

**A Chapter from IPPF's Opposition Manual 2006**

***The Role of Religious and Conservative Groups  
in the United States***

By the International Planned Parenthood Federation

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## **I. Introduction**

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) is developing a comprehensive guide on the global opposition to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). This guide, which will be published and distributed later this year, will seek to address the background of the global opposition movement and will offer case studies and tools to help SRHR organizations combat the opposition, therefore hindering their agenda to roll back the clock on important SRHR issues.

This chapter, the first of several, concentrates on analyzing the religious and conservative opposition to SRHR in the United States, and how one American group in particular is driving their agenda forward around the world.

When taken as a whole, opposition groups, both around the world and within the United States, are made up of a vast array of different cultures and belief systems. Many hold opposing views and may be hostile to each other on a number of different issues. However, the one unifying conviction they share is their staunch opposition towards SRHR. It is incumbent upon us to understand the beliefs and tactics of these groups; unless we are able to comprehend what motivates them, it will be difficult to develop strategies to defend SRHR from their continual attacks.

The following chapter begins by looking at the mindsets and attitudes of the anti-choice movement and will present an overview of those involved: religious fundamentalists, authoritarians and those who have a strong social dominance orientation.

Having analyzed the personality types, we will then discuss the 'political' or 'right wing' Christian fundamentalist opposition to SRHR in the United States, focusing on their tactics to rewrite American history in support of their agenda and to instigate a backlash to pro-choice legislation, such as *Roe vs. Wade*. We will then consider issues of language, particularly how the opposition uses well-crafted messages to influence decision makers, the public and, ultimately, policies.

Following this is an in-depth look at one of the most prominent anti-choice religious organizations in the United States: Focus on the Family. This case study seeks to understand how this growing organization operates, the scope and breadth of its agenda, and how it seeks to determine and influence policies both in the United States and abroad. This example illustrates how successful the opposition can be in exporting their ideology overseas.

As a whole, this chapter seeks to explain the mindsets of those individuals and groups opposed to SRHR, how they operate, and to explore what we must do to ensure that basic human rights are maintained.

## **II. Theoretical Framework: The Big Picture**

In 1993, the United Nations Conference on Human Rights declared "the human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights." There have been hard-won improvements since that time, but the current statistics regarding the status of women and the state of sexual and reproductive health are staggering.

Development alone cannot assuage the misery experienced by millions of women and girls around the world. The blame for a tremendous amount of needless suffering lies at the feet of those who use everything from legitimate political organizing to brute force to oppress women and repress sexuality, no matter how dire the consequences. Those who care about women and girls must be strong advocates who recognize how dangerous the groups can be who oppose SRHR and IPPF.

Opposition to sexual and reproductive health and rights can be observed in a wide variety of geographic, religious, political and economic environments. Some opposition groups uphold practices that have deep roots in the local culture; others seek to "return" communities to a largely mythical past. Some operate on the fringes of social consensus, trying to reopen debates settled years ago. And others enjoy the support of a popular majority or act as an agent of the government (or, in a few cases, are the government).

Some opposition groups are international – for example, Focus on the Family and Human Life International are active around the world, and both continue to increase their scope. But not all groups are the protégés of powerful "super-structures," nor can we say that their supporters are simply the victims of "outside" manipulation. Many have emerged more-or-less independently and have found genuinely committed indigenous followings. It would be a mistake to describe all opposition activity as the result of a unipolar (i.e. U.S or Vatican led) or even bipolar (Christian and Islamic) global strategy to restrict SRHR, but it would be an equal mistake to see these developments as random, unpredictable, and idiosyncratic.

When groups are connected, it is easy to determine the lines of influence among them. But what does it mean when groups form and thrive in relative isolation, yet espouse the same ideas and practices? And further, how does this come about when the groups do not even share a similar cultural / religious heritage?

The answer lies in a culmination of situational and personal factors. For each of us, a complex mix of influences and desires form the backdrop to our political opinions. Environmental factors like how one's family or community thinks, how one is educated, and one's position in society are important variables – but if they were the only factors, we would not see differences of opinion among individuals who grow up in the same setting. Though they are often overlooked in political analyses, internal or psychological factors such as one's personal attitude towards power, hierarchy, and equality, or in-groups and out-groups, or faith, ambiguity, and the like, are just as important as conditions outside the self.

Members of opposition groups come from a variety of environments, and often make very strange bedfellows. What they all have in common is a set of attitudes that

drives their anti-SRHR agenda. It is only by understanding these attitudes that we can unravel the mystery of why this is happening in our time, in so many places – and what we can do about it.

### **A Taxonomy of the Opposition**

The roster of entities that make up the opposition can be bewildering. It includes:

- Christian fundamentalists with a political orientation (like Focus on the Family<sup>1</sup>);
- Islamist fundamentalists with a political orientation (like the Taliban);
- Religious service providers (such as those sponsored by Catholic churches);
- Right wing or “conservative” politicians and parties, including those for whom religion is not a major focus; and
- Wealthy individual donors and “conservative” foundations.

One way to understand why these entities share an anti-SRHR agenda despite some obvious differences is to consider three distinct attitudinal clusters/personality orientations. We can think of these clusters/orientations as three “types”:

1. those who are religious fundamentalists
2. those who are highly authoritarian
3. those who have a strong social dominance orientation

#### **1. Religious Fundamentalists**

Fundamentalism is an expression of the fault line between the old world and the new. Fundamentalist factions can be found in all the world’s major religions; fundamentalists around the world share certain salient characteristics. These characteristics are so powerful that they sometimes enable believers who would otherwise consider each other to be the enemy of God to work together for a common goal.

Fundamentalists share an absolute fealty to religious authority. Criticism, interpretation, and adaptation of doctrine is not permitted; instead, fundamentalists demand public recognition of their creed through the application of laws and the observance of practical conventions (such as

manner of dress and dietary restrictions). The “perceived crisis” that fundamentalists confront is nothing less than modernity itself, which they see as driving a wedge

<b>Fundamentalisms</b>
<p><i>“They are embattled forms of spirituality which have emerged as a response to a perceived crisis. They are engaged in a conflict with enemies whose secularist policies and beliefs seen inimical to religion itself. Fundamentalists do not regard this battle as a conventional political struggle, but experience it as a cosmic war between the forces of good and evil. They fear annihilation, and try to fortify their beleaguered identity by means of a selective retrieval of certain doctrines and practices of the past... Eventually they fight back and attempt to resacralize an increasingly sceptical world.</i></p> <p>Source: Karen Armstrong, British commentator and author on Religious Affairs</p>

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<sup>1</sup> Focus on the Family will be discussed in detail later in this chapter

between man and the divine. Fundamentalists fervently believe that modern, secular society wants to purge religion from all aspects of life. Karen Armstrong writes:

*"Every fundamentalist movement I have studied in Judaism, Christianity and Islam is convinced that secular society is determined to wipe out religion. In the US, extremists fear an insidious corruption of Godly America by books that promote a liberal or scientific ideal, or by the promotion of feminism, which they regard with horror."<sup>3</sup>*

Though the fit is not perfect, we can also describe as fundamentalist the Catholic clergy and affinity groups who advocate strict adherence to the doctrine of the current Pope. They certainly share the major "family resemblances" among fundamentalist groups, which include:

- the belief that moral and spiritual absolutes are observable and incontrovertible. These absolutes include the fixed nature of gender roles and sexual identity.
- a pre-eminent concern with the erosion of religion and its proper role in society; the belief that there should be no split between church and state, and that it is the role of government to enshrine virtue.
- a desire for strict hierarchies and adherence to mandated behaviours (which indicate obedience to doctrinal dictates and a suppression of individual identity).
- sharp boundaries which indicate a distinction between the "in-group" (true believers, the "saved") and the out-group (deviants like sexual minorities, people of different faiths, and advocates of change such as feminists).
- the belief that a nation that adheres to and promotes the one true religious creed will be rewarded by God; a nation that flouts God's rule will attract his wrath.

The last point was articulated with shocking clarity by the Reverend Jerry Falwell, founder of the Moral Majority, on American television in the days following the attacks of 11 September 2001:

#### **Fundamentalism in the USA**

*"I really believe that the pagans, the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians... all of them who have tried to secularize America – I point the finger in their face and say, 'You helped this happen.'"*

Rev. Jerry Falwell, Founder of the Moral Majority and Liberty University, referring to the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001.<sup>2</sup>

*"New Orleans is now abortion free. New Orleans is now Mardi Gras free. New Orleans now is free of 'Southern Decadence' and the sodomites, the witchcraft workers, false religion – its free of all those things now. God simply, I believe, in His mercy purged all of that stuff out there – and now we are getting to start over again."*

Rev. Bill Shanks, pastor of New Covenant Fellowship of New Orleans, following Hurricane Katrina, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Jerry Falwell, CNN.com, posted September 14, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Armstrong, "Cries of rage and frustration", The New Statesman, 9/24/01.

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*"Living by God's principles promotes a nation to greatness; violating those principles brings a nation to shame... (organizations) which have attempted to secularize America have removed our nation from its relationship with Christ on which it was founded. I therefore believe that that created an environment which possibly caused God to lift the veil of protection which has allowed no one to attack America on our soil since 1812."<sup>4</sup>*

Many found these comments deeply disturbing, but it is a viewpoint (including the odd reference to a protective "veil") with which fundamentalists around the world could agree.

### **Sunni Fundamentalism, Iran**

*"Humanity today is living in a large brothel! One has only to glance at its press, fashion shows, beauty contests, ballrooms, wine bars, and broadcasting stations! Or observe its mad lust for naked flesh, provocative postures, and sick, suggestive statements in literature, the arts, and the mass media! And add to this, the system of usury which fuels man's voracity for money and engenders vile methods for its accumulation and investment, in addition to fraud, trickery, and blackmail dressed up in the garb of law."<sup>1</sup>*

Source: Sayyid Qutb, a founder of Sunni Fundamentalism

### **A Closer Look at Modernity**

It has been stated many times that fundamentalist men reject modernization because it threatens to upset "traditional" familial and community power arrangements from which they personally benefit. To reduce fundamentalism to a mechanism purely for controlling women is too simplistic and does little to explain why so many women passionately espouse this way of life. It is worth considering that some fundamentalist women believe the same changes bring harm to themselves. Many fundamentalist women believe the influx of modern ideas would "*corrode the only tethers that kept men firmly bound to the responsibilities of home and hearth*"<sup>5</sup> – in other words, fundamentalist dictates gave women the power they otherwise lacked to compel men to behave responsibly. Some women, including many of those who voluntarily began wearing burkas during the 1979 revolution in Iran, have seen fundamentalism as a bulwark against the commodification of sexuality rampant in the West, and / or a method of protest against governmental corruption.<sup>6</sup>

For all fundamentalists, their belief system is a way of imposing order on a chaotic, dangerous world and of imbuing their everyday actions with meaning. Since this system is strictly hierarchical, any change in the behaviour of women is viewed as a direct threat to the "truth" around which their lives are ordered.

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4 Ibid

5 Grant Wacker, "The Christian Right", The National Humanities Center TeacherServe, <http://www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/tserve/tserve.htm>. Grant Wacker is a Professor of the History of Religion in America at the Duke University Divinity School.

6 Tohidi - Revolution? What's in it for them? Globalized Iranian American women are nudging their homeland toward democracy at <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/sunday/commentary/la-op-iranwomen31jul31,0,7192154.story?coll=la-home-sunday-opinion> .

History demonstrates that fundamentalist leaders are rarely content to limit their influence to those who freely elect to follow them. Such groups, defined by the belief that it is under attack, may experience a crisis when it achieves a level of hegemony. Identifying a larger enemy is an effective way to maintain a unifying bond, for, as scholar Michael Mazar has written, "*generating hatred against an enemy held responsible for the debasement of the present and the destruction of the glorious past focuses energy.*"<sup>7</sup> There is no reason to expect that tyranny that begins at home, expands to the community, and spreads nationwide, will stop at a country's borders. Fundamentalists tell us that the role of women is at the heart of their struggle for domination.

## **2. Opposition to Equality: Authoritarianism**

Some elements of the opposition are motivated by factors beyond religious belief. Many believe that their society is "in trouble": they fear the "traditional" family faces extinction (due to divorce, single parents, and same sex couples), believe their cultural purity is under assault (from immigrants, multi-culturalism, or a liberal elite), see lack of respect for authority as the true cause of crime, and believe dissent equals a lack of patriotism and makes a nation weak. Many believe that by making things too "easy" (by providing contraception, "abortion-on-demand", and safe sex information) we remove the natural "penalties" or consequences (pregnancy, STDs and AIDS) that keep wanton behaviour in check. Perhaps most of all, they are deeply troubled by the most visible of social transformations – changes in the status of women. Like fundamentalists, such people are not limited to a specific culture, nation, or religion; instead, they can be found wherever there is social change.

We sometimes call people who fit this description "conservatives," "traditionalists," or "right-wing," but these terms can mean different things depending on the political context. It is more accurate to describe them as having an authoritarian orientation.

Understanding authoritarianism is critical to understanding the opposition. Studies of people with strong authoritarian orientations show that they tend to be strongly "pro-life"; studies of anti-choice groups have shown their members to be strongly authoritarian. For most members of the opposition, being against SRHR is an aspect of their authoritarian orientation towards the world. Understanding the authoritarian mentality will help us unravel the seeming contradiction of being both "pro-life" and in favour of capital punishment and military action; the affinity between anti-SRHR and anti-immigrant or racist agendas; and the hostility with which so many opposition groups prosecute their cause.

### ***The Authoritarian Mindset***

Three major attitudinal clusters define the authoritarian mentality: submission to authority, conventionalism, and a general aggressiveness to others different than themselves. They:

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Mazarr, "The psychological sources of Islamic terrorism: alienation and identity in the Arab world," Policy Review, 6/1/04.

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- crave conformity, security and stability. They take comfort from following a strong leader in a hierarchical structure; they rely on this strong leader to protect them in a world they see as hostile and chaotic.
- see the world in terms of good and evil, right and wrong, black and white. They are uncomfortable with "shades of grey" and see people who consider nuances or alternatives as being weak. They become anxious or angry when something upsets their highly structured world view.
- are highly intolerant of anyone or anything that diverges from the "normal" whether it be in matters of sexuality, gender relations, nationality, race, culture, religion, and so on. People with authoritarian personality traits exhibit high levels of prejudice, and their fear of out-groups "appears to be instigated chiefly by fear, particularly of a dangerous, degenerating world."<sup>8</sup>
- are more likely than others to perceive sexually explicit material as "pornographic" (rather than "erotic") and sexual expression as negative. For authoritarians, sexuality is a critical marker of adherence to "traditional values" and respect for authority.<sup>9</sup>

### ***The Bottom Line***

People with strong authoritarian tendencies think of themselves as "tough" and "patriotic," but they are actually more fearful than others. They feel threatened by a wide variety of people and ideas, and they are less able to cope with uncertainty. They need authority figures in the family, church, and government to give them a much needed sense of security; these authority figures are often, but not always, male.

For the opposition, a condom is not just a condom: it is a symbol of the destructive forces that are ever ready to undermine the proper familial, community, religious and political authorities. Promoting "abstinence only" is not just (and sometimes not at all) about disease prevention; it is about maintaining familial and social order. In this way we can see how, from their perspective, being "pro-life" and pro-death penalty is perfectly consistent: both positions give ultimate power to the "proper authorities."

### **3. It Is Good To Be the King: Social Dominance Orientation**

Social dominance theory (SDT) attempts to answer two questions that are central to IPPF's mission: why are patriarchy and sexism so prevalent? And why are they so difficult to eliminate? Social dominance theory posits that "most forms of group conflict and oppression (e.g., racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, nationalism, classism, regionalism) can be regarded as different manifestations of the same basic human predisposition to form group-based social hierarchies." Further, it theorizes that all "human social systems are subject to the counterbalancing influences of hierarchy-enhancing forces, producing and maintaining ever higher levels of group-based social

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Altemeyer, "Highly dominating, highly authoritarian personalities." *Journal of Social Psychology*, 8/1/2004.

<sup>9</sup> Manuel Braun, "Traditional ideology as an inhibitor of sexual behavior." *The Journal of Psychology*, 11/1/1996.

inequality, and hierarchy-attenuating forces, producing greater levels of group-based social equality."<sup>10</sup>

### ***SDOs, the Opposition, and Us***

SDO correlates negatively with support for women's rights. "Men are viewed as dominant over women and wield much economic and political power. One way for them to maintain their dominance and their own self-image is to promote subordinate roles for women...men who score high on SDO are less likely to be supportive of women's rights, fearful that such a stance might erode their own dominant position and power."<sup>11</sup> In keeping with their relatively elevated status, men tend to score much higher than women on measures of SDO, and the more elevated one perceives oneself appears to correspond with a stronger expressions of SDO. SDOs also "display higher levels of prejudice and discrimination against lower status groups such as women, racial minorities, and homosexuals."<sup>12</sup>

Particularly important for the study of opponents of women's equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights, people with high SDO scores, regardless of their location, gravitate towards occupations that will allow them to dominate others: most notably, politics.

### ***Leaders of the Opposition***

There are some people who are fundamentalists (or are strictly religious), authoritarian, *and* have a high social dominance orientation. They typically have a simplistic, dualistic good vs. evil worldview; support rigid controls over sexual behaviour and self expression; be lacking in empathy for anyone not of their in-group; be hostile towards equality and rights; and see suffering and oppression as an inevitable "fact of life" or the just punishment for sin. They will also see themselves as uniquely deserving of power and will strive to reach the top echelons of society. They will also see themselves as "above the rules" and will say or do anything to maintain their status.

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10 Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto, *Social Dominance*, Cambridge University Press, 1999. pg. 38.

11 Ibid.

12 Marc Stewart Wilson, "Social dominance and ethical ideology: the end justifies the means?", *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 10/1/2003.

### **III. The Opposition to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the United States of America**

*"I have felt for a number of years that we have had such a dramatic and profound and unprecedented change in basic American politics. There's been an increase in basic fundamentalism ... both within the religious community of our country and also within government, and an unprecedented and overt -- not disguised -- merger of the church and the state, of religion and politics."*

Jimmy Carter, 39<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, 5 Nov 2005

As we have seen, much of the opposition movement is comprised of three central personality orientations and attitudinal clusters. But analysing the make up and common traits of the opposition is one element of defining who they are. Another is understanding exactly what they want and how they hopes to achieve it. But to fully understand the opposition to SRHR in the United States it is important to recognize the key characteristics of both the beliefs and the people itself as they attempt to impose their narrow ideology on the rest of society. This entails analysing the defining moments for SRHR throughout the recent history of the United States. And it is in doing that we are able to prove that one of the central arguments used by the opposition - that the constitution of the United States is based upon Christianity, and that Christianity is the cornerstone of the nation's identity - is in fact the opposite of the truth. Needless to say this fact has been conveniently overlooked by the opposition who has sought to rewrite and interpret American history from a fundamentalist viewpoint that would have everyone believe that the constitution of the United States was based upon their conservative and right wing interpretations of the Bible.

As Former President Jimmy Carter makes clear "Thomas Jefferson, one of our Founding Fathers, said that we should build a wall between the church and state. That wall is being deliberately and ostentatiously, not secretly, broken down. So, there has been an increasing merger in this country of fundamentalism on the religious side, fundamentalism on the political side, and the two have come together"<sup>13</sup>

While this historical inaccuracy has been advanced as the truth by many opposition groups the defining moment for many in the United States was the decision of the US Supreme Court to legalize abortion in the case of Roe v Wade. This ruling can be described as a pivotal moment in the history of both pro and anti-choice movements. For pro-choice activists it was a symbolic ruling which advanced women's reproductive rights to a new level after decades of struggle. For anti-choice groups it was a turning point. From this point on they would have to plot, organize and go on the attack to 'protect the correct American identity'. The backlash to SRHR that ensued is still being felt today. Never has the anti-choice movement believed itself to be in such a strong position. They have adherents in many high ranking and powerful positions and a relatively high (though far from majority) level of support among the public at large.

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13 As cited on Americans United for Separation of Church and State at [http://blog.au.org/2005/12/jimmy\\_carter\\_th.html](http://blog.au.org/2005/12/jimmy_carter_th.html)

Despite this, the recognition by the pro-choice movement of the manner in which the opposition has advanced its ideology in the United States as it seeks to subjugate mainstream society to their own narrow worldview has allowed us to identify many of their major weaknesses. But more worrying than the misinformation they disseminate - which can be defeated with evidence based on scientific fact - is their ascendancy to positions of power through mainstream politics. This is an issue that should concern those in the pro-choice movement most of all. This section, therefore, seeks to look at how the struggle for SRHR has evolved in the United States and how the opposition has been able to attain such influential positions of power within mainstream US politics.

It is often said that the victor to any battle rewrites its history. We must ensure that it is the pro-choice movement that is left holding the pen.

### ***The bigger picture***

The single most important fact to grasp about the opposition to sexual and reproductive health and rights in the United States is that this movement is neither narrowly drawn nor focused exclusively on the issues with which we are all familiar.

What has been building in the United States for the last thirty years – and which is now being aggressively exported around the globe – is a movement that espouses a detailed and comprehensive vision. Sexuality is but one part of this vision, though obviously that is the aspect that we find of greatest immediate concern.

It is possible to gain valuable information from looking just at the organizations, court rulings, and government policies from the United States that deal strictly with reproductive health issues. But without looking at the bigger picture, it is impossible to see how the anti-sexual and reproductive health and rights agenda rose to a position of dominance in U.S. politics, how its myriad recommendations have become reality, and why its exponents now hold many of the highest offices in the land. This never has been, and never shall be, simply a matter of the “controversial” issue of abortion.

As mentioned earlier, much of the opposition movement in the United States is comprised of one of the three attitudinal clusters/personality orientations. This section looks at just one of these clusters – that of the Christian fundamentalists who have been organizing for the last thirty years in order to redefine America and its role in the world.

Certainly, there are participants in the movement who are not fundamentalists; orthodox Catholics and even a small number of conservative Jews and Muslims play a role. But the overwhelming character of the movement is Christian fundamentalist, and the ties between those leaders and their counterparts in other faiths are recent and tenuous. Despite the critical role played by conservative Catholic clergy in mobilizing support for anti-choice endeavors and publicly castigating pro-choice leaders, Christian fundamentalists are historically suspicious (at best) of the Catholic faith. Christian fundamentalists are supportive of the state of Israel because of the role it plays in the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, but they recognize that Jews are, of all the categories of believers in the United States, the most strongly liberal. And

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while some fundamentalist leaders lobbied alongside a few Muslim leaders in support of President Bush's initiative to steer government funds to charities with an explicitly religious agenda, many others have publicly denounced Islam using the most reprehensible terms imaginable.

The group we are concerned with is often referred to as "political" or "right-wing" Christian fundamentalists (these terms recognize that there are certain fundamentalist believers who retreat from the public sphere and show little concern for politics or policy). For the sake of brevity, the abbreviation **RCF** (for Right-wing Christian Fundamentalist) may be used in this chapter.

Consistent with Karen Armstrong's<sup>14</sup> general description of fundamentalist movements, America's Christian fundamentalists are internally divided by a plethora of doctrinal schisms. Several observers have identified a theological variant called Christian "Reconstructionism" or "Dominionism" among the most influential RCF leaders. This phenomenon rarely mentioned by the mainstream press is a tremendously important part of the problem we now face.

To truly understand the scope of the changes taking place in the United States, one must grasp the past this movement is trying to erase. Devastation is never so grievous to the eye as when one can summon the vision of what stood before. RCF leaders have been avidly promoting an imagined history of the United States that resembles the theocratic Puritan communities of colonial America; they ignore and sometimes even deny the spirit of enlightenment, tolerance, liberty and equality that imbues the U.S. Constitution and is abundantly apparent in the words of founding fathers such as Thomas Jefferson. It is here that America's true political character is rooted, and it is this legacy that is now most gravely threatened.

### ***Individual Liberty and the Myth of Traditional America: The 18<sup>th</sup> Century***

Tony Perkins, the current president of the Family Research Council and a former state legislator, once authored a bill called the American History Preservation Act, which purported to prevent "censorship of America's Christian heritage" in the public schools. This is a common refrain among RCF leaders. They describe a pious, wholly Christian nation that has been (in Perkins' words) "*hijacked by a secular movement determined to redefine society... these radicals were doing their best to destroy two centuries of traditional values.*"<sup>15</sup>

What RCF leaders don't say – and their followers don't know – is that framers of the US Constitution strongly supported secular government and opposed the establishment of a national religion. For the most part, these men were "Deists" who believed in a divine higher power and supported the value of religion in promoting civic virtues, but were not themselves particularly religious.

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14 Karen Armstrong, a former nun, is a leading commentator and author on Religious Affairs

15 As cited on Harpers.org: Soldiers of Christ II, Feeling the hate with the National Religious Broadcasters- Posted on Monday, May 30, 2005. Originally from May 2005. By Chris Hedges. See: <http://www.harpers.org/FeelingTheHate.html>

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For America's founders, the tolerance of a variety of beliefs was a core value. Thomas Jefferson, a key author of the Constitution and the third President of the United States, wrote in 1782, "*the legitimate powers of government extend to such acts as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbors to say there are twenty gods or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.*" Government was not to favour some beliefs over others, nor to compel religious behaviour.

The first amendment to the Constitution makes this value a matter of law with the following language: "*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof.*" Jefferson's thinking on this matter is expressed plainly in a letter he authored in 1801:

*Because religious belief, or non-belief, is such an important part of every person's life, freedom of religion affects every individual. State churches that use government power to support themselves and force their views on persons of other faiths undermine all our civil rights... Erecting the "wall of separation between church and state," therefore, is absolutely essential in a free society.*

Nevertheless, RCF leaders consistently tell their followers that the country was founded in accordance with Biblical law and the idea the founding fathers wanted a secular government is a pernicious lie. "*I hope the Supreme Court will finally read the Constitution and see there's no such thing, or no mention, of separation of church and state in the Constitution*" is a typical statement, in this instance delivered by Republican Congressman Tom DeLay.<sup>16</sup>

Opposition to sexual and reproductive health and rights plays a large part in the RCF's myth of "traditional" America. In their vision, nuclear families with strict gender roles raised obedient children who eschewed premarital sex until they formed monogamous nuclear unions of their own. There was no birth control, no abortion, and no homosexuality; for the most part there was no extramarital sex, and when it did occur, the offenders were duly punished and made an example to others.

Thus it would come as a shock to Christian fundamentalists – and indeed to most Americans – to learn that not only was abortion fairly common at the time of the nation's founding, it was also not illegal. The fact is that until relatively recently, abortion was only considered a crime insofar as it might harm the woman if carried out improperly. The notion that a fetus could have individual rights is an entirely modern concept. But the constant repetition of the message that "traditional" American values are "pro-life" while secular government and individual liberty are recent innovations means a great many Americans now hold beliefs about their history that are simply not true.

### **Abortion and Birth Control in America: The 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

Not only was abortion present in colonial America, it was understood in a way that was very different from the way we see it now. At the time, it was very important for

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16 As cited on 'Americans United for Separation of Church and State' website 'House Leader Tom DeLay Attacks Church-State Separation' May 2005 <http://www.au.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=7305&abbr=cs>

women to be chaste outside of marriage. In addition, childbearing carried significant health risks. For this reason there were a plethora of potions – mostly toxic – and procedures a woman could use to “rejuvenate” her fertility – induce menstruation – in effect, ending a pregnancy. The notion that these substances were meant to promote a women’s health by “restarting” her hormonal cycle was a way of denying she was pregnant at all, which was extremely important in an environment where a pregnancy outside of marriage would be evidence of illicit sex. Until the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was common for home remedy and folk medicine manuals to list a number of means to “restore a woman’s cycle.” While it was sometimes noted that such remedies could be used for the “generally unjustifiable” act of abortion, the decision about whether to do so was left to the woman herself. Unfortunately, due the toxic nature of many of the recommended substances, serious complications were not unusual.

Early lawmakers relied on a combination of the Constitution, English Common Law and cultural tradition to develop, reconcile and refine American jurisprudence. Where the law did make mention of abortion, it was to treat as a homicide the death of a woman who died as the result of an abortion provider’s attentions. Judeo-Christian teachings made almost no mention of the willful termination of pregnancy, and then only insofar as it affected the woman or her family. The Bible never addresses abortion directly, though it does recommend punishment for a man who assaults a pregnant woman (Exodus 21): “If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.”

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, some physicians began pushing for serious restrictions on abortion providers as a way of stemming the tide of women harmed by unscrupulous providers; it has also been said that the doctors had a financial interest in driving abortionists out of business. These laws were never aimed at the pregnant woman herself; they viewed the woman, not the fetus, as the victim. The first reported prosecution for abortion occurred in Massachusetts in 1812. In 1821, Connecticut became the first state to explicitly criminalize abortion, making it a crime for anyone to “maliciously” give poisons to a woman “quick with child” (quickening was considered the point at which a fetus was imparted with a soul, thus becoming an infant; the point at which quickening occurred was thought to coincide with the perceptible independent motion of the fetus in the womb). A wave of similar abortion restrictions followed in the other states. It was not until 1845 that two states revised their abortion laws to make the death of a fetus, rather than the woman, a criminal offence. For the first time, a woman who sought an abortion would be subject to a fine.

In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after the Civil War, physicians in favour of penalizing abortionists joined forces with religious leaders who condemned abortion as a grave moral offense. The mainline religions took official positions against abortion, including the Catholic Church, which until 1869 had not openly condemned early abortion. Harsher laws were enacted, with some states criminalizing abortion at any stage of pregnancy; some states penalized the woman; some states included a therapeutic exception; and some states refused to make abortion before quickening a

crime. In all instances, the two primary motives for the laws were to protect women from abortion and to curb illicit sexual behaviour. In 1873, the federal government banned "obscene literature and articles for immoral use." The intent of this law, and its limitations at the state level, was to ban birth control. The stage was now set for more than a century of intense controversy and activism over sexual and reproductive health and rights.

### ***Making Change Happen: The 20<sup>th</sup> Century***

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Margaret Sanger emerged as the foremost challenger of restrictions on family planning; her efforts spearheaded a long campaign to win back for women some of the options they had lost. But it was not until 1965 that the Supreme Court, addressing the state of Connecticut's law banning the use of contraception by married couples, recognized the right of married couples to make such personal decisions without government interference.

That decision (*Griswold v. Connecticut*) plus several others culminated in the Court's landmark ruling in *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion. This was a crucially important change in American jurisprudence. In this series of cases the Court, for the first time, recognized in the Constitution a range of liberties that spoke to a zone of privacy first for married couples, and then for individuals. "Privacy" in this context refers to personal autonomy - the right to choose whether or not to perform certain acts or be subject to certain experiences in matters of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Further, the Court called this personal autonomy a fundamental right, meaning that any government infringement had to be justified by a compelling state interest. With regard to abortion, the Court held that before viability, the woman's right to privacy outweighed a state's interest in protecting a fetus or curbing "immoral" behaviour.

It is currently in vogue to say that women's rights advocates in the United States moved too fast in their efforts to legalize abortion; that the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* shocked the nation and caused the vociferous opposition backlash of the 1980s and 1990s. This view holds that a legal strategy detracted from the (ostensibly preferable) cluster of grassroots efforts to change the hearts and minds of state and local lawmakers.

This perspective assumes, falsely, that the most significant change in the legal status of women since the granting of the right to vote happened virtually "overnight." Nothing could be further from the truth. The campaign to free women from the burden of being forced to bear children against their will has deep roots in American history and was not confined to any single area of civil society. As a brief overview, consider: the Court's decision in *Roe* relied on judicial precedents arising from decisions to legalize birth control for married couples the decade before. The Court also relied on evidence that public attitudes toward abortion had changed; they pointed to the many states that had either legalized abortion on their own (such as New York) or liberalized their abortion restrictions to give physicians a wider zone of discretion. The liberalization of abortion laws, particularly in the Southern United States, occurred in large part because of the persuasive lobbying efforts of individual physicians and medical societies. But the lobbying campaign by physicians would not

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have occurred without the preceding decades of cross-cultivation with sexual and reproductive rights and health advocates.

For example, it was in 1925 that Margaret Sanger held the first conference that brought together birth control advocates and key figures in the medical and social sciences. These efforts bore fruit when the Supreme Court was convinced, in 1936, that if Congress had known about the safety of contraception compared to the health risks of pregnancy, it would not have passed laws that interfered with a doctor's ability to prescribe contraception "for the purpose of saving life and promoting the well-being of their patients" (*United States v. One Package*). This decision overturned the laws that prohibited the importation of contraceptive devices, giving greater latitude to physicians. Margaret Sanger herself relied on the expertise and support of more experienced advocates, traveling in 1914 to England to study with Havelock Ellis and to Holland to study with Dr. Aletta Jacobs (who had been openly dispensing birth control information and devices since 1882).

The two lawyers – both women – who represented the plaintiff before the Supreme Court in *Roe v. Wade* benefited from the pioneering efforts of the first women to become lawyers in the United States, in the 1860s. They also benefited from decades of activism promoting the idea that professional women should be given the same respect as men in their chosen fields of expertise; this set the stage for the *Roe* lawyers to be heard on equal footing with the male lawyers for the defense. And the judges who decided *Roe* were undoubtedly influenced by the decades of activism that changed social attitudes towards gender roles; by 1973, women had entered the universities and professions in large numbers. The Supreme Court judges were ready to see women as autonomous individuals rather than the wards of fathers and husbands.

The Supreme Court decision that finally gave women the right to choose whether and when to bear a child was the culmination of more than a century of organizing for social change. Individuals from the women's rights, medical, legal, legislative and academic spheres all played vital roles. Significant change simply does not happen overnight. It can only result from a deeply rooted, multi-front, long-term campaign.

It took decades for women to win their right to personal autonomy; it is taking decades to lose it as well.

### **Backlash: Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

The Supreme Court decided *Roe v. Wade* at a time when the United States was undergoing profound social changes. People of different races, genders, sexual orientations, religions, political beliefs, were developing new individual and group identities and asserting their right to be considered equal to other members of society. They began to question the validity of the "normal," ostensibly preferable representation of the ideal woman, man and family. Pointing to the nation's history as a "melting pot" for immigrants of different ethnicities and religions, they put forward as truly American the values of diversity, tolerance, and equality.

But as we know from our examination of the authoritarian mindset earlier in this chapter, there are people who are comfortable in a dynamic, democratic environment,

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and there are those who are not. People who drew strength from the knowledge that they conformed to the correct American identity, who felt that those who challenged the norm were implicitly or explicitly criticizing their way of life, and who were unsettled by changes in their social structures, became frightened and angry.

A great number of Americans disapproved of these developments, but as is always the case, there was a small group that felt a lot worse. And it is this smaller group that forged their own organizations and agendas specifically to oppose the changes taking place in society. These people formed the vanguard of what we now know as the right-wing Christian fundamentalist movement.

For decades, fundamentalists had shunned mainstream entertainment, politics, and civic organizations that they saw as ungodly, and also fearing ridicule from those who did not share their beliefs. They had slowly created their own infrastructure of radio stations, television production studios, publishing houses, revival meetings and fundraising vehicles. The leaders of this new movement used these networks to tell fundamentalists that theirs was the "true" American way of life, and it was the mainstream that was being infiltrated by a host of nefarious forces. Fundamentalists would need to "take back" society from these interlopers and take up their mantle as the true – moral – majority. Not only were these efforts successful, but because they were carried out in a structure that was somewhat parallel to the mainstream secular media, the extreme nature of certain messages went unnoticed.

It was because of this existing communications infrastructure and the reservoir of people who were both frightened of the changes taking place and invigorated by the notion of "saving" the nation that these leaders were able to immediately capitalize on the Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*. They wisely saw an issue that would be a unifying call to arms for their nascent movement; as the Reverend Jerry Falwell put it, *Roe* sparked his awareness that he needed to move from preaching to political action. A mere eight days after the decision was handed down, the first anti-abortion amendment to the Constitution (defining life as beginning at conception and conferring "personhood" to a fetus at any stage of development) was introduced in the U.S. Congress; in the next three years, more than 50 like pieces of legislation were put forward. A number of "pro-family" anti-SRHR and anti-feminist organizations were founded around this time, including the American Family Association, the American Life League, Concerned Women for America, the Moral Majority, and the National Right to Life Committee.

In 1979, this movement joined forces with other constituencies who supported the candidacy of Ronald Reagan for President of the United States. These groups included corporate interests who opposed taxes, unions and government regulation; those who opposed the civil rights movement; and those who hated communism, Cuba and the Soviet Union and felt the U.S. needed to step up its military operations. Reagan was also supported by large numbers of ordinary, otherwise apolitical Americans who were suffering under a flagging economy and were drawn to Reagan's charismatic persona.

Analysts estimate that in advance of the 1980 election, organizers added two million fundamentalist Christians to the Republican voter rolls; such voters made up two-thirds of Reagan's 10 per cent margin of victory over President Carter. It was during this time of heady success that serious efforts were made to blend diverse agendas

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into functional political operations, and right wing groups like the Council for National Policy were formed.

Once elected, Reagan brought a number of fundamentalists and right-wing true believers into the White House and government agencies, including anti-abortion activist Dr. C. Everett Koop for Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health and Human Services (he was later promoted to Surgeon General). The executive director of the Moral Majority became a top official at the Department of Education. And James Watt, a vocal believer of apocalyptic Bible prophecy, became the top official in charge of the environment. Watt famously told Congress that he didn't see the point of environmental protections when the world would be ending soon regardless.

Leaders like Pat Robertson urged their followers to start taking over positions at every level of the Republican Party; in a 1986 memo, Robertson gave them the following advice:

*How to take over a political party:*

- *Rule the world for God.*
- *Give the impression that you are there to work for the party, not push an ideology.*
- *Hide your strength.*
- *Don't flaunt your Christianity*
- *Christians need to take leadership positions. Party officers control political parties and so it is very important that mature Christians have a majority of leadership positions.*

It is this trend that sparked the wry observation that there are now only two kinds of Republican leader: those who are religious fundamentalists, and those who know the value of them.

The general public and the press were barely privy to these connections; instead, they saw a series of individual legislative and policy initiatives to diminish the right to choose, restrict access to family planning services, weaken environmental protections, hobble labor unions, eliminate social programmes for the poor, and stifle civil rights gains. These were characterized as scattershot attempts by a variety of "special interest groups" to pressure essentially neutral government officials to do their bidding. During the 1980's and early 1990's the "chipping away" of women's reproductive rights included bans on using taxpayer money to subsidize abortion services, eliminating abortion services for military women stationed overseas, prohibiting the use of government funds for international development organizations that discussed or provided abortions, restrictions on family planning services for minors, and the imposition of mandatory waiting periods and government-authored lectures that reproached a woman before she could obtain an abortion. Meanwhile, conservative justices appointed by Reagan relaxed the conditions under which the government could legally intrude on a pregnant woman's personal autonomy. Talk of the state's need to protect the rights of the fetus against the possibly "trivial" or immoral interests of the mother became common.

There is a difference, however, between a coalition of different activists who join together to achieve a common goal, and a group that shares an overarching belief system that knits a number of different interests into an intellectually and emotionally satisfying whole. Barely seen by the general public and the press, just such a philosophy was beginning to take hold.

### ***The Rise of Christian Reconstructionism***

Reagan appointee James Watt was not the first government official to link politics and end-of-the-world Biblical prophecy. In 1971, Reagan himself told a California state legislator that, with regard to certain passages in the Bible, *"Everything is falling into place. It can't be much longer now. Ezekiel says fire and brimstone will be rained upon the enemies of God's people. That must mean that they'll be destroyed by nuclear weapons... Ezekiel tells us that Gog, the nation that will lead all of the other powers of darkness against Israel, will come out of the north. Biblical scholars have been saying for generations that Gog must be Russia... now that Russia has become communistic and atheistic, now that Russia has set itself against God. Now it fits the description of Gog perfectly."*

The belief that we are living in the "End Times" is typical of Christian Reconstructionism, which was founded in 1973 by R.J. Rushdoony and promoted by his son-in-law, Gary North. Reconstructionism advances the following principles:

- God should be at the centre of every activity, including politics, the economy, education, the arts, etc.
- Laws are only valid when they are in accordance with the Old Testament. The law should serve three purposes: to make other people Christian, to provide a standard set of rules for all Christians, and to maintain civil order.
- The Bible is infallible and should be the ultimate arbitrator in all disputes.
- The individual, the family, the church, and society as a whole must be "reconstructed" along Biblical terms.
- The return of Jesus Christ is imminent.

With regard to the last point, some Reconstructionists believe that they are Biblically mandated to occupy all positions of power in society so they can create Christ's earthly kingdom; this is a precondition to his return and the fulfillment of prophecy. Others believe good Christians will experience the "Rapture" – meaning they will be spirited away to heaven while everyone else is left behind to suffer. Seven years of "Tribulation" in which the anti-Christ tries to take over the world will ensue, after which Christ will return in accordance with prophecy. The first idea encourages adherents to act now to purify America and the world; the second encourages them to act now in order to defend America against the anti-Christ, who is surely afoot, and ensure they will experience the Rapture in accordance with prophecy.

The Reconstructionist vision of a theocratic state is incompatible with the idea of democracy. Although they envision maintaining elections, their world would deny voting rights to everyone but the chosen few. Reconstructionists advocate the following policies:

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- Dramatically scaling back government. Most public institutions and programmes, such as schools and assistance for the poor would be abolished and replaced with church-run charities.
- Basing laws on the Bible rather than the Constitution.
- Using the death penalty to punish offences such as murder, rape, abortion, and homosexuality; some also would apply it to adultery, "unchastity," witchcraft, "incorrigible" juvenile delinquency, blasphemy and the propagation of "false" religious doctrines.
- Some Reconstructionists support indentured servitude as punishment for theft.
- A God-ordained order with God above all, man under God, woman under man, and animals at the bottom.

Reconstructionists are strongly opposed to tolerance because, as Rushdoony once put it, *"In the name of toleration, the believer is asked to associate on a common level of total acceptance with the atheist, the pervert, the criminal, and the adherents of other religions as though no differences existed"*.<sup>17</sup>

While this belief system may seem strange, one must remember that many of its adherents are quite discrete about its more controversial aspects, believe a watered-down version. It also has the advantage of offering "something for everyone" – corporations who oppose government regulation, wealth individuals who oppose taxes, and so on.

Another important factor that has allowed Reconstructionism to progress unchecked is that the American public is very comfortable with public officials making proclamations of faith. George W. Bush's comment during the 2000 election that Jesus Christ was his favourite philosopher was generally met with approval. Voters are suspicious of candidates who say their personal religious beliefs won't affect the decisions they make in office; they wonder why someone would have one set of beliefs for their private life, and another for their public service. Overall, religion plays a greater role in American public life than it does in many other countries.

### ***America Is Different***

How religious is the United States? Consider the following information from the World Values Survey (WVS), an international research project that measures social and political change around the world. WVS reports that in 1995, when asked to rate the importance of God in one's daily life on a scale of one to 10, 50 per cent of Americans chose "10" – a greater percentage than any other economically advanced democracy.

When the question was revisited in 2000, 58 per cent of Americans chose "10" – a remarkable increase in just five short years. In 1995, WVS found that 55 per cent of all Americans attend religious services at least once per month; by 2000, that figure had risen to 60 per cent.

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17 The Words of Christian Reconstructionists compiled by Paul Thibodeau at <http://www.sullivan-county.com/nf0/fundienazis/fundiewords.htm>

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When WVS combined its questions about attendance of religious services and the importance of God in one's daily life with four other measures of religiosity, it found that the United States is indeed one of the most religious countries in the world. Only 19 of the 75 countries WVS analysed rated higher in religiosity, and those 19 were all developing nations such as Brazil, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Egypt, Iran, Nigeria, Turkey, and Uganda.

WVS also examines the degree to which a nation reflects what they call "traditional values": showing deference to authority, placing great importance on religion, God, and family life; having absolute standards of good and evil; favouring the dominance of men in social, political, and economic life; favouring large family size; and being intolerant of abortion, divorce, euthanasia, and suicide. WVS contrasts this set of "traditional values" with what it calls "secular-rational values" (egalitarianism, tolerance, independent thinking, scientific investigation, and reliance on reason).

Using these definitions, WVS reports that the United States has one of the most "traditional" value systems in the world: as they put it, *"Americans have much more traditional values than the peoples of almost any society regardless of level of economic development and type of political system."* In this context, the United States has far more in common with Chile and Turkey than it does with Canada, Great Britain, and the Netherlands.

The same data illustrate another important difference between the U.S. and other wealthy nations. In 1981, countries such as Australia, Britain, Canada, Denmark, Germany (East and West), Sweden, and Japan were already much more "secular-rational" than the U.S., and by 1995, each of these countries had become considerably more secular-rational than they were before. By contrast, the U.S. made no progress towards secular-rationalism during the same time period. In other words, the values gap between the U.S. and other wealthy countries widened significantly over the past two decades.

In 1992, 36 per cent of Americans self-identified as born-again Christians; by 2003, that number increased to 42 per cent. Further, between 1978 and 1987, the number of white evangelical Christians who identified with the Republican Party increased by nine per cent; between 1987 and 1995, that number increased an additional seven points. Though George W. Bush did not win a plurality of the vote in the 2000 presidential election, his approval rating among religious conservatives was an unprecedented 84 per cent.

Nevertheless, support for a woman's right to choose has remained steady over time. Over the past 16 years, most Americans (approximately 57 per cent) have said they oppose overturning *Roe v. Wade*. Acceptance of homosexuality has also increased. The feminist ideal of a woman deciding her own destiny – what profession to enter, whether to have children, to marry or to remain single – was controversial when it was articulated in the 1970s but is now widely accepted, as is the idea of equal opportunities for boys and girls. Americans support technological advances and innovations in science; at the same time, they support teaching the Biblical story of creation in public schools. And sexually suggestive language and imagery is common in mainstream entertainment. Such cross-currents in American society help explain why many of these issues continue to generate controversy.

A number of political analysts and advocates consider these conflicts part of an ongoing "culture war." Certainly those who have been actively defending sexual and reproductive health and rights feel like they have been besieged by the volume and variety of anti-choice initiatives. In addition, the slowness of some social liberals to recognize that the right to choose is no less worth defending than other civil liberties has been isolating and exhausting. RCF leaders avidly use the imagery of cultural warfare to describe their inclinations; as Gary Bauer put it, "*We are engaged in a social, political, and cultural war. There's a lot of talk in America about pluralism. But the bottom line is somebody's values will prevail. And the winner gets the right to teach our children what to believe.*"

### ***The Ruling Reign of the Cross***

Reconstructionism has had a tremendous impact on American politics. It has provided a framework that allows activists who oppose sexual and reproductive health and rights, favour tax cuts, oppose environmental regulation, distrust public education and support aggressive military action to work together on a common agenda. One organization, the Council for National Policy (CNP), appears to have been a very effective vehicle for developing joint strategies.

The CNP's membership includes a who's who of right-wing individuals: religious leaders; military figures who favour a more aggressive policy of foreign intervention; foreign policy figures who oppose international cooperation through the U.N.; wealthy benefactors with an interest in cutting taxes and gutting labor and environmental regulations; individuals with ties to anti-immigrant groups; Reconstructionist authors Rushdoony (recently deceased) and North; and an assortment of current and former elected officials and political appointees. Guest speakers have included the current President George Bush (whilst Presidential candidate), Vice President, Attorney General, Secretary of State, and so on. The CNP was founded by Tim LaHaye, a Reconstructionist.

With such a structure, a victory on one issue becomes a victory for everyone. While there have been some disappointments, the Bush White House has tried to meet CNP's expectations in some very important ways, including his Faith-Based Initiative (which would shift money from secular social welfare programmes to charitable groups with an explicitly religious agenda), tax cuts for the wealthy and for corporations, disregard for international institutions and treaties, and of course his attacks on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Bush has nominated an unprecedented number of right-wing fundamentalist Christians (some of whom are Reconstructionists) to the full range of government positions. This list includes:

- **John Ashcroft**, Attorney General (resigned 2005). As Senator from Missouri, Ashcroft opposed *Roe v. Wade*, civil liberties, the separation of church and state, and social programmes for the poor.
- **Elaine Chao**, Labor Secretary. Chao is a member of the board of directors of the anti-feminist Independent Women's Forum.

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- **Mike Johanns**, Agriculture Secretary. As Governor of Nebraska, he signed proclamations declaring "March for Jesus" and "Back to the Bible" days.
- **Margaret Spellings**, Education Secretary. Endorsed by groups like Focus on the Family, one of her first actions was to warn the makers of children's television programmes that they could not refer to homosexuality.
- **Mike Leavitt**, Secretary of Health and Human Services. As Governor of Utah, Leavitt supported outlawing abortion without an exception to preserve the woman's health.
- **Gale Norton**, Secretary of the Interior, (resigned March 2006). Norton was a protégé of James Watt. She recently instituted a policy requiring all 1,000 managers of national parks and other programmes to take an oath of loyalty to President Bush.
- **Tom Coburn**, Co-Chair, President's Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (2002). As a member of Congress, Coburn supported abstinence-only education, promoted the idea that condoms are not effective, and wanted to outlaw abortion without exceptions. In addition he has been quoted as saying "The gay community has infiltrated the very centres of power in every area across this country, and they wield extreme power... That agenda is the greatest threat to our freedom that we face today. Why do you think we see the rationalization for abortion and multiple sexual partners? That's a gay agenda."<sup>18</sup> He is also a member of Muskogee's New Community Church.<sup>19 20</sup>
- **Michael Gerson**, Director of Presidential Speechwriting and Senior Policy Advisor. A fundamentalist Christian responsible for integrating religious and policy language and former senior policy adviser for the Heritage Foundation.<sup>21</sup>
- **Henry "Hank" Paulson** nominated as US Treasury Secretary (30 May 2006). The former chairman of investment bank Goldman Sachs, Paulson is a devout Christian Scientist.

In addition, **Marvin Olasky**, the strategist who developed Bush's theme of "compassionate conservatism," is said to be a Reconstructionist, and Bush chose a Reconstructionist minister to conduct the 54<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Prayer Service at the National Cathedral.

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18 Medicine man - The future of GOP control of the Senate depends on Oklahoma Republican candidate Tom Coburn, a former doctor who has covered up a scandal from his past until now - By Robert Schlesinger at <http://dir.salon.com/story/news/feature/2004/09/13/coburn/index.html>

19 About Senator Coburn - Biography at <http://coburn.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=AboutSenatorCoburn.Biography>

20 In October 2004, James Dobson (Focus on the Family) spoke on behalf of Senatorial Candidate Tom Coburn of Oklahoma at a rally at Oklahoma Christian University in support of a constitutional ban on gay marriages. See 'Dr. James Dobson and Gay Bashing'. December 02, 2004, By: David Palmer, Independent Media TV at <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/14088.htm>

21 Source Watch: A project of the Center for Media & Democracy at [http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Michael\\_J.\\_Gerson](http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Michael_J._Gerson)

## **IV. The Importance of Language**

As witnessed above, much of the opposition to SRHR in the United States is comprised of a mixture of Christian fundamentalists and right wing conservatives. And despite a majority of the general public in the United States maintaining a progressive view on 'choice', the opposition has seemingly been able to manipulate the agenda and the thinking of many into supporting their world view.

Much of this has been achieved, and its importance to the debate should not be under-estimated, on the opposition's ability to frame their messages in 'moral' 'traditional' and 'patriotic' language which has created a powerful resonance and struck a chord with large parts of the population. Indeed, the language used by the anti-choice movement has become an exceptionally powerful weapon in their armoury

Such success has had the effect of placing progressives on the back foot, and in doing so it has also raised a number of awkward questions for the pro-choice movement. These questions include:

- Why has the opposition been able to translate their ideas and messages so successfully and in such a way that it has drawn support from large parts of the general public?
- What is it about these fiercely anti-choice exponents that attracts such support in a country that is still broadly in favour of not overturning Roe?
- And quite simply, why has their messages struck such a chord?

Without clear answers to the above questions it is unlikely that the pro-choice movement will be able to make any significant headway in their fight to regain the upper hand in the debate on SRH. Indeed if pro-choice activists are to regain the momentum, then a 'retaking' of the language will be required as a first and important step.

For many the ability to manipulate language is central to how pro-choice activists can regain the upper hand in the debate over SRHR. Some believe that the ability of the opposition to frame their messages using carefully constructed language in a convincing manner has been central to their strategy for winning the support of large sections of the population. But if this is the case, how did it come about, and why is it only now that pro-choice activists are responding?

According to George Lakoff, conservatives have been working on defining their ideas and language for at least three decades and have spent the time building up an "infrastructure to communicate them" while progressives have sat idly by without responding, or knowing how to respond. Lakoff states that conservative think tanks have spent vast amounts of dollars in their pursuit to build a language that defines and attracts people to their worldview. Clearly the opposition's tactics have borne fruit and has had a significant impact, but Lakoff stresses that this is down to the opposition reassessing the language of their values and coming up with a bigger picture scenario over three decades ago - but which is now finally bearing fruit with such devastating impact.

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"Over the last 30 years their think tanks have made a heavy investment in ideas and in language. In 1970, [Supreme Court Justice] Lewis Powell wrote a fateful memo to the National Chamber of Commerce saying that all of our best students are becoming anti-business because of the Vietnam War, and that we needed to do something about it. Powell's agenda included getting wealthy conservatives to set up professorships, setting up institutes on and off campus where intellectuals would write books from a conservative business perspective, and setting up think tanks. He outlined the whole thing in 1970. They set up the Heritage Foundation in 1973, and the Manhattan Institute after that"<sup>22</sup> .... "and now ...they have 1,500 conservative radio talk show hosts. They have a huge, very good operation, and they understand their own moral system. They understand what unites conservatives, and they understand how to talk about it, and they are constantly updating their research on how best to express their ideas."<sup>23</sup>

Clearly in respect to SRH language, conservatives and religious fundamentalists can be said to have stolen a march on the pro-choice movement. They are organized, they are smart and they have the extensive resources they need to influence the debate. Some could argue that while pro-choice activists were working in the field providing health care services and information to millions of women, the opposition was busy sitting in their offices away from the frontline developing long-term strategies to impose their own world view on what America should be like to the rest of the nation. The bi-products of their 'worldview' strategies have been their attempt to deny women both their hard won rights including the right to reproductive health care information and services.

While it can be said that the opposition's strategy hasn't facilitated all of the changes they would have liked to have seen (often because of the tireless work of pro-choice advocates), it is clear that the language they have used and the support they have gained have had an impact on the wider SRHR debate. It is this impact that has the potential to jeopardize the lives of literally millions of women around the globe.

Below is an example of just one of the many opposition groups in the United States that have been pushing an anti-choice agenda for nearly thirty years.

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22 Framing the issues: UC Berkeley professor George Lakoff tells how conservatives use language to dominate politics - By Bonnie Azab Powell, NewsCenter, 27 October 2003 at [http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2003/10/27\\_lakoff.shtml](http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2003/10/27_lakoff.shtml)

23 Ibid.

## **V. Focus on the Family USA**

Focus on the Family is one of the largest Christian organizations in the United States that actively opposes SRHR. Founded in 1977 by James Dobson, it was first run from a two-room suite in Arcadia, California but now has its Head Office in Colorado Springs, Colorado which is comprised of an Administration Building and a Welcome Centre that "has had more than a million guests walk through its doors."<sup>24</sup> According to its website, "Families can enjoy a 170-seat theater" and "expansions in 1997 and 2000 added a kids' play area with a three-story slide, Whit's End Soda Shoppe, birthday party room, G. Harvey Art Gallery, Solid Grounds coffee shop and 10,000 square foot gift shop and bookstore. In 2001, the Discovery Emporium was added, complete with a puppet stage, reading area and KYDS' Radio Studio" ... "Kids get to climb into a replica of the B-17 bomber."<sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup>Clearly it has come a long way.

Dobson formed Focus on the Family in response to the perceived disintegration of the American family. The mission of the organization is to "Disseminate the Gospel of Jesus Christ" by 'helping to preserve traditional values and the institution of the family'. Many of Focus on the Family's activities attack sexual and reproductive health and rights at every level. The policies they have adopted on SRHR can be interpreted as anti-choice, anti-condom, anti-women, anti-abortion, anti-rights and anti-homosexual. For example, they support "re-orientation" therapy" which seeks to 'turn' homosexuals 'back into' heterosexuals. Indeed, Focus on the Family has held a number of 'Love Won Out' conferences to promote "the truth that homosexuality is preventable and treatable".<sup>27</sup> As it proclaims on its website: "Come and witness the type of love that draws men and women *affected* by homosexuality into the arms of their Creator."<sup>28</sup> In essence Focus on the Family seeks to transform society into one that lives by its 'standards' alone no matter where in the world you live.

Undertaking such 'transformations of society' obviously requires considerable resources. But this is not something that deters Dobson's growing group of organizations. According to Focus on the Family's own 2005 Federal Tax Form 990 (10/1/04-9/30/05) its total revenue has now reached over US\$137 million with assets in excess of US\$97 million. On top of this, total lobbying expenses for Focus on the Family itself since 2002 has exceeded US\$1 million.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, Focus on the Family Action,<sup>30</sup> another organization designed ostensibly for the purpose of lobbying within the United States under the leadership of Dobson, provides "a platform for informing,

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24 Charity Wire: Focus on the Family at <http://www.charitywire.com/charity63/>

25 Focus on the Family, Welcome Centre and Bookstore at <http://www.family.org/welcome/visit/photos/A0022600.cfm>

26 Although authoritarian figures mentioned are pro-life, they are also in favour of capital punishment and military action (see p7 and p23)

27 See Focus on the Family 'Love Won Out' site at: <http://lovewonout.com/>

28 Ibid

29 Focus on the Family: 2005 Form 990 (10/1/04-9/30/05), 2003 Form 990 (10/1/03-9/30/04) and 2002 Form 990 (10/1/02-9/30/01) at <http://www.family.org/welcome/aboutfof/A0028626.cfm>

30 Focus on the Family Action is a separate legal entity to Focus on the Family but share the same guiding principles with Dobson as its head. Its website makes clear that it has been set up as a separate legal entity. "Focus on the Family Action is a new cultural action organization that is completely separate from Focus on the Family, legally. It has been created by separating out of Focus on the Family those activities which constitute lobbying under the IRS code so that they can be expanded in scope. It will provide a platform for informing, inspiring and rallying those who care deeply about the family to greater involvement in the moral, cultural and political issues that threaten our nation." <http://www.focusaction.org/Welcome/A000000105.cfm>

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inspiring and rallying those who care deeply about the family to greater involvement in the moral, cultural and political issues that threaten our nation" has reported total revenues of approximately US\$25 million.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, as Dobson states, "Focus on the Family Action will give me and my team much greater freedom to take our views to the public square, where the great debate over culture, rights, freedom and values is taking place, and allow me to ask people to take specific actions such as calling senators and congressmen to pass important, family-friendly legislation."<sup>32</sup>

Fundamental to Focus on the Family's guiding principles is its belief that "God has ordained three basic institutions — the church, the family and the government — for the benefit of all humankind"<sup>33</sup> with the government existing to "maintain cultural equilibrium and to provide a framework for social order."<sup>34</sup>

Focus on the Family started its activities with "a book on child discipline and a 25-minute weekly broadcast"<sup>35</sup>. Since then its growth has been considerable and it has become an international organization with more than 74 different ministries and 1,300 employees. These 'Ministries' portray the scope and ambition of the organisation as it attempts to influence society into adopting its own worldview. Many of the Ministries cover particular areas. For example, the College Student Ministry "offers college students a life-changing, semester-long experience that helps them develop a healthy Christian worldview"<sup>36</sup>; the Donor Ministry reaches out to corporations so that Focus on the Family can reap "an increasingly greater harvest to support the Lord's work"<sup>37</sup>; the Government and Public Policy Ministry provides "a biblical perspective on national and local news"... "in a nation where individual 'rights' increasingly trump biblical truth"<sup>38</sup> and the International and Cultural Ministry "develops resources and other teaching tools in languages and styles that speak effectively to their intended audiences".<sup>39</sup>

One of the main tools used to achieve Focus on the Family's objectives is Dobson's broadcasts, aired on more than 3,000 stations in North America. Topics have included 'the battle to destroy lust', 'reaching hearts on abortion', and 'the sacred value of life'. Furthermore, he is seen daily on 80 TV channels in the United States, and produces 10 magazines with a combined circulation of more than 2.3 million every month<sup>40</sup>. A series of books, with titles such as '*Be Intolerant: Because Some Things are Just Stupid*', and '*Reason in the Balance: The case against Naturalism in Science, Law and Education*', has also been published.

The theme running through the organization's work is the perceived threat posed to American society by modernity in its various forms. The family, with the father as the

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31 See: Focus on the Family Action, Federal tax Form 990, Fiscal Form ending Year 2005, at [http://www.focusaction.org/pdfs/FOFA\\_2005\\_990.pdf](http://www.focusaction.org/pdfs/FOFA_2005_990.pdf)

32 See: Focus on the Family Action at <http://www.focusaction.org/Welcome/A000000105.cfm>

33 Our Guiding Principles – Focus on the Family at <http://www.family.org/welcome/aboutfof/a0000078.cfm>

34 Ibid

35 Focus on the Family: About Us, Our Ministries at <http://www.family.org/welcome/aboutfof/a0007486.cfm>

36 Focus on the Family: Ministries <http://www.family.org/welcome/aboutfof/a0007486.cfm>

37 Ibid

38 Ibid

39 Ibid

40 Focus International website: <http://www.family.org/welcome/intl/>, May 2005

authoritative head, and always consisting of one man and one woman, is seen as the cornerstone of human – not just American – society, and anything that would appear to jeopardize this is perceived as a threat to society as a whole. Hence Focus on the Family is not only opposed to marriage and adoption rights for homosexuals – it is against homosexuality in principle, and sees it as one of the main evils in society: *"Homosexual marriage is an empty pretence that lacks the fundamental sexual complementariness of male and female. And like all counterfeits, it cheapens and degrades the real thing"*<sup>41</sup>. Feminism, abortion, The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, pre-marital sex, pornography and stem cell research are seen as other 'threats' to society. While the sanctity of human life is a fundamental issue for Focus on the Family, Dobson is in favour of the death penalty, even arguing that execution of minors is unproblematic, on the basis that bureaucracy and red tape would ensure that they would be "at least 30 or 40 by the time their sentences were carried out"<sup>42</sup>.

The current Bush administration has provided Focus on the Family with considerable opportunity for growth and influence. The organization helped President Bush's programme to spend US\$1.5 billion to promote 'healthy marriage', over five years.<sup>43</sup> The aim is to allow federal funding for organizations working to promote marriage as an institution, through mechanisms such as instruction in marriage skills and mentoring programmes that use married couples as role models. These programmes would be targeted at welfare recipients. Focus on the Family has also gained considerable increases in funding under the Bush administration due to the current focus on abstinence-only sex education, as discussed below.

### **Sex education – No apologies**

Focus on the Family's abstinence-only sex education programme, "No Apologies: The truth about Life, Love and Sex" was originally written for U.S schools. The video has been described as a combination of "MTV production techniques, biblical values, and the explicitness of an Army VD training film"<sup>44</sup>. It is now being used extensively in Focus on the Family's international branches (see below), including countries as different as Japan, Costa Rica, and South Africa. The curriculum remains virtually unchanged, and so fails entirely to take into consideration the widely different social, cultural and political contexts in the countries where it is being promoted.

Given the enormous influx of funding for U.S domestic abstinence-only sex education in the past few years, Focus on the Family made the decision to support local U.S groups in creating new domestic materials for the industry, while simultaneously focusing their own energy on exporting and marketing their curriculum overseas.<sup>45</sup> The move has hence been a clever strategic positioning exercise allowing Focus on the Family to access much more U.S government funding.

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41 Ibid

42 "Life, Death and Judicial Tyranny" in Focus Action Newsletter, April 2005

43 Krehely, House and Kernan: Axis of Ideology; Conservative Foundations and Public Policy, National Committee for Responsible Philanthropy, Washington DC, March 2004, p 27

44 "James Dobson: leader of the 'Focus on the Family' Cult", US News, May 1998

45 Siecus Public Policy Office Fact Sheet: Siecus Review: No Apologies, The truth about Life, Love and Sex, April 2005

A review of the curriculum by the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) was profoundly critical of the messages being promoted. The curriculum "routinely suggests that condoms are incapable of providing protection against STDs".<sup>46</sup> Focus on the Family's assumption is that if young people are told that condoms don't work, then they will abstain from sex altogether. This assumption certainly seems illogical and ill-founded, and indeed it has also been empirically, and repeatedly, disproved. The tragic effect of such a message is, of course, that young people are at greatly increased risk of unintended pregnancy as well as STIs (including HIV), when – not if – they become sexually active.

When one considers the use of this curriculum, without any contextual adaptation, in seven sub-Saharan African countries where up to 25 per cent of the population is HIV positive, it becomes all the more devastating.

The No Apologies curriculum promotes a 'one-size fits all' model of marriage, and "presents marriage as a cure-all for problems ranging from HIV infection to domestic violence".<sup>47</sup> It states: "*Who is at risk of contracting HIV? Anyone who has sex outside of a mutually faithful monogamous marriage with an infected partner*" – hence bizarrely implying that the fact of being married is more important than the partner's HIV status in determining whether someone will get infected. The fact that married, faithful and monogamous women are the fastest growing risk group for HIV infection in sub-Saharan Africa, is disregarded entirely.

SIECUS further criticizes the No Apologies curriculum for its promotion of virginity pledges, a mechanism which has been comprehensively proven ineffective in preventing unintended pregnancy and STIs including HIV. In fact, virginity pledges delay the onset of sexual activity by 18 months on average – at which point the pledgers fail to use contraception, having been taught that condoms are ineffective<sup>48</sup>.

#### **No Apologies: What Focus on the Family is teaching students**

- "The safest place for a woman to live is married to a man"
- "Sex is more fulfilling and satisfying when enjoyed within marriage (...) this feeling can be especially strong in girls"
- "Sarah knows better than to trust a condom (...) they have holes in them, and the holes are too big to protect against STDs"
- "There really is only one correct answer to the question 'How should I handle the sexual side of my life?'"
- "Who is at risk of contracting HIV? Anyone who has sex outside of a mutually faithful monogamous marriage with an infected partner"

Source: Focus on the Family: "No Apologies, The Truth about Life, Love and Sex"

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Bearman and Bruckner: "Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges and the Transition to First Intercourse", *American Journal of Sociology* 106.4 (2001): 859-912, and Bearman and Bruckner: "After the Promise: the STD consequences of adolescent virginity pledges", *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 36 (2005): 271-278

## **Funding**

Since 1997 the US based organization National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy has published an annual overview of grant-making activities and strategies of the 12 largest conservative foundations in the United States. According to the 2004 review, the largest recipient of foundation grants for social issues was Focus on the Family, with over US\$3 million annually.

In May 2005, Focus on the Family began to receive funds from USAID to carry out abstinence-only activities in South Africa and Zambia. Focus on the Family is being sub-contracted by The Children's AIDS Fund, which has been awarded an estimated \$9 million.<sup>49</sup> The grant to The Children's AIDS Fund, an organization which promotes abstinence in African countries as a way of combating HIV/AIDS, has been subject to debate and controversy: USAID's expert panel ruled that the organization was "not suitable for funding"<sup>50</sup> a decision which was overruled by the head of USAID.<sup>51</sup>

A major source of income for Focus on the Family is its listeners to its international media programmes. It also receives considerable funding from right-wing philanthropists including the DeVos family, founder of Amway, "a global leader in the multi-level marketing industry"<sup>52</sup>.

## **Focus on the Family International Offices**

In 1992, Focus on the Family formed an international division. Since then, 18 international Focus on the Family associate offices have opened. Each international office is run independently by a national leader with a separate indigenous board of directors. Focus on the Family broadcasts its radio programmes on more than 4,000 facilities in more than 150 different countries worldwide<sup>53</sup>. In particular, offices have been set up in countries considered significant donor countries, as well as emerging donor countries. Further, countries such as South Africa, Egypt and China are important developing countries from an international policy perspective, as they are influential in the UN's Group of 77.<sup>54</sup> In this way, the organization appears to its audience in each country to be promoting a home-grown agenda, rather than one imposed from the United States. For example, in China, where James Dobson's broadcasts are aired on over 400 stations, reaching an estimated audience of 200 million (according to Focus on the Family), Dobson is known as Dr. Du, and Focus on the Family's website boasts that "translation and voicing quality has been so good that many listeners believe that Dr. Dobson is a Chinese man".<sup>55</sup>

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49 Washington Post, February 16, 2005: Group Awarded AIDS Grant Despite Negative Appraisal

50 Ibid

51 For the full background on this case, please see <http://www.democrats.reform.house.gov/Documents/20050215110525-05210.pdf>

52 About Amway at <http://www.amway.com/en/General/About-Amway-10725.aspx>

53 Focus International website: <http://www.family.org/welcome/intl/>, May 2006

54 The UN Group of 77 Member States or G77 as it is widely known "is the largest Third World coalition in the United Nations, the Group of 77 provides the means for the developing world to articulate and promote its collective economic interests and enhance its joint negotiating capacity on all major international economic issues in the United Nations system, and promote economic and technical cooperation among developing countries (ECDC/TCDC)." See: Group of 77 at the United Nations: Aims at <http://www.g77.org/main/main.htm>

55 Focus International website: <http://www.family.org/welcome/intl/>, May 2005

One of the methods employed by Focus on the Family to advance their vision in-country appears to be to concentrate on 'wedge issues'. In other words messages are formulated and issues framed in such a way that divisions within society are deliberately created. These divisions are often based around what Focus on the Family perceives to be 'morality' issues including sexual and reproductive health and rights.

In Japan, fertility rates are among the lowest in the world (at 1.32 children per women). Some say this is due to women choosing to play a full and active role in the economy, women wanting careers as well as the high costs associated to raising children. Thus, fewer marriages combined with an increase in sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and the supposed 'westernisation' and rapidly changing nature of Japan's youth culture, have led many to imply that 'public morality' in Japan has reached crisis point. A view seemingly shared by Focus on the Family.

Focus on the Family seek to raise concerns about the future of infertility in the country, but in doing so they seek to deny women the right to their own careers, and judges them as morally bankrupt if they choose to delay marriage in favour of a career.

Likewise in Egypt, where Focus on the Family's branch has been operating since 2002, one of the main aims is to promote abstinence-only sex-education. Given that the No Apologies curriculum has a number of "Decisions for Christ"<sup>56</sup> as one of its main indicators of success, it is clearly controversial in a country that is 94 per cent Muslim.<sup>57</sup> This is a good example of the need to appear domestic and therefore more acceptable; a blatantly US imposed Christian curriculum would be less than popular. Focus on the Family has been very successful at appearing 'native' to the countries they operate in.

It is important to note, however, that despite the attempt to appear 'home-grown', the programmes and websites of the international branches of Focus on the Family are virtually identical, both in the issues they address and the way in which they address them. This reflects Dobson's belief in 'universal' truths and values, but fails to take into account the socio-cultural differences between regions of the world that have entirely different realities.

## **International Activities**

- ***Influencing public policy***

Focus on the Family seeks to influence the work of governments, in particular by working with government ministries and holding discussions with ministers and officials to encourage the drafting of policies that reflect Focus on the Family's view of what a family should be. In Malaysia for example, Focus on the Family is working closely with the Ministry of Women and Family Development. The involvement focuses

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56 Citizen - Burying Their Hope - Pastors in Uganda want to preach morality to save their countrymen from AIDS. But condom promoters and the U.S. ambassador are hindering those efforts.- by Candi Cushman at <http://www.family.org/cforum/citizenmag/coverstory/a0036010.cfm>

56 Focus International website: <http://www.family.org/welcome/intl/n> Magazine, Focus on the Family, April 2005

57 CIA World Fact Book: <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/eg.html>

on drafting of 'family policies', planning of a 'national family day' and special events, and developing programmes and campaigns aimed at "strengthening families".<sup>58</sup> Focus on the Family representatives have also held talks with Ethiopian government officials (get more info).

The Focus on the Family East Africa office opened in 2000 and operates in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The Southern Africa office was set up in Durban, South Africa in 1992, and works in the Southern African region. Both branches have taken an active part in the debate around HIV/AIDS, not only promoting abstinence and fidelity as the best means to fight the disease, but also actively fighting against any attempts at promoting responsible and safe sex practices.

Following the Bush administration's large increases in funding for abstinence-based HIV/AIDS education, and promotion of the ABC principle, (Abstain, Be faithful, or use a Condom)<sup>59</sup> Focus on the Family and similar groups have repeatedly reinterpreted the ABC model. For example, ABC is sometimes said to stand for 'Abstinence, Being Faithful, and showing Character'; other times it is said that "AB and little c" stand for Abstain, Be faithful, and if you are set on ignoring the other two, use a Condom". These ideas effectively promote the idea that HIV infected people are characterless and promiscuous – that 'good' people do not get AIDS. Says an HIV/AIDS educator working with Focus on the Family in Uganda: "I recognize that I could give people facts about HIV/AIDS, and they could become better educated sinners. However, the power to change really comes from a conviction of realizing what you are doing is wrong."<sup>60</sup>

- **Radio Broadcasts and public information campaigns**

Focus on the Family's radio broadcasts are one of the most universal elements of the organization's work. Through the over 4,000 broadcasts in 150 countries daily, Dobson's ideas and suggestions on everything from how to strengthen family relationships, to abortion, homosexuality and child-rearing, are disseminated to significant audiences around the world. While the themes of the broadcasts are virtually identical in all countries, the country offices will often invite national 'experts' to comment. These 'experts' are typically conservative religious leaders. However, in many other cases, James Dobson's US broadcasts are quite simply translated and broadcast in other countries, and the notion that he is a national expert is actively encouraged.

Other 'public information campaigns' are also cornerstones of Focus on the Family's activities. These activities typically include publications, seminars, and counselling

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58 Focus International Website <http://www.family.org/welcome/intl/>, June 2005

59 Although the ABC model has been accepted by some AIDS activists and Health NGOs, it is seen as workable only as part of a larger scheme, because it consistently fails to take into account the impossible position of thousands of women, who are unable to negotiate condom use with their husbands, and are at risk of contracting HIV despite being monogamous and faithful. It also ignores the vast number of injecting drug users at risk of contracting HIV through shared needles, a serious problem particularly in eastern Europe and Russia.

60 Citizen Magazine, Burying Their Hope - Pastors in Uganda want to preach morality to save their countrymen from AIDS. But condom promoters and the U.S. ambassador are hindering those efforts. by Candi Cushman at <http://www.family.org/cforum/citizenmag/coverstory/a0036010.cfm>

services for married couples or for 'crisis pregnancies'. Other, more novel initiatives are also used. In Malaysia, Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants across the country play 90 second commentaries twice every hour. Themes include 'Forgiveness', 'Is Motherhood Boring?' and 'Be There, Dad!'<sup>61</sup>.

In Egypt, Focus on the Family has developed an array of materials aimed at encouraging an anti-choice stance. For example, the organization published a pamphlet entitled "First Nine Months" containing pictures of an embryo developing into a fetus. "The organization also held a seminar that presented a video, speech and testimonies from people who left the abortion practice".<sup>62</sup> Furthermore the organization developed a counselling course to deal with 'crisis pregnancy' aimed at 'educating Christian leaders'<sup>63</sup>.

▪ ***Abstinence-only education***

As discussed above, branching out into abstinence-only sex education internationally was a strategic move in terms of funding. In exporting the programme, however, no changes have been made to adapt the curriculum to audiences from other cultures. A SIECUS review of the curriculum concludes: "...it is not appropriate for an education programme designed for global use to promote a single religion or use language that connotes one set of religious beliefs. While No Apologies attempts to hide its Christian background, the curriculum remains patently religious in nature"<sup>64</sup>

No Apologies is nonetheless experiencing some success. According to the Southern Africa website, seven Sub-Saharan African countries are using it, and it is stated that 2,478 educators have been educated, reaching 106,797 learners between 2001 and 2004.<sup>65</sup> In Singapore, 6,000 participants are reportedly registered to attend training in No Apologies in 2005.<sup>66</sup> There are plans to launch a Mandarin version of the curriculum.

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61 Focus on the Family Malaysia Website, <http://www.family.org.my/>, June 2005

62 Focus on the Family Egypt at <http://www.family.org/welcome/intl/egypt/egypt/a0022308.cfm>

63 Focus International <http://www.family.org/welcome/intl/egypt/egypt/a0022308.cfm>, June 2005

64 Summary: Siecus Review: No Apologies, The truth about Life, Love and Sex, April 2005 at [http://www.siecus.org/pubs/No\\_Apologies.pdf](http://www.siecus.org/pubs/No_Apologies.pdf)

65 Report on the Presentation of No Apologies, the Truth about Life, Love and Sex curriculum presented as HIV/AIDS prevention pilot projects in eight provinces of South Africa, [http://www.safamily.org.za/programmes\\_noapologies](http://www.safamily.org.za/programmes_noapologies)

66 Impact Report 2004, Focus on the Family Singapore, Quoted in Siecus Public Policy Fact Sheet: Siecus Review: No Apologies, The truth about Life, Love and Sex, April 2005

## **VI. Conclusion**

As evidenced in this chapter, the Christian opposition in the United States has made significant attempts to reduce and deny the rights of individuals to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Its strategies, developed over the last few decades - to forge close links with and embed itself within the Republican Party and merge the divisions between church and state, religion and politics - have been highly successful.<sup>67</sup> And by framing the Republican agenda, the opposition has been able to use the Party as a vehicle for attaining power and imposing its own moral worldview upon the rest of society.

Although the United States is not a theocracy, the Republican Party is ostensibly becoming one - and it is driving American politics, using God as a battering ram on almost every issue: crime and punishment, foreign policy, health care, taxation, energy, regulation, social services and so on.

Unique to the Christian opposition is the intensity, organization, and anger it has brought to the public square. Its vitriolic intolerance - its loathing of other people's beliefs, of America's secular and liberal values, of an independent press, of the courts, of reason, science and the search for objective knowledge - has become an unprecedented sectarian crusade for state power.

In the face of such opposition it is vital that we, as supporters of sexual and reproductive health and rights, understand how the opposition thinks and comprehend why its agenda appeals to some people. We know that:

- The opposition sees the world differently. We value equality and individual rights; it values hierarchical structures and strict social codes. Our best messages, policy positions and programmes are as worrying to the opposition as theirs are to us. For example, we find the phrase "a world of possibilities" to be positive and inspiring, but it sees a world of possibilities as a frightening place.
- The opposition is deeply concerned with social control. It is not just concerned with single issues like abortion or "abstinence-only" education programmes, and making concessions on specific points is unlikely to satisfy it. The opposition uses incrementalism as a strategy to achieve a "big picture" goal. It would be very difficult to find common ground with these groups because the fundamental values of these groups are very different from ours.
- The opposition will not be placated by gestures that recognize the "controversial" nature of SRHR by treating programmes and funding differently

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<sup>67</sup> Many Christian groups are active in the Republican Party. One, the Christian Coalition has been acknowledged as having considerable influence. "The Christian Coalition was founded in 1989 by television preacher Pat Robertson to take over the Republican Party from the bottom up. It has been remarkably successful at getting candidates elected. While the organization is now considered a sinking ship - they have been surpassed by Focus on the Family and The Family Research Council - their Congressional scorecards are still useful. Their ratings cover a broader range of issues than the other groups, showing the breadth of their agenda".... "In 2004, forty-eight out of fifty-one Republican Senators voted with the Christian Coalition 100% of the time". Theocracy Watch: The Rise of the Religious Right in the Republican Party - a public information project from TheocracyWatch.org at <http://www.theocracywatch.org/>

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from the mainstream. Instead, treating SRHR differently will be seen as official sanction to attack it further.

- The opposition is hostile to programmes and ideas it sees as outside the norm or as challenging conventional values. The more stigmatized and marginalized SRHR becomes the more licence the opposition will feel to attack us.

We know, therefore, that the opposition is inhibited by its own conventionalism. If the opposition sees that a majority of the public and key leaders support SRHR, it will be harder for the opposition to attack it. Therefore, it is **ESSENTIAL** to keep SRHR in the mainstream. We must not let it be stigmatized and isolated. Where SRHR has already been sidelined, it is essential that we bring it back into the mainstream.

Clearly, we have a lot of work to do. The lives of millions of women and men around the globe are at stake. We must ensure, therefore, that we are more effective than the opposition in disseminating our pro-choice messages and making sure that these are acted upon around the globe. In doing so, not only will lives be saved, but also the hard won, internationally recognized rights gained over many years be upheld.

**Glossary: Essential Terms in U.S. Politics**

**The U.S. Constitution** is the supreme law of the United States. Over time there have been a number of changes and additions but it remains essentially the same as when it was adopted in 1789. It includes a preamble; the rules for governance of the nation; and a series of "amendments" that list the rights of citizens.

**Balance of Powers:** The U.S. has three "branches" of government with equal standing – the judicial, the executive, and the legislative. The three branches are on equal footing and each provides a check and balance to the other parts.

**The Supreme Court** is the judicial branch of the government; it is the highest court in the land and is charged with interpreting the U.S. Constitution as it applies to contemporary issues. Supreme Court Justices (there are nine) are nominated by the President but must be approved by the Senate; after they are appointed, they serve a life term.

**The President**, his Vice-President, and his cabinet of secretaries and advisors make up the "executive branch." Cabinet secretaries control federal agencies governing areas such as education, health and human services, homeland security, the environment, and so on. The President is accountable only to the electorate, though he is subject to lobbying and potential recall by the legislative branch and must follow the law as described by the judicial branch.

**The legislative branch** is the U.S. Congress, which has a Senate of 100 members (each of the 50 states is allotted two Senate seats) and a House of Representatives of 535 members (seats are allocated based on population). Legislation initiated by either chamber must be approved and reconciled with the other and signed by the President before it can become law.

**Two Party System:** The United States has two major national political parties and an assortment of minor parties that vary from state to state. In recent history the two parties have been the Democrats (such as Presidents Clinton, Carter, and Kennedy) and the Republicans (such as Presidents George W. Bush, George H.W. Bush, and Reagan). U.S. elections are "winner-take-all" – when a candidate wins the office of President, he is free to choose a set of secretaries and advisors his own discretion, although some must be confirmed by the Senate.

**Thomas Jefferson** was the author of the Declaration of Independence and one of the most influential founders of the United States. He was the third President of the United States (1801 – 1809).

**"Separation of Church and State"** refers to the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Its reads: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances. This is also commonly referred to as "the first amendment" or "freedom of speech."