

Generals erred by taking part in Christian video: Fund-raising video for the Christian Embassy

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High-ranking U.S. Army and Air Force personnel violated military regulations when they participated in a promotional video for a private evangelical organization, according to a report by the Pentagon's Office of Inspector General.

A Pentagon spokesperson said August 6 that it would be up to the army and air force whether to discipline the military brass involved, but said no action is expected against top civilian employees.

The 47-page report, released on July 27, found that three air force officers—Major General Jack Catton, Major General Peter Sutton and a colonel whose name was not disclosed—and three army officers—Brigadier General Bob Caslen, Brigadier General Vincent Brooks and a lieutenant colonel, also not identified—were wrong to take part in a fund-raising video for the Christian Embassy, based in Arlington, Virginia.

The Christian Embassy is part of the conservative Campus Crusade for Christ International and sponsors prayer breakfasts and other religious activities for high-ranking federal employees and elected officials.

The dispute over the video surfaced last December against a backdrop of complaints that military officials frequently turn a blind eye to improper proselytizing and show preferential treatment toward evangelicals.

“The officers were filmed during the duty day, in uniform with rank clearly displayed, in official and often identifiable Pentagon locations,” the report said. “Their remarks conferred approval of and support to Christian Embassy, and the remarks of some officers implied that they spoke for a group of senior military leaders rather than just for themselves.”

At one point during the 10-minute video, which was filmed inside the Pentagon in 2005, Caslen refers to the Christian Embassy's special efforts for high-ranking officers through Flag Fellowship groups. He notes that whenever he runs into another fellowship member, "I immediately feel like I am being held accountable because we are the aroma of Jesus Christ."

The air force's Catton explains in the video that the Christian Embassy helped him become a "director on the joint staff."

"As I meet the people that come into my directorate I tell them right up front who Jack Catton is, and I start with the fact that I'm an old-fashioned American, and my first priority is my faith in God, then my family and then country," Catton says on the video. "I share my faith because it describes who I am."

Catton later told the inspector general's office that he believed that the Christian Embassy, which hosts a weekly prayer breakfast at the Pentagon, had become a "quasi-federal entity."

The report also singled out Ralph G. Benson, a retired army colonel and a former Pentagon chaplain, for providing special access to the organization and "mischaracterizing" the purpose of the video by implying that it was "being produced to document the Pentagon chaplain's ministry rather than to promote a nonfederal entity."

The Military Religious Freedom Foundation, an Albuquerque-based watchdog group founded by retired air force attorney Michael L. "Mikey" Weinstein, asked the Department of Defense to investigate the video last December.

Weinstein expressed disappointment with the report's findings, which he said didn't go far enough in penalizing those involved. "They suggested corrective action, and we wanted to see courts martial," he said, adding that his organization plans to file a lawsuit against the Department of Defense. *-Religion News Service*