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CONSTRUCTING RELIGIOUS EMPATHY IN THE US MILITARY

FIGHTING THE GLOBAL WAR ON IGNORANCE

by

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Acknowledgments

The bestselling guide to international etiquette "Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands" advises, among other cultural insights, avoiding discussions of controversial subjects—like religion—in America. I thank the Air Force's Air University and the opportunity it offered to break etiquette and address this often controversial, but extremely important, subject in the context of today's military environment. Thank you also to my faculty advisor, Maj Edward Ouellette, for his guidance and help in refining this paper. My parents have provided me inspiration and shaped my thought processes over the years, and I am especially in debt to my father for imparting his knowledge of philosophy and religion. While attending Air Command and Staff College, I have had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know several Muslims friends, including Touhid Laskar from Bangladesh, Khalfan Al-Kaabi from the United Arab Emirates, Imed Bousbih from Tunisia, and Hamid Kbiri from Morocco. These gentlemen, directly and indirectly, have greatly influenced my thoughts on Islam and interfaith relations in general. These thoughts populate the following pages.

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Abstract

The US military wrestles with instances of well-publicized religious intolerance within its ranks. Though military leadership largely recognizes the need for cultural education as a mitigating influence on religious expression, other various voices and lobbying groups argue for limitations on Constitutionally-guaranteed religious freedoms afforded to military personnel. The reasoning typically invokes the 1st Amendment guarantee of separation of church and state, and sometimes warns of a fundamentalist Christian "takeover" within the ranks. The larger concern is the effect that openly religious soldiers may have in a protracted struggle against terrorists driven by extremely fundamentalist Islamist ideology. Some argue that, once a service member enlists, individual religious affiliations should automatically give way to the common religion of "patriotism." This paper examines each side of the debate, and establishes the historical and societal contexts in which the more current and specific military questions occur. Ultimately, it argues that removing individual religious expression from military members hampers, rather than helps, the Global War on Terror. Instead, the military must accept religion (or even lack thereof) as an honored personal choice and as indicative of cultural identity; religious empathy and tolerance may be achieved through deliberate education rather than through imposed silence. Opportunities exist for the military to lead America at large in educating and integrating its members from different faiths in the same manner that it did for racial or gender integration.

Chapter 1 − Introduction

Issue Background and Significance

The President of the United States, in comments echoed by many government officials, media outlets, and educators, describes the War on Terror as a clash of ideologies.[1] Islamist terrorist groups adhere to an ideology that includes a radical reinterpretation of Islam, bent on proliferating itself while eliminating Western influence in predominantly Muslim regions. US administration officials often simplistically bill the enemy ideology as freedom-hating and anti-democratic in an attempt to rally worldwide opposition to terrorism. In the mind of the Islamist terrorist, however, the opposing ideology (ours) is actually the Jewish and Christian cultural traditions that underpin Western societies as a whole. For example, Osama bin Laden likely takes no issue with a free and democratic Palestine as long as it remains strictly fundamental Muslim. Instead of aversion to freedom and democracy, underlying motivations for the ideological struggle borrow from complex, often religious, sources. Rather than continuing to skirt honest discussion of each of these major worldviews and the role they play in the War on Terror, Americans may increase their overall cultural empathy and truly understand the struggle against Islamist terrorism through education. Because of its strategic impact on national objectives and its global presence, few US institutions stand to benefit from cultural and, as a subset, religious education and awareness more than the US armed forces.

Despite recent emphasis placed by the Department of Defense upon cultural education,[2] there remains a gap in religious understanding. One of the more prominent obstacles to the inclusion of comprehensive religious education in the military stems from the rise of secular humanism in Western culture. In the United States, proponents of the secularist trend, through litigation tied to the First Amendment, have intimidated many government officials and

agencies—including parts of the military—into zones sanitized of religion.[3] Mere mention of one's religious affiliation, particularly as a senior officer, can seemingly yield accusations of impropriety and proselytization.[4] Admittedly, substantiated cases of improperly abusing military offices for religious purposes do exist, and punishment in those situations is warranted. But punishment fails to address the salient challenge of preempting such religiously-motivated cases of abuse of power. Two primary solutions are advocated as preemptive measures: 1) suppression of religious expression and 2) religious education.

Secularists argue that prevention relies upon limiting or removing religious expression in the military. Groups such as the Military Religious Freedom Foundation fear the preponderance of evangelical Christians among military members and the potential self-fulfilling prophecy of an "apocalyptic civilizational clash" between Christianity and Islam—propagated by "boots on the ground and wings in the sky for the purposes of ushering in Armageddon."[5] Aslan, president of Havard's chapter of the World Conference on Religion and Peace and an advisory board member of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, concludes "by keeping religion out of the armed forces we can take the first step in stripping radical ideology from an enormously complex and volatile conflict."[6] However, overreactive policies in this vein have led to complaints from military chaplains regarding restrictions on their practice of religion.[7] Additionally, secularist attempts to silence religious expression ignore the highly beneficial aspects of education as a means to increase cultural understanding and prevent religious impropriety.

The battle lines in the War on Terror, then, are not confined only to Afghan frontiers or urban Iraqi streets, but span America's cultural, religious, political, and military landscapes. The broadness of this struggle is not lost on current military leadership, which leans toward education and discourse as a solution to religious ignorance. Then-USAF Deputy Chief of Staff for

Personnel Lt Gen Roger Brady testified to Congress in 2005 that "we need to understand better the role of religion and culture more broadly in the way people think, act, and make decisions."[8] New curricula at service academies and military professional development schools emphasize understanding foreign cultures and religions. But military members are learning only part of the story and suffering for it. Full cultural awareness demands open discourse about American culture and religious identities, and thorough examination of the interactions thereof. Free practice of religion, within lawful bounds, must not be marginalized or silenced in the military; religious discussion, awareness, and education will help military forces understand the current security environment and ultimately aid US victory in the Global War on Terror.

Thesis

Military leadership understands the need for religious tolerance within the ranks of the armed forces, and has attempted steps toward inclusion—e.g. restricting proselytism or facilitating AF Academy cadet access to local human secularist groups.[9] Yet these same secularists often argue for more restrictive tactics to achieve tolerance, saying that even implied religious endorsement (via public affiliation) by military members is illegal under the 1st Amendment.[10] Such a position effectively eliminates free individual religious expression and does nothing to educate the implied underlying culture of religious intolerance. Instead, the military can further interfaith understanding with deliberate religious education. Such action not only creates interfaith dialog, but equips military members to effectively campaign for the hearts and minds so desperately needed to win the Global War on Terror. Removing individual religious expression from military members hampers, rather than helps the War on Terror. The military must accept religion (or lack thereof) as an honored personal choice and as indicative of cultural identity.

Approach

Those who argue for unfettered religious expression and proselytization in the military, as well as those who argue for the elimination of religious expression among service members, typically—and ironically—employ the same legal support. The 1st Amendment, with its guarantees both against the abridgement of individual religious rights and the establishment of an official government religion, encourages champions on both sides to trumpet their heartfelt motivation to uphold the liberties offered under the Constitution. Chapter 2 begins in this milieu, providing the legal, historical, and cultural context which normally envelops the debate. The context then constricts to examine instances of religious expression specific to public office and the military, and seeks to demonstrate that religion as a whole—and Christianity in particular— has a benign role in America's history and culture. Chapter 3 further examines religion in America and the US military, and decries religious ignorance as the main culprit in interfaith conflict. Accordingly, it argues against the secularist admonition to remove individual religious expression from the military and instead supports structured religious education as part of professional military education (PME). Chapter 4 pauses to acknowledge and debate several potential counterarguments to the premise that more—rather than less—religious dialog will provide military benefit in the Global War on Terror. Chapter 5 seeks to provide an equitable and candid framework for a religious education and awareness module to be included in existing PME. Chapter 6 provides concluding recommendations and summary. In order to support the thesis, this paper relies upon building arguments from a variety of primary and secondary sources, as well as polling data marshaled through web sources. In an effort to promulgate intellectual honesty and rigor, sources both for and against the thesis have been reviewed and sourced.

Chapter 2 − Historical, Legal, and Societal Context

In 2003, when former Deputy Undersecretary for Defense Intelligence, Lt Gen William G. Boykin, likened the Global War on Terror to a struggle between Christianity and Satan,[11] he reinvigorated a longstanding debate about the role and threat of religion in the government sector, and in the military specifically. Though the General was lightly reprimanded for his wayward tongue, other thoughts from senior government officials are not so easily dismissed: "We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other."[12] While some may guess that a current administration official, or the President himself, uttered the previous quote, the offending party was President John Adams in 1817. The quote, and much of this chapter, serves to document and illustrate the social context from which sprang our American society, and therefore our military. Granted, mores and realities develop over time and no argument, even from a pioneer of the US Constitution, should be immediately applied in today's social and cultural context. Yet there remains value in examining the mindset of our founding fathers as they created the 1st Amendment—especially since the 1st Amendment is often invoked as justification both for stripping religious discourse from public institutions and for defending individual religious expression.

Origins of the First Amendment

Nearly every contentious discussion of religion and its role in American public life falls back to differing interpretations of Article VI Section 3 of the US Constitution and of the 1st Amendment, as well as the oft-invoked "wall of separation between church and state." The

Constitution provides the structural framework for the government, while the Bill of Rights names the beliefs and values defensible under the Constitution.[13] Article VI Section 3 reads:

> The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.[14]

The straightforward passage ensures that the belief in, or practice of, a particular religion does not become a prerequisite to holding a state or federal position. In its entirety, the 1st Amendment reads:

> Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.[15]

The crux of today's ongoing debate centers upon the apparent dichotomy of religious expression displayed by individuals who happen to also hold government positions—revealing tensions between the "Establishment Clause" and the "Exercise Clause."[16] Further complicating matters is Thomas Jefferson's metaphorical "wall of separation between church and state," in his letter to Baptists in Danbury, Connecticut.[17]

Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, in 1947's Everson v. Board of Education, repeated Jefferson's words in his injunction against an official government preference both among religions and between religion and nonreligion.[18] As a result, Jefferson is often revered as the early standard-bearer for the secularization of America. For it was Jefferson (and his close ally James Madison) who vehemently argued for the liberty of conscience—the inalienable individual right to choose one's own belief system.[19] The 1st Amendment certainly grew, in part, from such a position. Yet, two important points shift weight from the Establishment Clause to

the Exercise Clause and inform the resultant role of government officials caught between the two.

The first point arises from a review of the actions of the First Congress, which signed the Bill of Rights into existence.[20] It was this same Congress that approved chaplains for the House, Senate, and armed forces (paid for with taxes), deemed that "religion, morality, and knowledge" were necessary to "good government and the happiness of mankind…", and requested that President Washington issue a Thanksgiving Proclamation to acknowledge "with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God" through thanksgiving and prayer.[21] Even President Jefferson later approved the use of taxes to pay for a Roman Catholic priest and church in a treaty with Kaskaskia Indians.[22] Regardless of our contemporary interpretations of the 1st Amendment and the degree to which it blocks interplay of government and religion, early government practice with respect to the 1st Amendment and religion indicates that "states and the federal government have traditionally acted as if the language permitted assistance of some sort."[23]

The second point revolves around the faith of the Founding Fathers and the ideas for government that they espoused. The Founding Fathers were largely religious and, indicated by John Adams' quote from earlier in this chapter, supported the idea that God-fearing leaders and populace were necessary for effective governance and citizenship. The insinuation, then, is that America's very religious Founding Fathers would balk at the degree to which the 1st Amendment has been wielded to drive a wedge between open religious expression and public institutions. Regardless of the veracity of this claim, the more germane point arises through the realization that the framework for our US government—its secularist trappings and protections included— spring from the bedrock of overwhelmingly Christian ideals and beliefs. Today's critics who

sound an alarm at the encroachment of Christianity in the political arena must contend with the notion that Christian ideals birthed that very political arena. The point is not that Christianity, nor any religion, automatically deserves a role in government business—that is a separate issue requiring far greater study of American history and legal precedent. Rather, the point is to question the necessity of the alarm. Secularists frown on the ubiquity of religious expression in public institutions and warn especially against Christian military members, bent on conquest, who "will quickly find each other, organize themselves, and go looking for some heretics to kill."[24] However, since the Founding Fathers, overtly driven by fundamental Christian beliefs, gave life to the Constitution, it seems disingenuous to paint Christianity as a mortal threat to that same Constitution.

Examples of Religious Expression in Public Institutions

Many decry the influence of religion in political, and by extension, military affairs. Dawkins and Harris, for example, blame wars[25] or institutionally-sponsored violence[26] on religiously motivated intolerance. Certainly the Crusades stand apart as an example of barbarism built around religious pretense. Yet many atrocities attributed wholly to religion typically stem from complex interactions of ambition, fear, scarcity of resources, and, yes, at times religion. Religion has contributed positively to many peaceful endeavors, though, and served to regulate the furor of war (evolving from the just war ideas of St. Thomas Aquinas in *The Summa Theologica*).[27] Even in a largely nonreligious conflagration, such as World War II, the personal religious motivations owned by public office holders may come to the fore during its execution—whether President Truman's "The atom bomb was no great decision…it was merely another powerful weapon in the arsenal of righteousness"[28] or General Eisenhower's D-Day plea to "let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking."[29]

Such examples demonstrate that American leaders and military members often turn to their faith and seek God's blessing in life and death struggles like war. There is little surprise and no scripted malice in this.

Critics of religious expression in the military pay little heed to the countless historical examples of religious rhetoric; more often comments, like those of Lt Gen Boykin or Brig Gen Weida (former Commandant of the US Air Force Academy investigated by an AF panel for sending overtly Christian e-mail messages to the cadet wing),[30] which are uttered in peace time situations do not get the free pass of religiously-tinged speech under duress. Still, history and precedent favor religious freedom in the military. Dating back to the first Congress, official acknowledgment and support of service member faith came with the establishment of the chaplaincy. The rationale for using taxpayer funding to pay for chaplains was that military members were often pressed into service at times and in locations that may preclude their ability to worship as they wished.[31] Thus chaplains were necessary so as to make worship as readily available to servicemen and women as possible. This time-honored and fundamental idea—that the government must not abridge the religious rights of servicemen and women—stands directly opposed to the prevalent secularist opinion that religious expression must be purged from the military in order for religious equality to exist.

Chapter 3 − Religious Culture in America and the US Military

Religious expression in the military has historical precedent and constitutional legitimacy, and limits upon religious rights are ill-suited for ameliorating the root causes of religious intolerance—at best limits treat only the symptoms. Finding the proper solution to cultivate religious empathy depends upon correctly identifying sources of intolerance.

Seeking the Religiously Empathetic Soldier

In *Faith of the American Soldier*, Mansfield relates the visceral tales of American soldiers serving in Iraq. While faith is Mansfield's centerpiece, his subjects range from intensely religious to uneasily unsure of any existence beyond this life. In one epitomic portrait, a southern-raised Bible-believing Christian Marine visits his chaplain after having severed in half an enemy combatant during a firefight. The horrific image fresh in his mind, the distraught soldier begs for justification: "Tell me that our enemies are the enemies of God. Explain to me how this is a war between good and evil."[32] His chaplain's response demonstrates a religious and cultural empathy that should be the goal of military cultural training:

> I cannot tell you that the other side is evil. Our government is officially nonreligious, and so are our armed forces. We do not fight holy wars. We do not view our enemies in religious terms. I can tell you that you fight for a great nation, though, and that God is with you if you turn your heart to Him.[33]

While the typical cross section of the US military is largely categorized as Christian, many variances exist with regard to denomination, church attendance, or pathway to Christian self-identification.[34] The military must place emphasis on accepting those of any faith (or non-faith, as the case may be) from American society at large and subsequently inculcating an attitude that mirrors that of the above quoted chaplain. This process will best be accomplished through deliberate religious training rather than superficially imposed religious silence.

The Issue of American Demographics: Christians, Unaffiliated, and Other

Secularists complain that the US military is overrepresented by evangelical Christians. In a predominantly Christian nation, one would expect the preponderance of America's volunteer military force to approximate the population at large. In fact, data show this to be the case.[35] The US military exists within, and borrows from, the context of the greater social fabric of America. Yet it is distinct as a public institution which relies upon teamwork and discipline to effectively operate in life or death situations. Thus one must not automatically accept as inevitable every larger American social trend into the military. The real question is not whether the military reflects society as a whole, but whether there are portions of society that should not be reflected in the military. Consequently, is a large Christian (particularly the evangelical variety) population damaging to the military as a whole? To answer this question, it is helpful to examine both differences and similarities between US military and American social norms, which leads to a broad picture of the state of religious ideals in both contexts, as well as what can be done to create a religiously informed and accepting society.

Religious climate survey data shows that America is largely a Christian nation, with over 80% claiming adherence to a Christian faith.[36] At first glance, Islamist characterizations of America's Global War on Terror as a struggle between Christianity and Islam—a continuation of the dark ages' Crusades—seems not far removed from reality. The US military reflects this large proportion of Christians, possibly leading the world to the conclusion that America's Christian soldiers are seeking to destroy Islam's fervent adherents. Obviously, such a mindset feeds Islamist rhetoric and hinders American efforts in the Global War on Terror. However, many of the terrorist-cited instances of Western cultural and political encroachment onto Muslim lands have little to do with Christian values and principles. In fact, it may be said that fundamental

Christians and Muslims actually rail against the same secular cultural and political stances. In the United States, secular or nonreligious poll responders comprise approximately 11% of the population.[37] In a sense, Osama bin Laden and Jerry Falwell are united in (and vilified for) their distaste for exported secular culture—although obviously their attempts to repel secular culture employ different tactics.

Ignorance: the Real Opiate of the Masses

The point here is that the uninitiated or unknowledgeable automatically assume a struggle between Christian and Muslim ideals in the Global War on Terror, when even a little rational thought uncovers a far more complex interplay of factors at work. Instead of simply looking at Christianity as a monolithic and threatening block within America and the US military, it better informs the discussion to examine the characteristics of today's American Christian—subsumed into the military from society at large—and what factors best ameliorate religious attitudes toward other faiths.

While it may prove impossible to adequately describe the "typical" Christian in America, there are several clues offered in the religious beat-watches of popular periodicals. In a recent "My Turn" column in Newsweek, for instance, one essay writer—a self avowed Christian— described her initial disapproval and slow acceptance of her younger sister's "strong faith in God, believing it was just a phase."[38] Another article on the "Modern Family" relates the author's reluctance to address her own child's questions on faith for fear of unduly influencing her offspring's choices and exposing her own limited grasp on matters of faith.[39] These two accounts do not wholly encompass the contemporary Christian, but survey data corroborates these stories of self-described Christians who display either little knowledge of basic Christian tenets[40] or increasing distrust of organized religion.[41]

According to Boston University religion professor and researcher, Stephen Prothero, Americans are fervently religious (compared to other nations with Christian beginnings) but know little more about the Bible than their non-religious counterparts. The trend is equally poor among Catholics, liturgical Protestants, and even evangelical Protestants. He found that American Christians have little fundamental knowledge of beliefs and traditions, though a greater number claim Christian affiliation now than 20 years ago. As Prothero puts it: Americans believe that "God has spoken in scripture but can't be bothered to listen to what God has to say."[42] He argues for public religious education so that Americans may increase their cultural awareness, but more importantly in order to head off dangerous ignorance. While his educational plan includes fundamental data (e.g. stories, people, places, etc.), I suggest a focus on the thought processes behind the faith. Knowledge is a precursor to understanding, but knowing something of the thought processes that lead one to place his or her faith in one religion or another is vital to pluralism.

Providing knowledge and encouraging discourse is the correct path to mollifying tensions between major faith groups. In Gallup polls conducted among religious Americans to correlate religious tolerance and education level, respondents with higher education levels responded less negatively toward members of other faith groups.[43] However, the poll also notes that this same highly-educated demographic has no more interest than those with lower education in learning about other faiths. These two results, considered concurrently, indicate that even nonreligious education can have a positive effect on religious tolerance, perhaps because the highly educated demographic has heightened its critical thinking skills and experience level. It seems reasonable, then, to conclude that education can achieve an even greater degree of interfaith acceptance and tolerance under a curriculum specifically designed for that purpose.

The Benefits of Religious Education

Critics may argue that religious curricula may be tailored, like in Wahhabi *madrasa* in Saudi Arabia[44], to bring about fundamentalist shifts that only add fuel to the uneasy embers glowing between major faith groups. Critics may also assert that the high number of fundamentalist or evangelical Christians in the military only increases the chances of further interfaith conflicts—that, educated or not, religious zealotry simply leads to barbarous acts. Their conclusion, therefore, is that military personnel must renounce overt religious affiliations in favor of common patriotic ideals. Yet there is little to support such a conclusion. Instead, as the data above indicates, knowledge and education leads to pacification more often than not— especially if the education is presented in a fair manner. Even the globally respected United Nations, considering methods to eliminate religious intolerance around the world, advocates cultural education as a "prerequisite for any effort to combat extremism and intolerance".[45] Education can be, and sometimes is, used as a club, but arguments can be redirected to show where common ground exists, or at the very least to show the thought processes behind mutually incompatible positions. This reasoning supports the conclusion that religious education will ease, rather than exacerbate, tensions between faiths. The important question that follows is: "What does such education look like, and who determines what 'fair' is?" Chapter 5 will provide additional detail on this basic premise for religious education.

Chapter 4 − Counterarguments and Discussion

Even if the reader agrees that 1) Christian principles underpin, rather than threaten, American democracy and the US military, and 2) proper education can increase pluralistic temperament and tolerance of other faiths, there are still many questions and gray areas that beg further discussion. These two previous points provide a baseline, but not a sufficient justification, for incorporating religious education (and what *kind* of religious education—to be addressed in chapter 5) in professional military education. This chapter will present possible counter arguments and areas of apparent contradiction in an effort to acknowledge opposing viewpoints, but still maintain the overriding importance of religious understanding as part of cultural education.

Objection #1: Proselytism in Superior-Subordinate Relationships

Secularists will point out that, due to standards of military discipline, high ranking personnel have tremendous referent power over subordinates—the mere mention of the leader's religious background may pressure lower ranking members into accommodating or even accepting the leader's religious beliefs. Therefore, arguments based upon the 1st Amendment free exercise clause and upon the benefits of education discount the importance of the military rank structure and open the door to abuses, perceived or actual, by superior officers. This type of grievance—that of implied or expressed coercion on the part of superior officers—seems to be the central concern of those most vocal opponents of religious expression in the military. Former US Air Force Academy graduate Mikey Weinstein founded his Military Religious Freedom Foundation with the broad intent of stamping out superior-to-subordinate and peer-to-peer proselytization within the military.[46] His organization plans to sue the Department of Defense because of non-sanctioned appearances by general officers, including Maj Gen Jack Catton, in a

Christian video production.[47] Weinstein wishes that the military would do more to stem the tide

of a perceived evangelical Christian takeover of the US military. He has taken to task such

organizations as the Officer's Christian Fellowship (OCF), whose cadet members seek to invite

other, possibly non-Christian, cadets to social functions with a decidedly Christian atmosphere.

His efforts to oust OCF from the US Air Force Academy campus actually resulted in the

expansion of the Academy's special programs in religious education (SPIRE) to include cadet

access to a far broader palette of local religious organizations, including a Free Thinkers

organization for atheists and agnostics.[48] But while the Defense Department's response has

largely been to attempt to accommodate any and all worldviews, Weinstein and others argue that

religion has no place in the military ranks. When addressing the question of referent power, it is

fair to acknowledge the potential for subordinates to feel pressured by their superiors. One

commander, at the beginning of his first commander's call, mentioned that he was a Christian

and explained that his allegiance to Jesus was a priority in his life. In saying this, he explained

that he wanted the organization to know who he was and what his priorities were. Though his

intentions were pure, some saw his statement of priorities as an affront to their own spiritual

inclinations, even if they themselves claimed a Christian faith.[49] The idea of a very private,

unspoken faith has a decidedly European flavor, though American culture—in many areas of the

country—allows public proclamation of faith. Some have characterized the difference between

American and European separation of church and state as a prohibition against the government

meddling in religious affairs (American) versus a prohibition against religion meddling in affairs

of the state (European). In any case, the issue of the abuse of referent power remains a difficult

one to solve, mainly because there are so many different opinions about what constitutes abuse.

Policy dictates that military members must not use the military to promote one religion over

another, but some bristle even at a leader's mere mention of his or her own faith. To crystallize

the issue, Turner made very incisive comments during the 2005 USAF Religious Climate hearing

before the Military Personnel Subcommittee within the House Armed Services Committee:

> Proselytizing, I want to disagree with Chaplain Williamson, who said that
> proselytizing is, in all instances, wrong...I wrote down that you said that
> proselytizing is when you are inducing someone to your religion because you
> indicate to them if they don't, there is going to be trouble. And I know that you
> know the definition of proselytizing does not include an issue of trouble. And by
> trouble…I hear your words as meaning discrimination. So I want to make three
> distinctions. 'Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior' is one level. 'Jesus Christ
> should be your Lord and Savior' is another level. 'I will not promote you or I will
> take action against you if Jesus Christ is not your Lord and Savior' is another
> issue. One, you have my personal statement of faith. One you have my statement
> of encouraging someone else to have or to accept a position of faith. The third is
> outright discrimination.[50]

To Turner, religious debate in the military is rooted in the second level, and he prefers to

err on the side of deregulation: "But where we cross the line and begin to talk about where

someone else might be offended and start drawing rules and regulations and laws based upon

what others perceive as offensive communication…we are, in fact, degrading our rights, not

protecting rights."[51] Disagreement continued in the hearing, just as it does daily within the

military and within the context of American society as a whole. As mentioned earlier in this

discussion, the aim here is to acknowledge the objection and suggest that the proper way to deal

with the issue, at least within the military, is to provide education and forums for discussion at

military schools.

Parco and Fagin have argued instead for an Oath of Equal Character, which asks military

members to recite their acceptance of others' integrity and character, regardless of religious

background.[52] This is a step in the right direction, but reciting an oath doesn't suddenly make it

so. All cadets recite the honor code: "I will not lie, steal, or cheat, nor tolerate among us anyone

who does," but not all automatically adhere to the code. Education and discussion are the keys

that can turn an oath of equal character into a heartfelt—and lived—statement.

Objection #2: Omission of Any Religion from a Curriculum Equals Inequality

Critics of military sponsored religious education will realize that, given the finite time

allocated for cultural education, the curriculum must focus on some subset of the myriad

worldviews represented throughout the world. Since the curriculum cannot possibly cover every

worldview, bias naturally will work against those omitted (likely minority) beliefs. Roughly

2000—about half of those split among various Christian denominations—different religious

communities existed within the United States by the 21st century[53] and worldwide,

Adherents.com tracks statistics on over 4200 religious groups.[54] Given these numbers, it is self-

evident that equal time cannot be allotted for discussions of Southern Baptism, Sikh, and Shinto.

Where the AF Academy—with its focus on equitable cadet access to personal faith choices—

solved the perception of religious bias by allowing interaction with any community faith group

(see Objection #1), the same solution here is not feasible. The focus of this recommended

military religious awareness curriculum is deliberate and purposeful instruction. Therefore, a

rational approach and justification are necessary to limit study to a few strategic and widely

practiced faiths. In this case, military necessity makes the most sense as a restrictive filter.

Religious awareness of those religions most likely to be encountered by military personnel—and

fueling the most intense religious conflicts—must receive the most attention within the

curriculum. Additionally, although differences in emphasis and interpretation exist within

Christian denominations, Christian faiths largely share basic tenets regarding God, Jesus, and

man's relationship to them. Therefore, for the purposes of military education, it is reasonable to

examine Christianity as a monolithic faith. Other religions to be included in discussions, according to collected data (see Figure 1), are Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism.
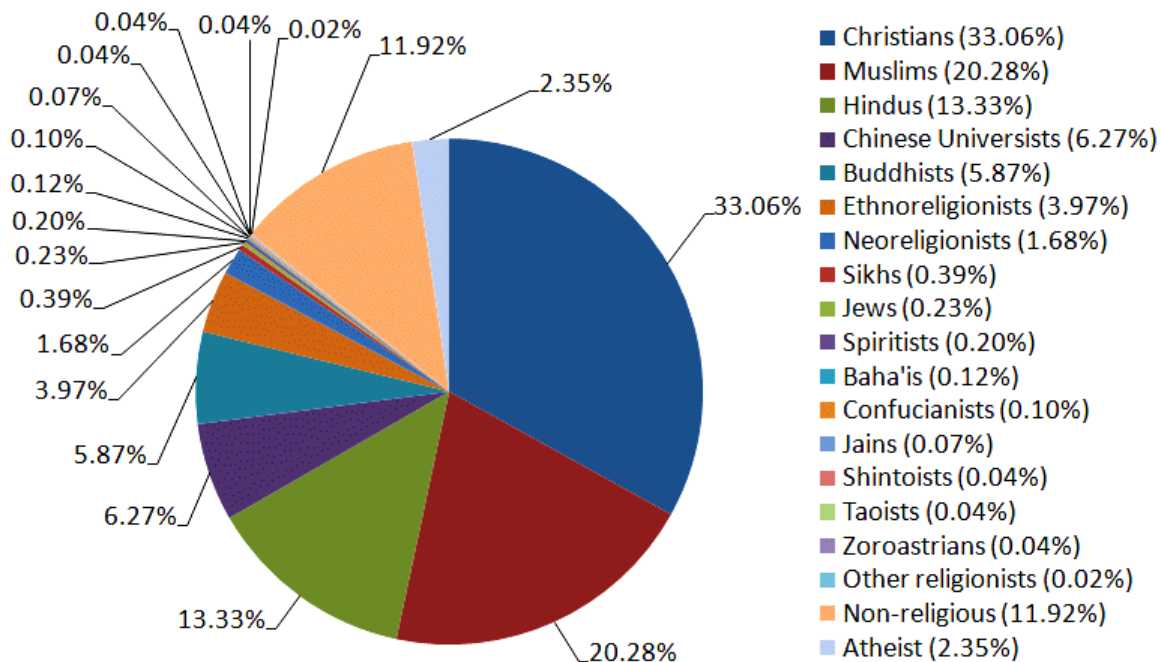

Figure 1. Worldwide Percentage of Adherents by Religion (mid 2005)[55]

"Non-religious" (including secular humanism and agnosticism) must also be included as a worldview, since its numbers outpace all religions except Christianity in America, and it represents a large population in the world. Focusing on these six worldviews does not constitute discrimination; it reflects the realities that military professionals will likely face. Instruction must be prefaced with the acknowledgement of the many religions which could not incorporated due to time constraints. Additionally, the methods used to present and examine each worldview can apply to any faith, thus validating personal adherence to any religion.

Objection #3: Christian Majority Bias Will Creep Into the Curriculum

Critics may argue that, in addition to the bias caused by omission (Objection #2), bias will also surface in the curriculum due to the probable Christian worldview of those constructing the course. A Christian-dominated military simply cannot be expected to give a fair presentation

of other worldviews, and may lend credence to terrorist claims that Christianity is at war with

Islam. Such an objection is easy to address in theory, though difficult to resolve in practice. The

solution lies with involving representatives of each worldview in the curriculum building

process. Collaborative efforts may require more time and energy to compile, but, for legitimacy,

the finished product must have the approval of each of the worldviews under consideration.

In order to gain the requisite approval, the military's curriculum could be coordinated

with the support of the Military Chaplains Association.[56] For additional fidelity and legitimacy,

PME institutions should enlist one of the numerous organizations that exist to deal with issues of

faith and validation. For instance, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries[57] or the Oxford Centre

for Christian Apologetics[58] may aid the construction of a curriculum module acceptable to a

broad range of Christians. Similarly, the Nawawi Foundation[59] may offer or coordinate unbiased

perspectives on Islam, while the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education[60] may serve

the same function for Judaism. The International Kampada Buddhist Union[61] and ISKCON

Educational Services[62] may coordinate on Buddhism and Hinduism, respectively. The Secular

Coalition for America[63] may accurately speak for the nonreligious worldview. These suggested

organizations, or others like them, should be asked to weigh in on the curriculum and provide a

narrative for their positions—not from military leadership with potentially Christian biases, but

from religious leaders or organizations representative of each pertinent worldview.

Objection #4: Discussion Will Only Stoke Historical Hatreds

Critics may argue that the only sure way to relax heated religious tensions is to preempt

discussion, based on the premise that religious discourse between differing views will always

turn ugly. If this objection were true, much of Europe, as a bastion of secularism and private

spirituality, would be free of religious tensions—and it certainly is not.[64] No one can deny that

unconstrained religious conversation between belligerent or defensive individuals with differing beliefs can quickly escalate into violence. However, many respected researchers, like Diana Eck of Harvard's Pluralism Project, suggest instead that:

> …pluralism is more than the mere tolerance of differences; it requires some knowledge of our differences…tolerance does not require people to know anything at all about one another…pluralism requires the nurturing of constructive dialog, revealing both common understandings and real differences. Dialog does not mean everyone at the "table" will agree with one another. The process of public discussion will inevitably reveal both areas of agreement and of disagreement. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table…encouraging a climate of dialog is foundational for pluralism.[65]

A structured learning environment offers an atmosphere for true growth and understanding—the military has already seen the beginnings of this in professional education that brings together international military members with various faith backgrounds.

Objection #5: Religious Discussion in PME Violates the 1st Amendment

Critics may still protest that, even if dialog and education are the proper solution to cultivate religious empathy, 1st Amendment separation of church and state renders the good idea illegal and therefore useless. Issues concerning the 1st Amendment and its legal ramifications were discussed in greater detail in chapter 2. However, it is worth reiterating that the 1st Amendment does not ban religion from the military. In fact, many researchers harness both legal and logical arguments to advocate bringing religious instruction even into American public schools.[66] Religious expression must not be abridged for any individual within the military, but religious intelligence, particularly in the context of cultural education, is not illegal as long as it does not promote one religion over another. As cultural understanding becomes an ever more important enabler for successful military leaders, the imperative for religious education only grows.

Chapter 5 − A Proposed Curriculum

Building upon arguments dealing with the legality and military utility of religious education in the US armed forces, the focus shifts to forming the framework of a curriculum that may successfully construct the religiously empathetic military member. This chapter, though necessitating more research and analysis before producing a true curriculum, at least provides a starting point and responds to Kressel's complaint that too many advocate religious education without providing an actionable plan.[67] The following information does not attempt to detail every facet of the proposed educational program, but rather reveals and argues the overall logic which supports the following main course objectives: the student should 1) appreciate the philosophical underpinnings of those major worldviews likely to be encountered by military members, 2) develop an understanding of the basic teachings of these worldviews, and 3) realize that moral, rational, and intelligent people can and do adhere to each worldview.

Herein the term worldview will be used to describe the panacea of beliefs—both religious and not. As Harris argues, terms like scientist, liberal, or racist are "merely species of belief in action. Your beliefs define your vision of the world; they dictate your behavior…"[68]

Objective #1: Appreciate Philosophical Underpinnings of Major Worldviews

Attaining objective #1 begins with a broad look at worldviews in a philosophical context—the commonalities they share and how they differ. The PME student should, as sub-objectives, a) be aware of the range of differing religious and philosophical thought, b) characterize his or her own personal beliefs in relation to the beliefs of others, and c) seek methods for bridging disparate worldviews. The course should encourage students to think critically about what they believe and why, and derive paths of understanding and commonality from their own worldview to that of others. These "paths" will serve as vital cogs for military

members who seek to build healthy interpersonal relationships with those from differing

religious or nonreligious backgrounds.

The curriculum should begin with an overarching philosophical framework. Many,

including Nord, note the analogous relationship between religion and philosophy.[69] In fact, most

worldviews may be viewed as subsets of philosophical thought, which deal with very basic

questions: 1) what is real? 2) what can be known? and 3) what is good?[70] Where most

worldviews share in this philosophical basis, they diverge in their answers to the aforementioned

questions. A graphic depiction (Figure 2) may help students understand the range of possible

answers, and enable them to plot various worldviews on the chart.
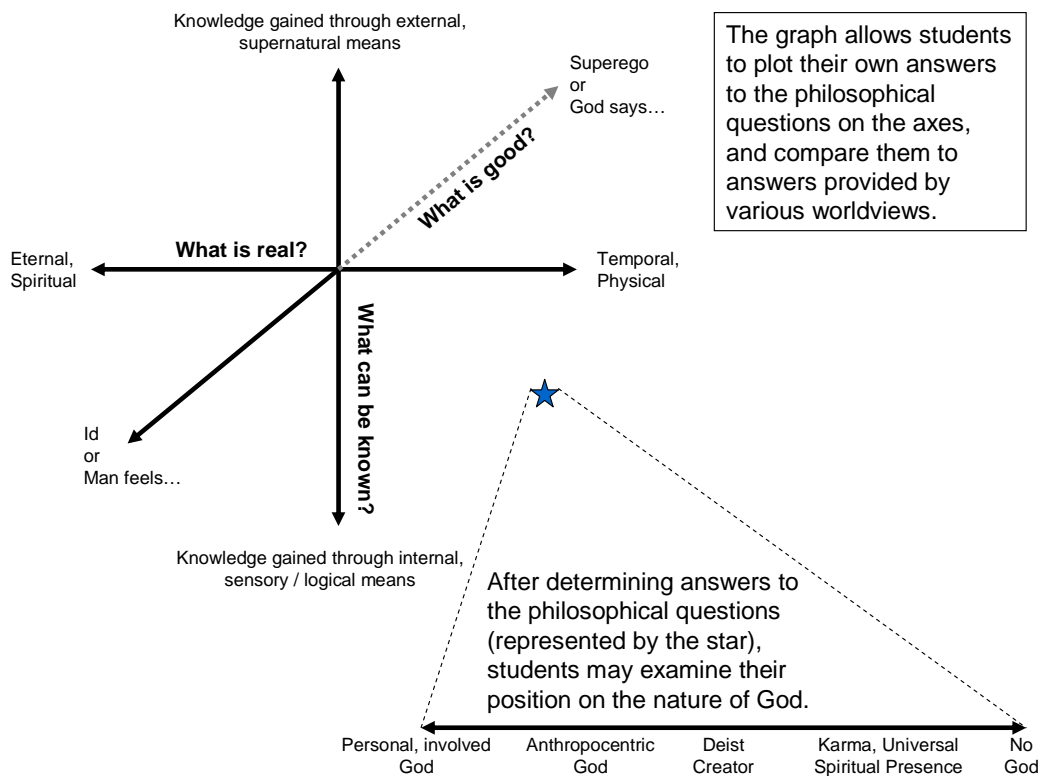

Figure 2. The Philosophical – Religious Construct[71]

The instructor should not attempt to assign moral judgments to the extremes on the axes

depicted above, but rather encourage students to think about ways to create bridges between the

disparate positions. The information provided, in conjunction with applied critical thinking, will

provide students with the foundation for understanding how people from very different

worldviews can constructively interact.

Objective #2: Understand Basic Teachings of Major Worldviews

The second phase of the curriculum should build upon the philosophical framework from

the first phase by describing in greater detail the basic tenets and logical arguments for each

worldview. The information may be presented in three parts for each worldview: a) facts—

important people/events/texts, b) supporting evidence—logical arguments/apologetics, and c)

faith—key beliefs/tenets. The student should gain an appreciation of the reasons why people

adhere to a certain belief—this is not a classroom opportunity to assess whether these reasons are

strong or valid (each student may evaluate the reasons privately), but rather an effort to point out

that logic and reasoning do play a role in formulating belief…even those that may be

diametrically opposed. This underlying truth allows people with differing views to respect each

other as honorable, intelligent human beings. This phase will also allow students to eliminate

possible misunderstandings or misinformed stereotypes and create a common basis of religious

understanding for fruitful dialog. The information provided in this phase differentiates the

curriculum proposed here from existing efforts within the military—which often provide forums

for interfaith dialog without providing information that may illuminate the discussion.

Current USAFA Superintendent Lt Gen John Regni reported several new programs

designed to "help protect every person's right to believe—or not to believe—as they choose."[72]

The Cadet Interfaith Council comprises one of the new programs, formed to "discuss religious

respect and accommodation issues, and potential problems."[73] Such a council is a welcome

addition, but may have limited effect beyond the small number who sit on the council and the

policymakers they inform. The real target of religious empathy is the cadet with untested

religious preconceptions culled through years of American cultural normalization—often the

cadet who has little use for the Cadet Interfaith Council and whatever its recommendations.

Effective religious empathy education reaches all Airmen, Marines, Sailors, and Soldiers, and

goes beyond merely providing a forum for discussion. It includes an intentionally structured

curriculum and begins with an explanation of the foundation of each worldview. This common

denominator for dialog is absolutely essential since, as Prothero laments, "Many a proponent of

interreligious dialog assumes that [people] know their own religious traditions."[74] As mentioned

in Chapter 2, this is a poor assumption. And the situation degrades even further when trying to

articulate the beliefs of others.

Thus the curriculum must include basic factual information surrounding a religion's

founder(s), key historical events, important texts, and important religious rituals and outward

behaviors. Each worldview may be conceptualized as a combination of foundational facts or

logic, with unproven or unprovable assertions placed upon that bedrock. In this way, the factual

information is bolstered by apologetics, which encourages adherents to employ their faith as a

bridge between what is known and what is believed. In the case of Christianity, for instance, few

dispute the existence of Jesus as a historical figure. Based on Biblical texts, Christian apologists

then argue for the idea of salvation offered by God through the sacrifice of God's own son. In

turn, Christians put faith in the (scientifically) unprovable assertion that Jesus was a confluence

of God and man—a tenet central to the Christian worldview. In this example, arguments may be

made with the support of sacred texts, but apologists also often make arguments based wholly

upon logic, reason, archaeological, or scientific support.[75] Many worldviews, including

Christianity and Islam, have very active apologists who seek to make structured, logical

arguments in support of their faiths. The factual or logical foundations for all religions are not

necessarily equal, but the curriculum must leave it to students to make their own personal

assessments of their validity.

Objective #3: Realize Each Worldview Has Moral and Rational Adherents

Achieving objective #3 begins with the supporting arguments discussed in the previous

phase of instruction. But the third phase should expressly emphasize that individuals

representing each major worldview can and do exhibit morality, rationality, and intelligence. To

this end, students may examine case studies or examples of respected individuals (both historical

and contemporary) representing various worldview backgrounds. Instructors may encourage

students to articulate areas of commonality among religious teachings and secular worldviews.

Whether sharing views on stewardship of the Earth and its resources, the value of life, or the

moral imperative of the Golden Rule (do unto others as you would have done unto you), each

worldview shares certain bonds and substantive areas of agreement with other faiths. These

areas may be emphasized without pretending that all believe the same thing. Finally, students

should be encouraged to discuss how to maintain fervent personal beliefs without denigrating

those who believe differently.

An attitude of intellectual or moral superiority is perhaps the biggest obstacle to interfaith

empathy. If an adherent of one religion believes that no other religion can attract moral, capable,

and intelligent followers then dialog immediately short circuits. While moral superiority appears

to be the vice of many religious groups,[76] intellectual superiority often cuts off dialog between

atheists and theists. Some atheist bumper stickers, like "Confused By Science? Just Say God

Did It!" or "Guilt, Fear, Mass Insanity…Sounds Like Islam and Christianity!"[77] playfully jab at

those with religious beliefs, but indicate a serious deep-seated sense of intellectual superiority.

As Lerner observes: those Americans with secular humanist beliefs "often see religion not merely as mistaken but as fundamentally irrational, and it gives the impression that one of the most important elements in the lives of ordinary Americans is actually deserving of ridicule."[78] The last phase of the curriculum should thus encourage students to break down prideful superiority complexes and focus on areas of commonality which support constructive relationships.

Overall, the proper educational model for religious education will factually present the evidence for, and basic tenets of, each major worldview and seek to show how rational, critical thinkers can support each system of belief. To offer a fair treatment of each faith or worldview, the proposed curriculum material should incorporate comments from leadership representing each group. When students realize that sane and intelligent human beings can look at the same data but glean different conclusions, the mold for true pluralism and understanding will be cast. It is important to avoid the patronizing universalist tolerance that believes that everyone simultaneously is somehow correct in their own way—there is still room to think that someone with differing beliefs can be flat out wrong. But the desired end state for the student is an empathetic mindset that 1) recognizes the right to a different belief, 2) acknowledges the equal moral and mental capacities of those who put their faith in a different religion or no religion, and 3) the equal standing of all human beings (atheists may end the sentence here) before God (for theists). The cumulative product provides common ground for further dialog by not only informing about the core principles espoused by each worldview, but by examining how those principles and beliefs can appeal to intelligent and rational people.

Chapter 6 − Conclusion and Recommendations

Religious beliefs have traditionally buoyed Americans at large, and within the military specifically.[79] Though not always a just motivator (see the Crusades), these beliefs nonetheless indicate American cultural heritage to a large extent. At times, disparate worldviews and religious motivations do cause interpersonal conflicts, and, where the military is involved, these can have strategic impacts on national objectives. Organizations or individuals, both within and external to the military, identify and decry instances of religious impropriety. The most grievous examples usually involve high ranking officers and warrant extensive media coverage (such as Lt Gen Boykin or Maj Gen Catton, each mentioned earlier). But strong religious convictions often arrive with the new military recruit, and service academies have also been accused of allowing, or even promoting, unhealthy religious expression. For instance, the founder of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation relates the very personal stories of bias suffered by his son while attending the US Air Force Academy,[80] and military sponsored research has uncovered environments at the US Naval Academy marred by similar religious bias.[81] These attitudes, left unchecked, have the potential to harm US efforts to represent the enlightened and pragmatic side in the Global War on Terror.

Yet while most generally agree regarding the nature of the problem, very different positions emerge when considering solutions. The first major camp, primarily comprised of vocal secularist voices, prefers to make public and government institutions, including the military, religion-free zones. Indeed some argue that, upon entering military service, personal religious beliefs must be checked at the door in favor of a new common religion: patriotism.[82] Legal support for such a position typically invokes a breach of the Establishment Clause of the 1st Amendment, but neglects to adequately address the Expression Clause. The second camp

advocates institutional cultural education and heightened religious awareness as proper tools for reducing tensions among worldviews. The arguments and research included in this paper lead to a favorable view of this second solution.

Fortunately, the military has already taken a few small steps toward constructing the religiously empathetic Soldier/Sailor/Airman/Marine through education. However, while leadership has renewed the emphasis placed upon cultural awareness in military professional development, more must be done. Current education neglects genuine discussion of religion as a cultural reality, instead speaking in general terms about religion as a potential motivator. In some cases, awareness training relays sterile religious percentage breakdowns for countries or regions, but nuances of belief systems and their implications are sadly omitted. This information, and more, is necessary to truly infuse military members with both knowledge and empathy.

I recommend that a modular worldview education curriculum be added to already existing cultural awareness training at institutions for US professional military education. The course may be tailored for time available, but should ultimately seek to enable a student to 1) appreciate the philosophical underpinnings of those major worldviews likely to be encountered by military members, 2) develop an understanding of the basic teachings of these worldviews, and 3) realize that moral, rational, and intelligent people can and do adhere to each worldview. A suggested curriculum has been included in the previous chapter as a starting point. Certainly, additional research, curriculum development, and interfaith coordination will be appropriate before the module is ready for employment.

As the military recruits and assimilates Americans from across the nation with numerous faith backgrounds and belief systems, it must understand the cultural norms that arrive with each

new service member and chart a course that will mold tomorrow's military representatives. Current military leadership has already encouraged Service PMEs to include cultural awareness training. This education appears, in some instances, to be beginning to pay dividends in Iraq,[83] but it may be strengthened with a more deliberate religious component in the curriculum. This religious education must not fear inflaming sensitivities, but rather seize the opportunity to shape our military force into religiously—as part of culturally—empathetic service members. Similar taboos have been confronted and conquered in the past. The military, as a more structured subculture within greater American culture, can lead the way toward religious tolerance and integration in the same manner that it led racial[84] and gender[85] integration. Proper educational focus will inform our military servicemen and women, tightening cohesion within and eliciting innovation from its diverse workforce. America's success in the Global War on Terror depends upon offering an ideology different and better than that of the terrorist. Fundamental acceptance of human beings and religious tolerance is part of that better ideology—and it must be embodied, not silenced, within our military.

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Appendix: Definitions

Before beginning any discussion, the terms used must adhere to a common understanding. Too often do arguing parties use identical words with differing meanings, rendering their efforts useless. While some may debate the correctness of the following entries, these definitions nevertheless provide the basis for this work.

Buddhism – religion, founded by Gautama Siddartha, based on the following tenets: 1) the goal of life is to achieve enlightenment, or nirvarna (indicated by an absence of suffering), 2) the eightfold path (right knowledge, intentions, speech, conduct, livelihood, right effort, mindfulness, and meditation) leads to freedom from desire, 3) Buddhists "take refuge" in the Buddha, the Dharma (teaching), and the Sangha (the Buddhist community). The belief systems of other religions may be blended into Buddhism.

Christianity – religion based on the following central tenets: 1) there is one God, 2) God makes His will known via the Bible, 3) after being created by God, humans rebelled against Him, 4) in order to redeem humans to Him, God sent His son Jesus—who was both fully divine and human—to suffer humanity's collective punishment, 5) humans cannot earn salvation, but gain eternal life by believing in Jesus' sacrifice. Main branches of Christianity are Catholicism and Protestantism.

Evangelical – any Christian who seeks to evangelize—share one's beliefs with others.

Hinduism – while there is no official founder or scripture, Hinduism has the following central tenets: 1) living creatures maintain ethics/duties, 2) living creatures are reincarnated, 3) living creatures experience effects of actions, 4) following correct paths will lead to enlightenment, or breaking out of the reincarnation cycle. There is no central doctrinal authority for Hinduism and numerous variations exist.

Islam – religion based on the following central tenets: 1) there is one God, 2) God makes his will known via the Koran, 3) the Koran was dictated by God to the prophet Muhammed, 4) following the five pillars of Islam (profession of faith, prayer, charitable giving, fasting, and pilgrimage) will usually lead to God's blessing and eternal life in heaven, though not guaranteed since God's will is supreme. Main branches of Islam are Sunni and Shi'a.

Islamist – follower of extremely fundamental and reactionary Islam, indoctrinated to subvert Western culture and moderate Islam in favor of establishing and enforcing Islamic sharia law.

Judaism – religion, often closely associated with elements of common Jewish ethnicity and culture, that has the following central tenets: 1) there is one God, 2) God makes his will known via the Torah, 3) the Torah includes Ten Commandments which were provided by God to the prophet Moses, 4) God chose Israelites (from whom Jews descended) to be His people, 5) study and observance of God's laws and commandments, and sometimes prayer and repentance, brings eternal life in heaven. Main branches of Judaism are Orthodox, Reform, Traditional, and Conservative.

Proselytize – the act of converting, or attempting to convert, a person to another (typically religious) point of view.

Secular Humanism –worldview that advocates understanding through science and reason, and either downplays the role of God, or denies God's existence altogether. Though not an organized religion by the Supreme Court, has organized representatives who seek to limit or eliminate religion or God from the public square.

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