

## A SOLDIER'S MORALITY, RELIGION, AND OUR PROFESSIONAL ETHIC: DOES THE ARMY'S CULTURE FACILITATE INTEGRATION, CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT, AND TRUST IN THE PROFESSION?

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The context for this monograph lies in the trust relationships that American military professions must retain with the society they serve if they are to remain professions. Of course, the alternative without such trust is for the Services simply to revert to the character and behavior of a government occupation, a big bureaucracy like the Internal Revenue Service or the Department of Agriculture. But to remain professions, one of the constant challenges the Stewards of these professions must address is “How different and how separate” they are to be from the society they serve. Stated differently, as the values and mores of American society change, the ethics of its military professions must also evolve, but never so much that such evolution diminishes their military effectiveness—their *raison-d'être* and the source of the trust relationship in the first place.

As the values of American society have changed in the past, in most cases, e.g., racial integration, abortion, smoking as a health issue, the service of gays in the military, gender roles, etc., those changes have eventually had a strong influence on the culture of the military professions and, in particular, on the core of those cultures—the Services' Ethics.

The authors argue that another such issue has now arisen and is strongly, and not favorably, influencing military cultures—a culture of hostility toward religion and its correct expressions within the military. Setting aside the role of Chaplains as a separate issue, the focus here is on the role religion may play in the

moral character of individual soldiers, especially leaders, and how their personal morality, faith-based or not, is to be integrated with their profession's ethic so they can serve in all cases “without reservation” as their oath requires.

The authors assert that Service cultures have become increasingly hostile to the correct expressions of religion, perhaps to the point that soldiers of faith are now intimidated into privatizing their beliefs, and thus serving hypocritically as someone other than who they really are. If the Services really want leaders “of character,” as their doctrines so plainly state, then they must maintain professional cultures that allow, indeed foster, authentic moral character whether faith-based or not, and its development as soldiers volunteer and serve. The Services can ill afford to lose the irrefutable power of soldiers' personal moralities as they serve in both peace and in war, providing an additional motivation and resilience to prevail in the arduous tasks and inevitable recoveries inherent in their sacrificial service.

After advancing this hypothesis and viewing it from several perspectives, the authors then address the service they know best—the U.S. Army—and offer recommendations for both Soldiers and the Stewards of the Army Profession as to the best way to maintain such a professional culture. The intent clearly is to start a discussion within the profession on an issue that the Army, at least, has placed for too long in the “too hard” box.

The authors see three opportunities for Soldiers of religious faith when facing what they perceive to be a conflict between their religion-based personal morality and what the institution is expecting of them. First, they may choose to compromise their religion-based convictions in order to go along with the prevailing institutional/cultural view. In doing so, however, they will be inauthentic to their core values and thus dishonest; they will be leaders without integrity. Lack of integrity in dealing with a known ethical dilemma, particularly by an Army leader whose every decision and action is carefully watched by his or her followers, will lead to lack of integrity and/or trust by the followers. Second, these Soldiers could continue to serve honorably within the Army Profession, but maintain their integrity by working within the institution to preclude and resolve such moral dilemmas. In other words, they are to get off the sidelines and “lead-up,” actively engaging and assisting the Stewards of the Profession in their vital role of maintaining over time both the effectiveness and the ethical standing of the Army Profession. Third, the Soldier of religious faith could leave the military profession, deciding that the cost of compromising one’s personal integrity is too high a price to pay to continue in sacrificial service to the Republic. This would be a tragic loss to the Army and to the Republic of such integrated men and women of character, many with well over a decade of distinguished service in combat, and should be earnestly avoided by both the individuals and by the Army.

The authors recommend that senior leaders, by policy and personal leadership, maintain the essential meritocratic nature of the Army’s Ethic and culture, while celebrating and leveraging the diversity of religious (as well as nonreligious) presence within the profession. These leaders should strip the profession’s culture of any real or perceived hostility or intimidation towards religion and its correct expression. They should maintain a culture in which Soldiers, as well

as their leaders, can live and serve with individual authenticity consistent with “military necessity” as expressed in Army regulations. In most all cases, they should be free to express and apply their religious faith and the moral convictions that spring from that faith.

Soldiers of religious faith, all ranks, uniformed and civilian, should be knowledgeable of, and scrupulously follow, rights to religious expression, as well as the limitations to those rights. At the same time, Soldiers are not called by the Republic in any role either to be an evangelist for a particular faith, or to insert religiously-based morality into situations where doing so is improper. Soldiers should aspire to effectively integrate personal morality of faith with the profession’s ethic. Soldiers should expect, remind, and assist the Stewards of the Profession to be the Guardians of the Ethic and the profession’s military effectiveness.

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