

The Religious Right

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Overview

"I can sum it all up in three words: Evolution is a lie."

- christianforums.com

The Religious Right began, significantly, in the 1960s from a coalition of religious conservatives in the U.S which wanted to exert political power as a group who had largely stayed out of politics until then. It is a group of interest groups, who collectively fall under the banner of new social movements (NSMs), but they each could be considered a single issue group. One of the most prominent groups of The Religious Right is the Christian Coalition, made prominent by Ralph E. Reed Jr.

The Christian Coalition and Ralph Reed

The Christian Coalition is a group mainly fundamentalist and evangelical Americans, which reports itself as having two and a half million members. Although started in 1988 by Pat Robertson and Timothy LaHaye, the group came into prominence when Ralph Reed took control of day-to-day operations from 1989, distributing voters' guides to conservative Christian churches, methods later used to support Bob Dole. At the height of his Coalition



career, Reed was named "the Right Hand of God" in 1995 by TIME magazine. But by 1996 the influence was in decline when Reed supported unsuccessful Republican nominee Bob Dole. Reed resigned in 1997, the year that the Coalition lost its tax-exempt status and divided into two parts: the Christian Coalition International, its taxable political arm, and the Christian Coalition of America, which was tax-exempt. Robertson resigned as the group's president in 2001.

Today the organisation is over two million dollars in debt, and its budget has been severely reduced from a peak of over \$26 million, to \$1 million as of 2006. (1)

After Ralph Reed resigned from the Christian Coalition he eventually

ran for Lt. Governor of Georgia in 2002 but lost after scandal and controversy (involving his prior connection to Jack Abramoff, whom he worked under in the College Republican National Committee as Executive Director) to underdog Cassey Cagle.

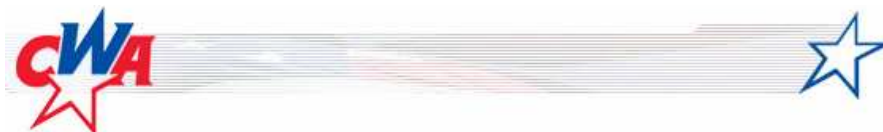
Methods

The Christian Coalition tends to aid the central republican part in mobilizing conservative Christian voters. However when they do promotional work themselves they tend to operate through the medium of flyers distributed to churches. In the 2000 election, the CC distributed over 70 million voter guides across the U.S., with 5 million being in Spanish, mostly distributed in Florida. In the 2004 election, they distributed 30 million flyers and targeted states and districts, particularly focusing on areas that were more politically competitive.

Ralph Reed uses the principle of negative campaigning to project a "softer" public face for Christian conservatism. Reed repeatedly described himself as a "guerrilla fighter" who "travelled at night" and put "enemies" in "body bags" before they even realized he had struck (Norfolk V ~~Virginia~~). He was given funding by the Christian Coalition to do this. Negative campaigning is trying to win an advantage by referring to negative aspects of an opponent or of a policy rather than emphasizing one's own positive attributes or preferred policies the broadest sense, the term covers any rhetoric which refers to an opponent, if only by way of contrast, but can also include attacks meant to destroy an opponent's character, which may veer into ad hominem. (consists of replying to an argument or factual claim by attacking or appealing to the person making the argument or claim, rather than by addressing the substance of the argument or producing evidence against the claim.)

Concerned Women for America

Founded in 1979 Beverly LaHaye, wife of Christian Coalition co-founder Timothy LaHaye, the group advocates traditional conservative ideals such as the 'elimination' of homosexuality (with the view homosexuals are 'sick' and need to be cured); official prayer in school; abstinence-only sex education and the teaching of intelligent design as a science.



It promotes six core issues: (2)

- Family – that being marriage between one man and one woman.
- The sanctity of human life – and thus is obviously anti-abortion.
- Education – by “returning the authority of education to parents”
- Pornography – strongly campaigning against all obscenity.
- Religious Liberty – the right of citizens to express their religion free from oppression, both within and outside of the United States.
- National Sovereignty – believing that neither the U.N. nor any other organisation should have control over the United States in any area.

Methods

The Concerned Women for America tend to focus on the issue of sex and homosexuality. They have recently sponsored initiatives that place emphasis on opposing programs geared towards helping LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) teenagers on the basis that such programs promote homosexuality, as well as opposing anti-bullying programs which explicitly mention sexual minority youth. The group has also, in a joint effort with 13 other groups, the CWA released an advertisement stating "The DOJ and FBI should immediately investigate whether 'adult' videos being sold in hotels by OnCommand and LodgeNet violate long-established Federal and State laws regarding distribution of obscene material. Adult hardcore pornography can tragically lead to sex crimes against women and children, yet sex videos are available in millions of U.S. hotel rooms which we strongly believe are prosecutable."

Focus on the Family

FotF Chairman, Dr. James Dobson.

Focus on the Family (FotF) was founded in California by Dr. James Dobson in 1977 and pledges itself as "dedicated to nurturing and defending families worldwide". As a non-profit organisation they are officially restricted from advocating a specific political candidate, but do maintain a traditionally conservative viewpoint on issues such as abortion and homosexuality.



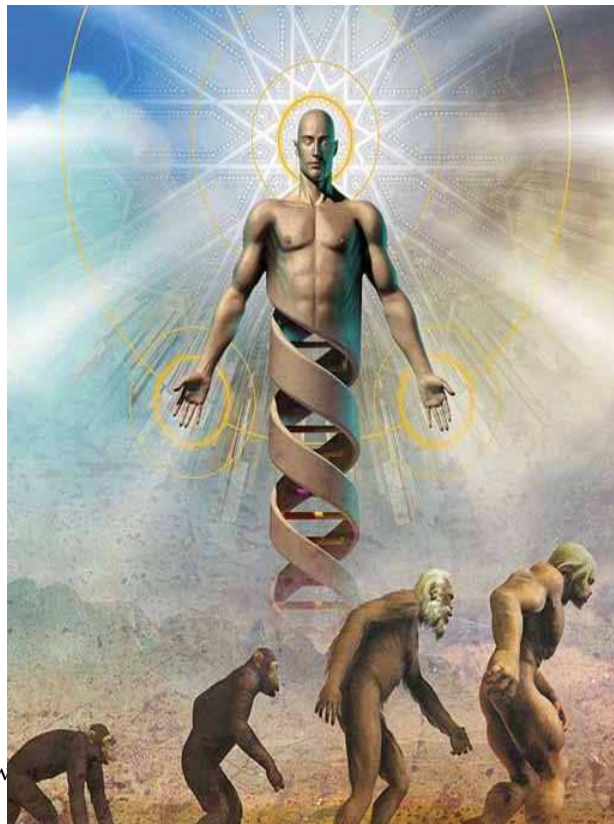
Methods

Focus on the Family use a lot of different tactics to get their point across. Their chairman (James Clayton "Jim" Dobson, Ph.D.) produces the daily radio program (of the same name) Focus on the Family, which is broadcast in more than a dozen languages and on over 7,000 stations worldwide, and heard daily by more than 220 million people in 164 countries. Focus on the Family is also carried by about 60 U.S. television stations daily. The group also provides free counselling and resources for families facing difficulties and they publish a variety of magazines, videos and audio recordings. The group have also began publishing a new political magazine called *Common Sense* which addresses political concerns, especially on issues where current public policies are seen as threatening to conservative families. FotF also produces a children's radio drama entitled *Adventures in Odyssey*. It began in 1987 as *Family Portraits*, starring an elderly Christian gentleman named John Avery Whittaker (aka "Whit"), who runs a popular ice cream shop/"discovery emporium" called Whit's End; and he imparts Christian wisdom to the children of the town of Odyssey. This is a way of promoting Christian values to young children. They have also produced such programs as biographies of Squanto, Jesus and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as well as an adaptation of classics such as *Christmas Carol* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

Intelligent Design Movement

The Intelligent Design Movement (IDM) promotes the ideology that it derives its name from. It believes that the world was created by intelligent design. It was founded and is still run by the Discovery Institute, a conservative Christian think tank.

After *Edwards v. Aguillard* in 1987, Creation Science was removed from U.S. school syllabuses, and the biology text book 'Of Pandas and People' was changed to meet the new



restrictions; whereby all references to 'creation' and 'creationism' were changed to 'intelligent design'. Charles Thraxton passed on the phrase a year later to Steven Meyer, a founder of the Discovery Institute. The overall goal of the IDM is to "overthrow materialism" and atheism.

They believe that society has suffered "devastating cultural consequences" from adopting materialism and that science is the cause of this decay into materialism since science seeks only natural explanations. Science is therefore atheistic, they claim. They believe that the theory of evolution implies that humans have no spiritual nature, no moral purpose and no intrinsic meaning. The movement proponents seek to "defeat the materialistic world view" represented by the theory of evolution in favour "a science consonant with Christian and theistic convictions."

Methods

Chief amongst the IDM's activities are a campaign to promote public awareness of this concept, the lobbying of policymakers to include its teaching in high school science classes, and legal action, either to defend such teaching or to remove barriers otherwise preventing it. They also seek to "Teach the Controversy"; discredit evolution by emphasizing "flaws" in the theory of evolution, or "disagreements" within the scientific community and encourage teachers and students to explore non-scientific "alternatives" to evolution, or to "critically analyze" evolution and "the controversy".

The IDM primarily campaigns on two fronts: a public relations campaign meant to influence the popular media and sway public opinion; and an aggressive lobbying campaign to cultivate support for the teaching of Intelligent Design amongst policy makers and the wider educational community. Both these fronts are largely funded by the Discovery Institute. The movement's legal arm is the Thomas More Center. This has played a central role in defending against legal objections to the teaching of Intelligent Design in classes, generally using the first amendment. The center has also acted as a plaintiff to remove legal barriers to the teaching of Intelligent Design as science. Similar legal foundations, the Allied Defence Fund and Quality Science Education for All (QESA), have also litigated on behalf of the movement.

The 2004 Presidential Election

The 2004 election for Bush was by no means a certain victory. Karl Rove, Bush's chief strategist, had to decide what angle would most assure Bush's victory. Bush of course continued to press his homeland security and terrorism agenda, which had been massively fuelled by the 9/11 attacks, but as the Iraq war waged on with no sign of troops returning home Americans' confidence was dropping point by point. So rather than make the war, the obvious choice, the topic of debate in the elections Rove decided on a more home-based issue. Not health, education or civil liberties, but conservative family values. He believed the topic would make the religious right more active politically, and as 79% ⁽³⁾ of evangelical voters chose GOP this substantially boosted Bush's campaign.



Voters

Exit polls after the 2004 elections indicated 23% of voters called themselves evangelical, a rise from 14% of 2000 voters who identified themselves as part of the Religious Right. Whilst the rise may seem relatively small in the grand scheme of things, there were substantial increases particularly in the key battleground states of Ohio and Florida – the latter being the decider of the previous 2000 election, where Bush beat Gore by a controversially slim 537 votes ⁽⁴⁾ . However the percentage of the electorate that were church goers actually fell perhaps suggesting that there are not any more religious Americans overall in ratio to population but that the religious right are more active proportionally to their membership.

2004 Presidential Candidates: Democrat John Kerry and Republican George Bush.

Religious Influence

Evangelical figureheads such as Dr. Dobson from Focus on the Family often had conference call meetings with campaigners such as Rove, and later Ralph Reed, to organise the national campaign. However there were calls from the conservative Christians that they were way ahead of GOP advice. Lori Viars, co-chair of the GOP committee for her county said "By the time the Bush campaign said, 'You should do voter registration through churches,' we were already doing that" ⁽⁵⁾. Voter registration in some areas soared when church goes started to give cards out to their friends to encourage voting Bush.

One major reason for evangelical support of the Republican Party was Bush's conservative anti-same sex marriage stance. And after

Massachusetts's high court approved same-sex marriages, they were fuelled into campaigning for a definition of 'marriage being between a man and a woman' constitutional amendment. The Bush administration was consequently criticised for delaying putting this amendment to the floor, with Rove continuously promising a forthcoming endorsement. However when the Senate finally rejected it, this caused a huge conservative uproar which led to 13 states eventually banning it themselves. This further brought conservative family-values into the election arena. In judicial nominations however, Bush did please the conservative right by nominating Chief Justice John Roberts and Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court, both considered conservative choices on matters such as abortion.

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