

Church, State and Nuclear Weapons

A recent event at the United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM), Offutt Air Force Base, highlights the importance of being vigilant in separating church and state.

A local pastor had been invited to give a talk on Christian leadership at the base chapel. Dr. Kayser's beliefs, ranging from religious supremacy over government to the need for a law criminalizing homosexuality, can be found online. I brought my concerns to Captain Yi, the USSTRATCOM chaplain, and the invitation was revoked.

I'm a retired Army officer currently working as a contractor at USSTRATCOM. My experience over 24 years of active duty is that the military does a good job recognizing the difference between accommodating freedom of religious belief and proselytizing. For example, I took company command early at Fort Campbell because another commander was relieved (fired) for making the statement, in front of a formation, that "We're not going have any Wiccans in Foxtrot company." Chaplains I worked with, both in garrison and while deployed, supported all soldiers regardless of the soldiers' particular beliefs or traditions. They helped my soldiers through tough times. At Offutt, the base chaplain endorsed my creation of Offutt Humanists. We strive to serve non-religious members of the Offutt team.

Commanders and their staffs are challenged daily to accomplish their missions and take care of soldiers. Often we can help by recognizing when beliefs are being promoted that do not represent the values of the command. This recent event at USSTRATCOM is a case in point.

Dr. Philip Kayser, pastor of Dominion Covenant Church in Omaha, was invited to give a class on leadership from a Christian perspective on December 3rd. Dr. Kayser had presented talks twice before as part of non-religious activities celebrating Constitution Day.

Certainly, the men and women at USSTRATCOM have responsibilities that call for strong leadership skills. General John E. Hyten, the newly arrived commander, and the 2,700 people in this combatant command headquarters are stewards of our nation's nuclear capabilities and advocate for resources. They also provide oversight for space operations, global missile defense, and worldwide intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance among other mission areas.

Incidentally, USSTRATCOM's nuclear mission is of particular interest to some Christian fundamentalists. Considerable effort has been spent in relating nuclear weapons and their effects to the End Time prophecies described in Revelations.ⁱ

In September 2010 and again in September 2011 Dr. Kayser gave two talks at the USSTRATCOM Leadership Center on ""Is this a Christian country or a secular country as is widely believed?"" and on "the founding principles that formed the backbone for our Constitution." Attendance at these events was voluntary.

Dr. Kayser's opinions about separation of church and state are very clear. Dominion Covenant Church's mission statesⁱⁱ:

"There is no square inch of planet earth over which Christ does not have authority. He has the authority to rule over the state, business, farming, science, art, economics, education, etc."

"Our church will not rest or be satisfied until all human authority submits to the Lord Jesus Christ..."

Kayser's website, Biblical Blueprintsⁱⁱⁱ, argues that:

"...our nation's founding was done in a way that explicitly commits all its institutions and officers to Christianity as an established religion (though not any one denomination as an established church)."

He states that:

"...(the) founding fathers were so explicit in making this a Christian nation that a Muslim or an atheist should not be able to take the oath of office with any degree of integrity if he understands the original intent."

At Dr. Kayser's lecture in 2011 the USSTRATCOM Chief of Staff offered the officers attending the option of renewing their oaths. In the oath our military leaders either swear or affirm that they will support and defend our Constitution. The option to "affirm" and omission of "So help me God" at the end of the oath satisfies the No Religious Test Clause in the Constitution (Article VI, Clause 3). This clause specifies that:

"...no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States."

One wonders whether non-Christian or non-religious officers present were comfortable affirming their support rather than swearing it given the religious nature of Dr. Kayser's lecture. I doubt that Dr. Kayser's talk included the assertion, as he has written elsewhere^{iv}, that our government has:

"...a chain of command beginning with Jesus:

- Jesus "our Lord"
- People (via conventions within the states)
- States
- Federal government

(in that order) "

The leadership class that Dr. Kayser was to present this December is based on "The 5Cs of the Healthy Leader" (Christ, Community, Character, Calling and Competencies)^v. An audio version of Dr. Kayser's lecture is available on his church website^{vi}. Much of it is practical advice about identifying "joy givers" and "joy suckers" in our lives and the importance of being of good character.

Most people would not find this class controversial. However, spreading beliefs can have both good outcomes and bad. Certainly spreading a mindset that advocates the supremacy of religious belief over secular government can have tragic consequences.

Here is a case of extremist beliefs exploiting the well intentioned efforts of others to spread a faith based on "love". The original author of the "5Cs" is Malcom Webber, founder and executive director of LeaderSource SGA^{vii}. LeaderSource is, according to its website, an "international leader development ministry". It works to "...accelerate church planting..." with emphasis on growing their brand of Christianity overseas. Efforts by this and other organizations have been very successful for American-based evangelical groups in countries like Uganda. Tragically not all influence has been positive because of those who would use the strength of the Christian "brand" to sell their own beliefs. The Uganda Anti-Homosexuality Act was introduced in 2013 a month after a two-day conference featuring evangelical Christians Scott Lively, Caleb Lee Brundidge and Don Schmierer^{viii}. The theme of the conference, according to The New York Times, was the "gay agenda": "how to make gay people straight, how gay men often sodomized teenage boys and how 'the gay movement is an evil institution' whose goal is 'to defeat the marriage-based society and replace it with a culture of sexual promiscuity' ".

Dr. Kayser's position on homosexuality appears to be compatible with the views of those religious leaders who encouraged the Uganda Anti-Homosexuality Act. In 2011 his beliefs about homosexuality gained nationwide attention^{ix}. Several publications, including the Huffington Post and Talking Points Memo, discussed Dr. Kayser's beliefs during the run up to the 2012 presidential election. When Dr. Kayser endorsed Ron Paul, Talking Points Memo spoke with Kayser directly:

"...Kayser's views on homosexuality go way beyond the bounds of typical anti-gay evangelical politics and into the violent fringe: he recently authored a paper arguing for criminalizing homosexuality and even advocated imposing the death penalty against offenders based on his reading of Biblical law ... Reached by phone, Kayser confirmed to TPM that he believed in reinstating Biblical punishments for homosexuals — including the death penalty — even if he didn't see much hope for it happening anytime soon."

The Anti-Homosexuality Act was passed by Uganda's parliament with life in prison substituted for the death penalty^x. Much, we can assume, to Dr. Kayser's disappointment.

Dr. Kayser didn't get the opportunity to extend his influence at USSTRATCOM this December. A contractor working at the USSTRATCOM headquarters raised concerns about Kayser's positions on church/state separation and homosexuality. The USSTRATCOM chaplain immediately cancelled the invitation, stating that Kayser's position on homosexuality made him "unacceptable" as a speaker given that gay men and women serve openly in all branches of the military.

This highlights the fundamental problem with entangling religion and government - whose interpretation of religious law do we follow? Dr. Kayser's theology degree from Florida's unaccredited Whitefield Theological Seminary may seem to lend authority when pronouncing on "God's will" as expressed in the Bible. However, we needn't look very far to find equally educated and sincere religious leaders who welcome people of all sexual orientations. When we consider using religion to guide public policy, it's problematic to see such radically differing conclusions drawn from the dominant religion's single "inspired and inerrant" document.

We haven't heard the last of Dr. Kayser. His Providential History Festival^{xi}, an annual event since 2007, continues to provide a venue for home schooled children to present speeches and plays about how they've identified the hand of God in historical events. Many other sincere, charismatic men and women share his opinions on church state separation and social issues. They are working relentlessly to promote their beliefs for the "public good."

If you don't share their vision for the future, do these two things:

1. Pay Attention. Find out what ideas are being promoted in your workplace and community.
2. Speak Up. Often all it takes to deny extremists a platform is to tell the simple truth about what is happening and ask the question, "Does this represent our values?"

The vast majority of our leaders, both military and civilian, want to accommodate the free exercise of religious belief without seeking to impose their beliefs on others. We can help by alerting them when beliefs are being promoted that are contrary to that goal.

The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.

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ⁱFundamentalist take on how nuclear weapons fit into the End Times described in Revelation:
<http://christinprophecy.org/articles/nuclear-weapons-in-the-end-times/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.dominioncovenantchurch.com/contact-us/>

iii <http://biblicalblueprints.org/christian-nation-part-1/>

iv <http://biblicalblueprints.org/christian-nation-part-3/>

v <http://www.leadershipletters.com/2009/08/24/the-5cs-of-the-healthy-leader/>

vi <http://www.dominioncovenantchurch.com/sermons/2012-leadership-conference/>

vii <http://www.leadersource.org/about/>

viii <http://www.publiceye.org/magazine/v24n4/us-christian-right-attack-on-gays-in-africa.html>

ix <http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/election2012/death-penalty-for-gays-ron-paul-courts-the-religious-fringe-in-iowa>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/12/28/philip-kayser-ron-paul-gays-iowa-caucus-2012_n_1173338.html

<https://thinkprogress.org/paul-campaign-touts-endorsement-of-preacher-who-advocates-death-penalty-for-gays-b86e5607fed7>

x <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/25/world/africa/ugandan-president-to-sign-antigay-law.html>

xi <http://providentialhistoryfestival.com/>

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