

Why Does Air Force Academy Encourage Atheism, Prosecute Christianity?

There appears to be a double standard at the Air Force Academy.

The academy is defending its promotion of an atheist event just a week after a Christian cadet was pressured into removing a Bible verse from his personal whiteboard because it allegedly offended non-Christian cadets.

“Ask an Atheist Day” was sponsored by the Freethinkers Club, an academy-approved cadet club. The event was advertised all week on academy bulletin screens and an official email sent to the cadet wing. An invitation was also issued by a cadet to the entire cadet wing assembly on Tuesday.

As I reported last week, a cadet “voluntarily” removed a Bible verse he had written on a whiteboard hanging outside his dorm room. “I have been crucified with Christ therefore I no longer live, but Christ lives in me,” the verse from Galatians 2:20 read.

That verse led to a formal complaint from Mikey Weinstein, of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation. Exactly two hours and nine minutes after the complaint was filed, the Bible verse was erased.

Academy Superintendent Michelle Johnson said in a written statement about the incident that the verse was removed because there was a “potential perception” problem.

“The Scripture was below the cadet’s name on a whiteboard and could cause subordinates to doubt the leader’s religious impartiality,” she said.

And in 2011, Air Force Academy cadet commanders apologized and backed away from an Operation Christmas Child toy program after Weinstein complained of religious intolerance.

Operation Christmas Child is a program sponsored by Samaritan's Purse, a ministry run by evangelical Christian Franklin Graham.

Weinstein was specifically upset about an announcement about the toy program that was made to the entire cadet wing as well as an email that was sent to all cadets.

The academy sided with Weinstein, and Brig. Gen. Richard Clark, who was then the commandant of cadets at the academy, apologized to Weinstein.

The academy also sent an email to cadets retracting an earlier email promoting Operation Christmas Child.

"We agree that it was inappropriate," Academy Spokesman Lt. Col. John Bryan told the *Colorado Gazette* in 2011.

So let's review. The Air Force Academy bends over backwards to promote an atheist event, but it drops the hammer on Christian-themed activities. A double standard appears to be flying high at the academy.

"Clearly, it is Johnson's leadership which raises questions about religious impartiality," writes Mark Alexander, of [Patriot Post](#), a conservative website.

"There may be some circumstantial differences between the 'Ask an Atheist' event and Operation Christmas Child, and I understand that," says Michael Berry, an attorney with Liberty Institute, a legal firm specializing in religious liberty cases. "The perception is being created among the public and the parents and the cadets that the academy is showing favoritism, or in this case it's showing animosity and hostility toward anything religious."

"If the Air Force Academy is going to allow atheists to host a discussion, they need to be showing the same level of openness to non-atheists—specifically Christians," he says.

Even the perpetually offended Mikey Weinstein objected to the atheist event.

"They are proselytizing for atheism," Weinstein told the *Gazette*. "What if this was 'Ask a Muslim Day' or 'Ask an Evangelical Christian Day'?"

The academy released a statement pointing out the atheist club had received approval to host its event.

"The Academy allows all cadet groups to host information fairs regardless of espoused religious beliefs or no beliefs at all," the statement read, noting there were also events scheduled for Christians and Muslims.

"Air Force policy does not limit the substance of voluntary discussions or the exercise of free expression where it is reasonably clear that the discussions are personal, not official, and are reasonably free of the potential for, or appearance of, coercion," the statement read.

In other words, an email promoting atheism meets the Air Force policy, but an email promoting a Christian ministry providing toys to poor children does not.

"Military members, including cadets, may not use their leadership position to promote personal religious or non-faith beliefs to subordinates because doing so may cause those subordinates to doubt their leader's impartiality and objectivity and, thereby, degrade unit morale, good order, and discipline," the statement concluded.

Based on recent events, I do wonder if those in charge of the Air Force Academy believe the only good cadets are godless cadets and Christian cadets are somehow guilty of degrading

unit morale, good order and discipline.

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