

by Don M. Snider, Ph.D.

A talk presented on 6 May 2009 at a seminar on "Integrating Faith, Family and Profession" at the Memorial Chapel of the U.S. Army War College

*Note: The views expressed here are those of the author, not the Army War College, the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense*

## **Introduction**

It is good to remind ourselves that some of the greatest challenges to our ability to think and to act as Christians come from those circumstances to which we must re-act, rather than autonomously acting first. Such I believe will be the case in the coming changes to DADT, which many leaders might well prefer not to be changed at all.

Thus, Christian officers, and particularly those at the level of strategic leadership, will face a moral and ethical dilemma when the laws that govern service by homosexuals in U.S. armed forces change to allow such citizens to serve openly.

Morally, the dilemma will be manifested in terms of the officer's personal morality which, based on Christian teaching, views homosexual conduct as wrong and thus not to be legitimized socially by open service in the Republic's armed forces.

Ethically, the dilemma will be to accommodate fully an evolving professional ethic, which evolution in DADT directly confronts and contradicts the officer's personal morality. Under their commission, it is rightly expected that officers individually can in all circumstances abide by and fully support the profession's ethic (...and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion...). Thus, if they cannot resolve the cognitive dissonance between personal morality and professional ethic, then they simply cannot integrate faith, family, and profession, and should seriously consider whether they should remain on active duty.

I will not focus on the specific Christian beliefs behind your, and my, views on homosexual conduct, as I believe we here this morning are part of a larger Christian consensus that it is simply wrong; it is sinful behavior. But in passing I will note that the same Christian perspective makes quite clear that it is no more wrong and sinful than any number of other behaviors you deal with daily among a few members of the profession – adultery, drunkenness, lying, stealing, abuse of spouses and children, failure to pay legitimate bills... clearly, we all, each one, are fallen and live in a fallen world.

That perspective also makes quite clear that those who are the object of the cultural wars within our society and this policy change are not just "gays" or "homosexuals." By the Christian narrative they are human beings created in the image of God. All humans are therefore valuable without having to prove their worth; they are to be accorded the dignity and respect called for by their unique creation. Christian officers, above others, must understand and support this belief by their leadership both personally and officially.

### **What is behind the policy change; How to contextualize it?**

I believe as military professionals you must see this as an issue of an evolving professional ethic. Remember, the three influences on the ethic of military professions are: 1) the values and behavioral norms of the society being defended, how they expect their sons and daughters to be treated when in uniform and how they expect their wars to be fought and won and a better peace then established, 2) the military imperatives for an effective fighting force, e.g., the obese may not serve, etc.; and 3) the terms of international treaties to which the United States is a party. In that regard, the evolution in DADT can be seen in three interrelated trends:

- The first trend is the now well-publicized secularization of American society. Sadly, neither our military professions, nor their chaplaincies, are researching the influences of this trend. But recall the cover of *Newsweek* only a month ago, "The Decline and Fall of Christian America."<sup>1</sup> The article reported new statistics from the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS 2008) documenting that America is becoming less Christian.

<sup>2</sup>

86% of American adults self identified as Christians in 1990; but only 76% in 2008; those with "no stated religion, atheist, or agnostic" rose in the same period from 8.2% to 14.1%; etc. While discussions of a currently post-Christian America are fanciful, a slow trend is unmistakable. How

are you going to incorporate/accommodate this trend in your own understanding of the evolution of the profession's ethic and DADT?

· The second trend is the significantly increasing acceptance of homosexual lifestyles among generation Y Americans, including those volunteering for service in our armed forces. In my experience teaching at West Point the past 13 years, the trend was clear and when discussing it with the cadets the influence of their secondary school experiences was more than obvious. In similar manner, and equally unscientific in method, is a 2008 *Military Times* survey of active duty military personnel indicating that while 54% of active duty personnel oppose a change in the policy, 71% will have no difficulty at all accommodating the change.

3

So my point to you is, as always, be aware of the generational issues that you must deal with as you lead at the strategic level. Simply stated, everyone you lead does not believe, and therefore think, as you and your generation do.

· The third trend is the lack of any effort since 1993 by the strategic leaders of our military professions to study, analyze, and otherwise argue for the military necessity of the current DADT policy. In other words, if it was necessary for task cohesion within the force, the leadership never made the case; and it is now far too late. You will have to draw your own conclusions as to why this was the case, but my own take is it simply remained in the "too hard" box; sadly a case of a profession being led as a politically correct bureaucracy rather than studying for itself what is ethically necessary for an effective fighting force and then defending that fact in public. If I am correct, there is also another lesson here for you as future strategic leaders!

**Having contextualized, some questions to ask yourself**

First, I suggest you ask yourself if you really believe in an evolving professional ethic... is this a welcome and good thing? I suggest that it is, and offer only one example to make the point. During the last era of conventional war (post-RVN to the end of the first Iraq War) the profession's ethic of force was singular – maximum force permissible. However, in hybrid warfare under the COIN doctrine employed in Iraq and Afghanistan, we have now rightly added a second ethic of force – least force necessary. You recent participants in that theater know far better than I how much the U.S. military's ethic of force has evolved and how hard it has been to inculcate it at every level of operations. But my point is that American military ethics do change and for good reasons.

Second, have you thought recently about the limits of liberal democracy and what our constituted form of government is able to produce in terms of governance? Theoretically, we have from our Founders a form of government with federalism and institutional checks and balances that will not allow the minority citizens to be tyrannized by the majority. Sadly, our national history belies that theory. There are however many, myself included, who have never been in the minority on issues that personally touched us. I have never felt tyrannized, except perhaps under *Roe v. Wade*, but as a male that did not touch me personally. My point is that now, under a changed DADT, some of you are going to have to wrestle for the first time with minority status, and you are going to have to be careful as to how you re-assess your personal expectations of your government... the constituted form of governance to which you took a solemn oath.

4

Third, I suggest that you ask yourself how the role of your own Christian witness as a strategic leader might change under this policy change. We know that those who follow you within your small part of the military will naturally know of your faith walk and will be keenly observing you to see how you handle the policy change, thus my question. You will have to arrive at your own answer, but I suggest that for many other Christians and searchers within the ranks, those of less professional and spiritual maturity than yourself, your actions will be critical (as always they will watch what you do far more than they will listen to what you say). Carefully thought through in advance, this might well be a golden moment for lifestyle evangelism done, as always, by your professional excellence.

Fourth, and last, I ask that you rethink this policy change through in the context of your original calling into the military. In the big picture, what has changed? Certainly not the purpose of our armed forces - it remains to execute faithfully the policies of our government by the use of lethal force or the threat thereof. And to enable this American soldiers must continue to fulfill their fourfold purpose – to prepare to kill, and under right authority, to kill; to prepare to die, and when necessary, to die. So you will have to answer yet again your original question, “Who is now worth dying for?” I do not pose this question to be melodramatic but to remind you of the bald essence of your calling and focus your attention solidly on its evolving salience. In the words of Rick Warren, “It’s not about you,”<sup>5</sup> rather this is about your dual callings from God and from this beloved Republic, things far greater than self or a job.

### Summary

It is quite insufficient for the Christian officer to react to this change in professional ethics with what I have heard on occasion, “We will just have to suck it up.” That is not leadership, rather a very poor form of followership. With study and reflection on your own part and much discussion within the fellowship, this is an evolution that you can deal with forthrightly, either in or out of active military service. But you will have to be clear as to who you are, what you really believe, and whether you can be authentic as a Christian officer in your approach to the personal and professional tensions this change will produce. Needless to say, an inauthentic or incongruous reaction will be self-defeating to your leadership, and perhaps even toxic to your organization’s effectiveness. Time is short. I trust this outline will help you to start the necessary study and reflection.

Don M. Snider, Colonel, U.S. Army, Retired, Ph.D., serves as Adjunct Professor, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College; He formerly served as Director of Defense Policy for the National Security Council in both the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations, as Olin Distinguished Professor of National Security Studies at West Point (1995-1998), as Project Director for *The Future of the Army Profession* (2nd Edition, April 2005), and as Project Director for *Precepts from the Cadet Prayer* (2007).

*Forging the Warrior's Character: Moral*  
(2007).

---

## ENDNOTES

1. John Meacham, "The Decline of Christian America," *Newsweek*, April 13, 2009: 34-38.
2. ARIS Survey available at [www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org](http://www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org)
3. Branden McGarry, "Troops oppose repeal of 'don't; ask'," *Military Times*, December 29, 2008.
4. For those who want more on this, I suggest Robert P. Kraynak, *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy* (University of Notre Dame, 2001).
5. This is the first sentence of the first chapter of Warren's *Purpose Driven Life* (Zondervan, 2002).

