



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on August 16, 2011

Air Force Suspends “Christian Just War Theory” Class for Missile Officers

The U.S. Air Force has cancelled a course entitled “Christian Just War Theory” that was required for all nuclear missile launch officers, reported the Associated Press. The course, which has been taught for the past 20 years by military chaplains at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, is being revised following complaints by some participants that Scripture was used by teachers to show that war can be a moral endeavor, explained David Smith, a spokesman for the Air Force Air Education and Training Command. While the Air Force once felt the Bible-based training was necessary “because of the nature of the job” missile officers might be called upon to do, Smith said, it is now considered inappropriate in a society that has become increasingly pluralistic.



According to [CNN](#), the Air Force suspended the ethics class “after 31 missile launch officers reported the religious nature of the briefing to the [Military Religious Freedom Foundation](#),” a secular watchdog group that targets faith in the armed forces. Mikey Weinstein, a spokesman for the organization, said that there were several things the missile officers “found disgusting. The first was the fact that there is actually a slide that makes it clear that they’re trying to teach that, under fundamentalist Christian doctrine, war is a good thing.”

The [43-slide Power Point presentation](#) begins by posing the question, “Can a person of faith fight in a war?” and includes photos of such American military leaders as General George Washington, Colonel Joshua Chamberlain, and General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson as affirmation that a Christian may fight. It cites such Old Testament examples as Abraham, who “organized an army to rescue Lot (Genesis 14),” and Hebrew judges Samson and Deborah, who were motivated by God “to fight and deliver Israel from foreign oppressors.” The presentation also notes New Testament references to the military, such as the apostle John’s reference to Jesus as a warrior judge (Revelation 19:11).

In addition, the presentation quotes [Wernher von Braun](#), a noted German rocket scientist during World War II, who recalled that he and his colleagues made a “moral decision” to surrender their technology to the United States after the war. “We felt that only by surrendering such a weapon to people who are guided by the Bible could such an assurance to the world be best secured,” von Braun was quoted in one slide as saying.

Weinstein said his group was “literally blown away by what we saw on the slide presentation,” adding that “one of the first things I did was to contact some of the most senior leadership for the Air Force in



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the Pentagon and made it very clear that this has to stop immediately.”

Smith said Air Force officials were not aware of the religious nature of the class until they were contacted by [TruthOut.org](#), the online magazine that originally broke the story. “That is when we became aware of concerns about the course and our commander here reviewed the course and decided immediately that it was not appropriate for what we want to do and suspended using that briefing,” said Smith.

Smith said that the Air Force is reviewing its training to determine whether or not to proceed with a similar class that does not include a religious context. “Ethics discussions are an important part of professional military development and it is especially important for our airmen who are training to work with nuclear weapons because they have to make hard decisions,” he explained. “We are looking to see if we need a briefing like this ... but it will not be a religion based briefing.”

Weinstein insisted that his group’s protest wasn’t about “attacking someone’s faith. What it’s about is remembering that in this country ... we separate church and state. They don’t do that in other countries. We do that here.”

But Matthew Staver of [Liberty Council](#), a conservative legal advocacy group, argued that allowing chaplains “to include Christian values and themes in ethics presentations does not violate the establishment clause” — that portion of the First Amendment that foes of religious freedom have used in an effort to sanitize society of faith in God.

In reality, Staver said, “it’s a violation of freedom of religion when the Air Force seeks to suspend this ethics course solely because it has some Christian themes that are being taught by chaplains.”

Similarly, David French of the [American Center for Law and Justice](#) said it was ludicrous to charge that the class somehow violated the First Amendment.. “Just-War theory has been a vital part of American military history for the last several hundred years,” French told [FOX News](#), calling Weinstein’s attack “another attempt to cleanse American history of its religious realities.” He charged that the campaign was “about cleansing religion from the public square and building a completely secular society and military.”

Commander Daniel McKay, a retired U.S. Navy chaplain, told Fox News that the decision by the Air Force to bow to pressure from secularists was deeply troubling. “Why is it inappropriate to give our people guidelines that have withstood the test of time — to give us moral guidance,” McKay wondered. “I think there are certain segments within our society who are making concerted efforts to take us away from our Judeo-Christian values, principles, and morals.”

Jay Tower of Christian Echoes noted that the 20-year-old optional course “wasn’t controversial until a tiny minority made it so,” adding that groups such as the Military Religious Freedom Foundation “know that Christians can be counted on to be intimidated. Christian Americans are generally complacent, tend to turn the other cheek — and have been conditioned to giving up their rights whenever a small but vocal minority begins shouting that they are offended.”

Photo: A U.S. Air Force chaplain’s assistant lights an altar candle with a long-handled lighter in preparation for a Christian worship service.



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