

# Fighting for Military Religious Freedom

by John Compere\*, Baird, TX

“Fighting for our service members’ rights, so they can fight for ours” is the motto of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF). The MRFF is a national nonprofit constitutional rights organization solely dedicated to ensuring all members of our United States Armed Forces receive the Constitution guarantee of religious freedoms, to which they and all Americans are entitled.

Established in 2005, the MRFF is a watchdog group for our military that has uncovered voluminous evidence establishing a pervasive pattern and practice of constitutional infringements against members of the United States Armed Forces. These violations of basic human and constitutional rights have been committed from the highest levels to the lowest levels in all of our military services and involve religion. For its advocacy, the MRFF has been nominated for the Noble Peace Prize seven times over six consecutive years, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011, including two nominations in 2010.

The MRFF represents more than 51,000 military members, veterans and civilians (96% of whom are Christians) who have requested that their American Constitution right to determine, practice and enjoy their own religious or non-religious beliefs be respected and protected.

There is little uniformity in religious beliefs. Christianity, for example, has 33,820 different varieties worldwide with 2,000 in the USA alone (World Christian Encyclopedia). All have major disagreements over biblical versions, translations and authors as well as creeds, doctrines, rituals, liturgies, prayer, baptism, clergy gender, life beginning, human equality, freewill or predestination, divinity of Jesus, one deity (1st Commandment monotheism) or a trinity of deities (non-biblical polytheism), etc. The Department of Defense acknowledges our nation’s diversity of religious beliefs by publishing an official list of recognized religions for the military alone that includes 221 different faith and belief groups.

Christian military members do not want someone else’s version of Christianity imposed upon them. Non-Christian military members do not want any version of Christianity imposed upon them. All object to being publicly proselytized with the private religious beliefs of another in the military workplace and want to be able to perform their military duties free from uninvited interference. The MRFF proudly, patriotically and professionally represents them to ensure this precious Constitution liberty of theirs and all Americans is respected and protected. See [www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org](http://www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org).

The military mission is to defend our nation against its enemies – not promote a religion. The sworn military service oath is to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States...and bear true faith and allegiance to the same” - not to any religion or religious writing. The Constitution prohibits our government or its representatives (which includes the military) from promoting a religion.

Military service and pay are public whereas religious beliefs are private. Military personnel may privately practice a religion or no religion, but they may not use their military service or position to publicly promote their private religious beliefs or force them on other military members. Military installations provide chapels for those who choose to worship and chaplains for the spiritual support of those who seek it. Religion problems seldom arise when military leadership demonstrates intelligence, integrity and loyalty to the Constitution, mission, oath and regulations.

Those who disrespect and disregard our Constitution, their sworn service oath and military regulations subject themselves to disciplinary action. Additionally, a basic Constitution class and briefing on the lawful significance of sworn oaths need to be mandatory. Those who choose not to support and defend our Constitution, honor their oath or follow regulations have the right to seek a career in the civilian sector for private pay.

The Constitution (1<sup>st</sup> Amendment) provides, respectively, our historic trinity of American religious freedoms:

1. Freedom from public religion - our government is prevented from “respecting” an establishment of religion (favoring a religion). It is our right to be free from religion imposed by the government or its representatives;
2. Freedom of private religion - our government is prevented from “prohibiting” the free exercise of religion. It is our right to practice any religion or no religion provided it does not violate the rights of others; and
3. Freedom of speech about religion – our government is prevented from “abridging” freedom of speech. It is our right to speak or write about religion. It does not include the right of the government to impose religious speech or writing on Americans.

There can be no misunderstanding about the three operative verbs above. All one has to do is first read them and then read their definitions in any American dictionary.

Simply stated, we Americans (including the military) have the right guaranteed by our Constitution to our own religious or non-religious beliefs, but we must respect the right of others to their beliefs. It is the precious right we cherish for ourselves and timeless universal wisdom known as the “GOLDEN RULE” reportedly preached by Jesus in every New Testament version (Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31).

1<sup>st</sup> Commander-in-Chief GEORGE WASHINGTON publicly acknowledged American military freedom of belief - “It has been suggested that [the military chaplaincy] has a tendency to introduce religious disputes into the Army, which above all things should be avoided, and in many instances would compel men to a mode of Worship which they do not profess.”

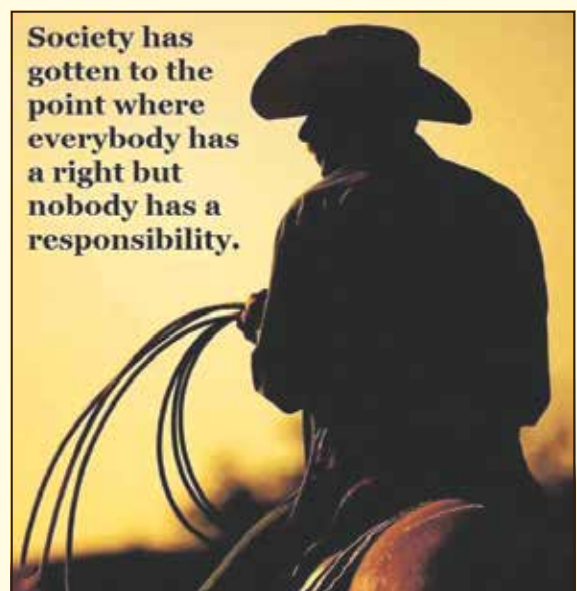
40<sup>th</sup> Commander-in-Chief RONALD REAGAN affirmed this critical American liberty in a public speech - “We establish no religion in this country, we command no worship, we mandate no belief, nor will we ever. Church and state are, and must remain, separate.”

Christian Evangelist BILLY GRAHAM, adviser to many American Commanders-in-Chief, also praised it in a public sermon - “We enjoy the separation of church and state and no sectarian religion has ever been and we pray God, ever will be imposed upon us.”

\*John Compere, Brigadier General, Judge Advocate General’s Corps, US Army (Retired); former Chief Judge, US Army Court of Military Review; Disabled American Veteran (Vietnam); MRFF Advisory Board Member; and Texas rancher 🐄



Submitted by Norma White, Amarillo, TX



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