

“Underground” Group of Cadets Say Air Force Academy Controlled by Evangelicals

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An anonymous cadet at the US Air Force Academy (USAFA) spoke out against alleged religious discrimination at the school last week, saying that some cadets must pretend to be evangelical Christians in order to maintain standing among their peers and superiors. In an email to the [Military Religious Freedom Foundation](#) (MRFF), the whistleblower stated that he is part of an “underground group” of about 100 cadets who cannot rely on proper channels to confront evangelical pressure.

The email, published by [Veterans Today](#), applauds the MRFF from the “underground” and indicates that the academy is “literally overrun with Christian conservative fanatics.”

The MRFF and allies from a myriad of civil rights and interfaith groups sent a [letter](#) Tuesday to the Department of Defense (DoD) detailing the cadet’s email and other startling complaints, including testimony from the parents of an academy graduate who believe their daughter was “methodically brain washed” by a fundamentalist group there, demanding an investigation of the academy and the evangelical academy ministry [Cadets For Christ](#).

The MRFF is also demanding the DoD pressure the USAFA to publicly release the results of a study of the religious climate at the academy.

Academy leadership announced last month that the results would not be released, which angered the anonymous cadet who contacted the MRFF.

Results of the so-called “Climate Study” leaked to the press, and “353 cadets (almost 1 out of every 5 survey participants) reported having been subjected to unwanted religious proselytizing, and 23 cadets (13 of them Christians) reported living ‘in fear of their physical safety’ because of their religious beliefs,” according to the MRFF.

Mikey Weinstein, a USAFA graduate and MRFF founder, told Truthout that USAFA Superintendent Lt. Gen. Mike Gould was dishonest about the results of the Climate Study, and told the public that everything was fine at the academy without releasing the actual results. He said it’s time for a legitimate investigation of the “fundamentalist culture” in the academy.

“That commander’s report belongs to the public because [Gould] lied to the American people,” Weinstein said. “Until August of this year, I was supporting Gould and the Academy, now it is obvious that was a mistake.”

The USAFA issued a press release earlier this month after the MRFF alleged that dozens of cadets had come forward and complained about the improper and cult-like evangelism

practiced by Cadets for Christ.

“Upon learning of this allegation, Lt. Gen. Mike Gould, USAFA superintendent, directed an immediate review of the claim,” the release states. “To date, the allegation is not substantiated. Throughout his tenure as Superintendent, General Gould has repeatedly emphasized the necessity for religious accommodation and respect.”

Weinstein received the email from the anonymous cadet after this initial spat with the academy and Gould.

The email describes a group of cadets who don't fit the Protestant evangelical stereotype; they're Catholics, mainstream Protestants, LGBT, atheists or agnostic. They tell Weinstein that his earlier advice to “trust the system” and take their grievances up the chain of command has failed, and they are forced to pretend to be something they are not. In order to achieve and prosper in the academy, these cadets pretend to be evangelicals and even attend Bible studies to avoid being “outed.”

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“Despite the Cadet Honor Code we all lie about our lives,” the anonymous cadet writes. “We have to. We don't have a choice. Thus we are all ‘invisible’ to our tormentors. They will never find us. My own parents don't know. Only my fiancée knows and he/she is one of my classmates and a fellow member of our underground group. I keep ‘Christian’ books and ‘Christian’ CD's in my room so others will be fooled and leave me alone and not suspect that I'm not actually with the USAFA ‘Christianity is the Only Way’ program here, even though I consider myself to be a Christian.”

The cadet reports that, in response to the MRFF's attempt to hold USAFA leaders accountable, the academy's public affairs office included anti-MRFF blog posts from www.christianfighterpilot.com in a blanket email containing news clips about the USAFA to the entire academy.

The blog, constantly at odds with Weinstein and the [MRFF](#), reports deflecting a MRFF lawsuit earlier [this year](#). Weinstein said the MRFF is considering future legal action.

In its letter to the DoD, the MRFF maintains that the Christian Fighter Pilot “God and Country” blog has spread personal attacks and lies about the foundation. The MRFF is also concerned about a blog post included in the mass email regarding ministry group Cadets for Christ, although it is unclear if the blogger is associated with Cadets for Christ.

Cadets and graduates, as well as concerned parents of several cadets and graduates, have contacted the MRFF with serious concerns about Cadets for Christ, according to the letter to Gates.

The letters details the startling testimony of two Catholic parents of a 2010 graduate who, at first, were happy to hear that their daughter joined a Bible study group at the academy. That was before they discovered that their daughter was being taught that her “career should be that of a wife and mother,” and in Biblical terms, “the female is the sheep and the male is the shepherd.”

“Our daughter was methodically brain washed into believing that she was unsaved in the

Catholic religion,” the anonymous parents wrote in an email to the MRFF. “During spring break 2009, she urgently asked that we read the Bible everyday in order to ‘receive the grace of God and be saved.’ This manner of speech took us completely off guard.”

“This invisible force has rocked our family to the core. Two sisters no longer talk to one another. A mother has been asked to no longer contact her daughter. A father tries very hard to keep some sense of equilibrium in the family. This is what our family has become. Nevertheless, we will continue our attempts to bring our daughter back to us – we will never give up hope.”

“As parents, it is very difficult to see your child change in a manner that you no longer recognize her as your own. We grossly underestimated the power of this group. Being at such a geographical distance, coupled with the rigors of the USAFA, it becomes more difficult to monitor behavioral changes until they have taken deep root. Do you have any idea how it feels to grieve the loss of a child who is alive and healthy? THE AIR FORCE ACADEMY ALLOWED THIS TO HAPPEN!”

The Christian Fighter Pilot blog claims the MRFF attack on Cadets for Christ for being a “cult” is hypocritical, and a cult has every right to be a cult as long as it does not break any civil or military laws.

“The restrictions on the free exercise of what Weinstein calls a ‘Christian cult’ are no different than those on any other faith or non-faith group in the military, including what some may have called a ‘pagan cult’ for which the Air Force Academy created a chapel earlier this year,” according to the [blog](#). “The fact that Weinstein has heartburn over the Christian content of this group is irrelevant to their right to free exercise, though it does highlight the fact his goal isn’t ‘religious freedom’ after all.”

As of Wednesday, the Cadets for Christ [web site](#) appears to be down. The Colorado Independent reported that its organizers did not respond to a request for an interview.

The MRFF represents nearly 20,000 members of the military, more than 90 percent of them are Christians, according to Weinstein, who is a member of the Truthout board of advisers.

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