

USAFA VICTORY WAS SWEET

During the week of April 7, we learned that some faculty and cadets were mandated to attend an April 9 seminar at the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA); the seminar featured footage from the virulently anti-Catholic movie, "Constantine's Sword." We issued two news releases lambasting the academy for playing host to the film. Because of our relentless effort, the USAFA brass came to their senses and pulled the plug on the film before the event began.

It all started when we caught wind of an article in the *Colorado Springs Gazette* stating that the USAFA would host an event titled, "USA's War on Terror: Not a Battle Between Christianity and Islam." The seminar featured three speakers representing the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF), an advocacy group for the separation of church and state. The speakers scheduled for the event were former U.S. Ambassador Joseph Wilson; author Reza Aslan and MRFF president Mikey Weinstein. The seminar was made mandatory for hundreds of cadets and faculty whose coursework intersected with the topic discussed.

The seminar was billed as an event on the war on terror and to counter speeches that were given at the USAFA in February by three "former terrorists" who allegedly "demonized" Islam. The event was also meant to combat the alleged heavy-handed evangelical Christian proselytizing that occurred on the campus. Weinstein argued that the current war on terror "is not a war of fundamentalist Christianity against fundamentalist Islam," but rather it's "a war that involves providing for the national defense of the American people pursuant to an armed forces that is governed by the U.S. Constitution."

The *Gazette* also reported that during the seminar, those attending would watch clips from the controversial film,

"Constantine's Sword." The seminar, which was intended to combat the war on terror and religious intolerance, only fanned the flames of bigotry.

The movie is based on a book of the same title, written by disgruntled ex-priest James Carroll. The book version says that the Gospels are inherently anti-Semitic and that unless the New Testament is gutted to the point where the messiahship of Jesus is rejected, Christian anti-Semitism will not end. Carroll's book was discredited by the *New York Review of Books* saying of the author, "He is not a historian; everything he has to say on the subject of anti-Semitism is borrowed from other writers, and much of what he offers as fact is in reality highly contentious."

The movie version of "Constantine's Sword" goes a step further. The movie's director, Oren Jacoby, asked the following question on the movie's website: "Is there something in the DNA of Christianity—the majority religion in our country—that demonizes 'the other' and is inclined toward violence?" Although the USAFA announced that the clips of the film that were to be shown didn't contain anti-Catholic content, how did they justify showing the clips at all? Would they show clips of a film that suggested blacks or Jews to be inherently violent, even though the clips would not portray that message? Of course the answer is no.

On April 8, we sent copies of books by noted authors to the Academy's library. These books refuted the propaganda that was on display in the film. We also contacted the officials of the U.S. House and Senate who oversee the military academies. On April 9, we applied more pressure. We wrote to the Board of Visitors of the USAFA and asked them to launch a probe of what was occurring; we copied their letters to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees.

We felt the added pressure was necessary, especially after USAFA director of communications, Johnny Whitaker, placed a

phone call to his counterpart at the Catholic League, Kiera McCaffrey. Whitaker admitted that he had seen the entire film and that it was indeed anti-Catholic but that those clips wouldn't be shown. He also told us that Weinstein wanted to include some inflammatory clips, but that the USAFA denied that request.

The event went on as planned on April 9, but one thing was removed from the agenda—the officials at the USAFA decided to cancel showing the clips from “Constantine’s Sword.” Indeed, we were delighted at this result. We were pleased that the USAFA made the right decision not to provide a platform for such a bigoted film.

On April 10, Lt. Gen. John F. Regni, the superintendent of the USAFA, called Bill Donohue and had an honest and fruitful exchange. Donohue commended him for his intervention that proved to be decisive. We are glad that Lt. Gen. Regni recognized that this film did not contribute to the overall aim of the seminar and omitted it from the event.

We issued a news release later that day stating: “We know that there have been accusations of religious bias on the campus, and if that is true, it needs to be rooted out. What can never be tolerated is to slam one religion while purportedly addressing religious intolerance expressed toward another religion.”

Because the clips were cancelled, we considered the matter closed. And in fairness, we wrote to all of the public officials we had previously wrote to asking them to ignore our request for an investigation. We thank all of those who helped us achieve this victory.