



## Shocking: Veteran Forcibly Hauled Away for Mentioning God

Upon hearing about a military veteran hauled away by soldiers for mentioning God, you might expect the story to be out of Shanghai, Beijing, or Tianjin. But the incident in question today is all the more outrageous because it occurred here in the USA — at Travis Air Force Base near Fairfield, California. *Breitbart* [reports](#) on the story:



For countless years, service members have given the “flag-folding speech” at military and civic events, including retirement ceremonies. Traditionally, this speech explains the colors, symbols, and history of the flag.

The flag-folding speech also contains several religious references, including, “Let us pray that God will reflect with admiration the willingness of one nation in her attempts to rid the world of tyranny, oppression, and misery. It is this one nation under God that we call, with honor, the United States of America.”

The speech closes with, “God bless our flag. God bless our troops. God bless America.”

In 2005, the Pentagon changed the speech to remove all references to the divine, substituting additional historical facts such as Neil Armstrong’s planting of an American flag on the moon in 1969. But many service members prefer the traditional speech and desire that version given at their own retirement celebrations.

One of these people was Master Sergeant Charles Roberson, who was retiring from active duty on April 3, 2016. And the man he chose to give his flag-folding speech was Oscar Rodriguez, a decorated Air Force veteran with over 30 years military service and a popular orator who has rendered more than 100 flag-folding addresses. *Religion News Service* [provides](#) a bit more background and reports on what then transpired:

“I saw Oscar perform the speech live just one month prior to my own retirement ceremony and I really wanted him to be able to perform that same way at my ceremony,” said MSgt Roberson.

Rodriguez agreed to Roberson’s request, but when he began the patriotic flag-folding speech at the retirement ceremony [on April 3], multiple uniformed Airmen assaulted and forcibly removed Rodriguez because his speech included the word “God.” After dragging him out of the retirement ceremony, Travis Air Force Base personnel ordered Rodriguez off the base .

*Breitbart* reports that Lieutenant Colonel Michael Sovitsky, the commander of Roberson’s squadron, the 749th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, was opposed to hearing God’s name in the speech. But one could



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wonder about his position. “In God We Trust” is our official national motto — based on a law signed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956 — and first appeared on coins in 1864. Moreover, Christmas is a federal holiday. And reflecting this governmental recognition of faith, it doesn’t appear that Rodriguez’ actions violated military code. As Fox News [tells us](#):

“I can’t speak to the specific incident,” Ann Stefanek, a [sic] Air Force Spokeswoman tells Fox News. “[But] Air Force personnel may use a flag folding ceremony script that is religious for retirement ceremonies.”

“Since retirement ceremonies are personal in nature, the script preference for a flag folding ceremony is at the discretion of the individual being honored and represents the member’s views, not those of the Air Force.”

Given this, it’s not surprising that Rodriguez is considering legal action against the Air Force and has retained the First Liberty Institute for that purpose. As the *Washington Times* [writes](#):

First Liberty sent a letter to the Air Force and to the commander at Travis Air Force Base on Monday, demanding an apology by June 27 and threatening to “pursue all available legal options” on Mr. Rodriguez’s behalf.

“I’ve never seen anything like this,” said Mike Berry, director of military affairs at First Liberty. “Where people in uniform come and grab somebody and physically treat them like this, and forcibly drag them away against his will because of what he’s going to say, and because of what he was going to say is the word ‘God’? That’s insane. I can’t fathom that that would be happening in our country on a military base.”

And as Berry put it, in no uncertain terms to Fox, “The military broke the law and abused its power.”

Yet while the micro is that Rodriguez may very well win his case, the macro is that we’re losing the culture to secularism. This is apparent everywhere. For decades now, Christmas and Easter vacations have been replaced on school calendars with “Winter” and “Spring” breaks, and Christmas Trees are now sometimes called “Holiday Trees.” “B.C” and “A.D.” to identify dates have been giving way to “C.E.” (Common Era) and “B.C.E” (silly, too, for whose birth do we date the “Common Era” from?). And Christian businessmen are now, for the first time in American history, being forced to service *events* contrary to the faith’s teaching.

In general, more and more Christian symbols, messages, and events are purged from our cultural landscape as time wears on and are replaced by things un-Christian. And this is a phenomenon involving the entire West. Just recently, Switzerland’s Gotthard Base Tunnel was opened with [a bizarre, occult-like ceremony](#); and a German architect [has now recommended](#) that churches be destroyed and highly “visible” mosques be built in their place to encourage Muslims to “integrate.”

And much as how astronomers can predict where an asteroid will be 20 years hence by charting its trajectory, astute observers can know where society will likely be decades hence by analyzing our cultural trajectory. For just as the Roman Empire transitioned from persecution of Christians to their gradual acceptance to making their faith the realm’s official religion, we’re experiencing the process in reverse. From deep Middle Age religiosity, we transitioned to “Enlightenment” doubt to indifference to a lack of acceptance. And next? The late Cardinal Francis George touched on that when alluding to our devolution in 2010, saying, “I expect to die in bed, my successor will die in prison and his successor will die a martyr in the public square.”



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Yet there is hope — even in this world. Not only can powerful explosions (of faith, for instance) alter a culture’s trajectory, but, contrary to popular belief, it’s not that religion is dying in the world.

It’s that the West is dying in the world.

As I [reported](#) last year, the United States is going the way of highly secularized Western Europe, with Christians’ population share dropping by approximately a percentage point every year while the percentage of atheists is steadily increasing. Yet religious people’s share of the worldwide population [is actually growing](#), a phenomenon poised to continue.

The further good news is that much like anarchy, that which leads to moral anarchy — widespread atheism — is not a permanent state of affairs. As Cardinal George [also reminded us](#), “The world divorced from the God who created and redeemed it inevitably comes to a bad end. It’s on the wrong side of the only history that finally matters.” Furthermore, said George about the man who will follow the martyred heir to his office: He “will pick up the shards of a ruined society and slowly help rebuild civilization, as the church has done so often in human history.”



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