink and a nod from his chain of command. Think Abu Ghraib!

From Fort Jackson, the Army’s largest basic training facility, where trainees are encouraged to attend Campus Crusade’s weekly “God’s Basic Training” programs, to the U.S. Air Force Academy where students are pressured to attend the Crusade’s weekly “cru” (short for crusade) Bible study, American military personnel are, as Campus Crusade’s Scot Blom gloats, “government paid missionaries” when they complete their training.

As the demands of fighting a perpetual war against “radical Islam” begins to strain both the military’s resources and the country’s resolve, the Pentagon has begun outsourcing larger chunks of the war to private contractors. Predictably, our “government paid missionaries” have become more expensive and much less controllable or accountable.

The Bush administration’s favorite contractor, Blackwater, is the most powerful private army in the world. It commands thousands of mercenaries in Iraq and Afghanistan, has over a billion dollars in government contracts, and enjoys complete immunity from prosecution for its theater of operations’ conduct.

Blackwater’s founder, Erik Prince, a staunchly conservative Catholic, has also served on the board of directors of Christian Freedom International, a crusading missionary organization operating in the overwhelmingly Islamic countries of Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Prince envisions an evangelical “end time” role for his warriors, “Everybody carries guns, just like Jeremiah rebuilding the temple in Israel—a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other.”

No one in the last decade has contributed more to end time, apocalyptic evangelism than John Hagee, a televangelist seen by millions of viewers weekly and pastor of the 19,000-member Cornerstone Church. Hagee preaches that in order to bring about the Second Coming of Christ and the Rapture of true believers, Islam first has to be destroyed.

In a [2006 interview](#) with National Public Radio’s Terry Gross, Hagee told her, “Those who live by the Quran have a scriptural mandate to kill Christians and Jews.” He went on to claim that there are 200 million Muslims waiting for the chance to attack Israel and the United States. From his pulpit, Hagee [makes it clear](#) to his congregation and the radio and television audience what they can expect from American Muslims if such an attack ever took place, “While American Muslims live in America, 82 percent are not loyal to America and are not willing to fight and defend America.”

In his book, “Jerusalem Countdown – A Warning to the World,” Hagee warns that the war between Islam and the West “is a war that Islam cannot and must not win.”

John Hagee is not just a mad evangelizing prophet. He is the mad evangelizing prophet who is courted by a war president, a hawkish presidential candidate and members of Congress from both parties. His Islamophobic bilge has trickled down from Capital Hill, through the labyrinthine corridors of the Pentagon, and into the chamber of a sniper’s rifle and the hand of a Marine guarding a checkpoint in Fallujah.

Officers in the military are expected to lead by example. Enlisted personnel are expected to follow that example. If the recent incidents at Radhwaniya and Fallujah are not just the acts of renegades, then the chain of command seems to be working the way it was designed.

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