

## Top 10 Power Brokers of the U.S. Religious Right

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### Religious Fanaticism in the United States Equals the Islamists!

What follows is a list of the nation's Top Ten Religious Right groups, as determined by publicly available financial data and political prominence. Additional information describes the organizations' leaders, funding and activities.

By Rob Boston, Church and State. Posted July 7, 2006.

The United States is home to dozens of Religious Right groups. Many have small budgets and focus on state and local issues; the most powerful organizations conduct nationwide operations, command multi-million-dollar bank accounts and attract millions of followers. They have disproportionate clout in the halls of Congress, the White House and the courts, and they wield enormous influence within the political system.

What follows is a list of the nation's Top Ten Religious Right groups, as determined by publicly available financial data and political prominence. Additional information describes the organizations' leaders, funding and activities.

#### 1. Christian Broadcasting Network

Founder, CEO and Director: The Rev. Pat Robertson

2004 Revenue: \$186,482,060

Location: Virginia Beach, Va.

Web site: <http://www.cbn.com>

Overview: The Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) airs Robertson's "700 Club," an incendiary daily mix of Pentecostal faith-healing, lifestyle advice and far-right politics. He calls church-state separation a "lie of the left" and thinks Christians like him should lead the world. With his withdrawal from the Christian Coalition in 2001, Robertson uses CBN as his primary political soapbox. The show, which according to Nielsen Media Research has 830,000 daily viewers, opens with a "newscast" that parrots Robertson's views, often followed by commentary from the televangelist himself. Top leaders of the conservative movement regularly pontificate on the program, and Republican members of Congress appear to tout legislative goals.

Robertson, 76, has a history of controversy. His 1991 book *The New World Order* was based on a host of anti-Semitic sources, although Robertson has always been pro-Israel for end-times theological reasons. The same book opines that former presidents Jimmy Carter and George H.W. Bush may have been unwitting dupes for Lucifer. On his TV show, Robertson once charged that Methodists, Presbyterians and Episcopalians represent "the spirit of the Antichrist." In a Sept. 13, 2001, diatribe, he asserted that the terrorist attacks on America happened because of the Supreme Court's rulings in favor of church-state separation. In the ensuing controversy, Robertson shifted the blame to Jerry Falwell, who had been on the show with him.

Over the years, the failed presidential candidate has often dallied with brutal dictators. He celebrated Guatemala's Pentecostal strongman Efraim Rios Montt, lauded Frederick Chiluba of

Zambia as a model for American politicians, hunted for gold with Liberia's Charles Taylor and did business with Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire. (He was caught using relief airplanes owned by his charity, Operation Blessing, to ferry diamond-mining equipment in and out of Zaire.)

Despite all of this, Robertson retains a close relationship with the Republican Party establishment. Operation Blessing has received \$1.5 million in taxpayer funding through the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

CBN is Robertson's flagship tax-exempt operation. He also founded and runs the American Center for Law and Justice, a Religious Right legal group (see below); Operation Blessing and Regent University, a school offering degrees in law, business, journalism, theology and other disciplines. Added up, Robertson-related groups brought in \$461,475,115 in tax-free donations in 2004.

Robertson Quote: "The fact that [the courts] are trying to ignore this country's religious heritage is just horrible. They are taking our religion away from us under the guise of separation of church and state. There was never any intention that our government would be separate from God Almighty. Never, never, never in the history of this land did the founders of this country or those who came after them think that was the case." ("700 Club," July 19, 2005)

## 2. Focus on the Family

Founder and chairman: Dr. James C. Dobson

2005 Revenue: \$137,848,520

Location: Colorado Springs, Colo.

Web site: <http://www.family.org>

Overview: Although sometimes mistakenly identified as a minister, James Dobson is a child psychologist who founded Focus on the Family in 1977. Dobson, 70, rose to national prominence after the release of his first book, *Dare to Discipline*, a controversial volume that lauded corporal punishment for children at a time when many child-rearing experts were recommending against it. He came to the attention of aides to President Ronald Reagan and during the 1980s served on various White House commissions, including a 1985-86 stint on Attorney General Edwin Meese's Commission on Pornography.

From modest origins, FOF has expanded into a huge ministry with a worldwide presence. Dobson's radio broadcasts are heard daily by an estimated five million Americans. According to its Web site, "Focus on the Family has...become an international organization with more than 74 different ministries requiring nearly 1,300 employees" with a "daily broadcast heard on over 6,000 facilities worldwide." FOF produces 10 magazines that are mailed to 2.3 million people and responds to as many as 55,000 letters per week. The ministry also produces various DVDs, books, pamphlets and other materials. It has political affiliates in 32 states that lobby and monitor state legislation.

A product of the strict Church of the Nazarene, Dobson is a hardcore fundamentalist who refers to church-state separation as the "phantom" clause in the Constitution. He frequently lambastes gays, legal abortion and the teaching of evolution in public schools. FOF sponsors controversial "Love Won Out" conferences run by an "ex-gay" ministry that seeks to convert homosexuals into fundamentalist Christian heterosexuals.

Although he poses as an avuncular family counselor, Dobson and his empire spread Religious Right propaganda and extreme rhetoric. In a 1996 radio address, he attacked the concept of tolerance, calling it "kind of a watchword of those who reject the concepts of right and wrong....It's kind of a

desensitization to evil of all varieties." Two years before that, an FOF magazine attacked the Girl Scouts for being agents of "humanism and radical feminism."

More recently, Dobson lashed out at a pro-tolerance video produced for public schools that featured popular cartoon characters, among them SpongeBob SquarePants, because the group that produced it put a "tolerance pledge" on its Web site that included gays.

Dobson has promoted right-wing politics for a long time, but in 2004 he took the step of forming a more overtly political arm, Focus on the Family Action, and began personally endorsing candidates for public office. According to information on the FOF Action Web site, the group collected just under \$25 million in 2005.

Figures such as these give Dobson major political clout. He regularly threatens Republicans with retaliation if they do not do his bidding and claims credit for knocking U.S. Sen. Tom Dashle (D-S.D.) out of the Senate in 2004. Dobson also issues regular threats to other Democratic senators representing "red states." In June of 2004, during a visit to Colorado Springs to speak at the U.S. Air Force Academy, President George W. Bush took time out for a private half-hour meeting with Dobson.

Dobson Quote: "Do we as Christians need to be liked so badly that we choose to remain silent in response to the killing of babies, the spreading of homosexual propaganda to our children, the distribution of condoms and immoral advice to our teenagers, and the undermining of marriage as an institution? Would Jesus have ignored these wicked activities?... No, I am convinced that he would be the first to condemn sin in high places, and I doubt if he would have minced words in making the point."(Christianity Today, June 19, 1995)

### 3. Coral Ridge Ministries

Founder and President: The Rev. D. James Kennedy

2005 Revenue: \$39,253,882

Location: Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Web site: <http://www.coralridge.org>

Overview: D. James Kennedy, a former dance instructor who was converted to fundamentalist Christianity after hearing a sermon on the radio, founded Coral Ridge Ministries in 1974. Kennedy, pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church (PCA), is now seen on about 600 U.S. television stations on Sunday mornings. His "Coral Ridge Hour" mixes fundamentalism with strident attacks on public education, gays, evolution, legal abortion, "secular humanism" and other Religious Right targets.

Kennedy, 75, has a strong presence on radio as well through "Truths that Transform," a daily half-hour commentary heard on 744 stations. In addition, he has authored several books that promote far-right views.

Kennedy is a big promoter of the "Christian nation" view of American history. Every year, his Center for Reclaiming America for Christ, hosts a major Religious Right conference in Fort Lauderdale. The event attracts a mix of activists and politicians. In 2006, Arkansas Gov. (and 2008 presidential hopeful) Mike Huckabee spoke.

In 1995, Kennedy decided he wanted a presence in Washington and opened the Center for Christian Statesmanship. The Center hosts regular events for Capitol Hill staffers to instruct them in the proper "biblical worldview" and works closely with far-right GOP lawmakers.

Kennedy Quote: "This is our land. This is our world. This is our heritage, and with God's help, we shall reclaim this nation for Jesus Christ. And no power on earth can stop us." (Character & Destiny: A Nation in Search of its Soul, 1997)

#### 4. Alliance Defense Fund

President, CEO and General Counsel: Alan Sears

2004 Revenue: \$17,921,146

Location: Scottsdale, Ariz.

Web site: <http://www.alliancedefensefund.org>

Overview: The Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) was founded in 1993 by a coalition of 30 Religious Right leaders, among them James Dobson, D. James Kennedy, Donald Wildmon and the late Marlin Maddoux and Bill Bright. The original idea was to create a funding pool that would subsidize the Religious Right's courtroom activity, and as its Web site proclaims, "reclaim the legal system for Jesus Christ." ADF head Alan Sears served under Reagan-era Attorney General Edwin Meese, leading the Meese Commission on Pornography.

While the ADF still supports lawsuits spearheaded by other groups, it has begun directly litigating in court as well. The organization also sends intimidating letters to government officials and public schools, containing thinly veiled threats to sue unless ADF demands are met. Last year, the group launched a campaign to derail the alleged "war on Christmas" and bragged that it had 800 attorneys standing by. (In the end, only one lawsuit was filed.)

Some ADF cases are filed merely to generate publicity. In 2005, the ADF sued a public school in California on behalf of a teacher who claimed he had been ordered to stop using the Declaration of Independence in class because of its reference to the "Creator." The ADF arranged for intense media coverage of the case but quietly dropped the suit once it became obvious the teacher's claims were not true.

Aside from threatening public schools, the ADF also diverts a lot of money into opposing same-sex marriage and what it calls the "radical homosexual agenda." It also opposes legal abortion and supports cases filed by employees seeking the right to proselytize on the job.

The ADF sponsors regular training for lawyers under its National Litigation Academy. In exchange for free instruction, "each attorney pledges 450 hours of pro-bono time to the Body of Christ," says the ADF Web site. More than 900 lawyers have reportedly participated. The group also sponsors Blackstone Legal Fellowships where law students "receive intensive training in Christian worldview principles and how they apply to the study and interpretation of law."

Sears holds extreme views. He was the first Religious Right figure to assert that the cartoon character SpongeBob SquarePants might be gay and has criticized the 1959 comedy film "Some Like It Hot" for promoting cross-dressing.

Sears Quote: "One by one, more and more bricks that make up the artificial 'wall of separation' between church and state are being removed and Christians are once again being allowed to exercise their constitutional right to equal access to public facilities and funding." (January 2004 e-mail alert)

#### 5. American Family Association

Founder and Chairman: The Rev. Donald Wildmon

2005 Revenue: \$17,595,352

Location: Tupelo, Miss.

Web site: <http://www.afa.net>

Overview: Donald Wildmon, a Methodist minister, founded the American Family Association in 1977. Its original name was the National Federation for Decency. His goal, Wildmon boldly stated, was to rid the television airwaves of “anti-family” programming, mainly through boycotts and threats of boycotts of companies that advertised on shows Wildmon dislikes.

The AFA has since branched out, engaging in typical Religious Right activities like attacking gays and bashing evolution. It now includes a lucrative radio empire with 176 affiliates in 34 states, a fundamentalist Christian news service and a legal group called the Center for Law and Policy. In 2000, Wildmon launched a nationwide campaign to urge states to pass laws mandating the display of “In God We Trust” posters in public schools.

Wildmon, 68, has flirted with anti-Semitism, suggesting that Jews control the entertainment industry. The AFA’s Journal has also reprinted articles from The Spotlight, an anti-Semitic newspaper. In December, Wildmon said evangelicals may stop supporting Israel if Jewish leaders don’t stop criticizing the Religious Right.

Wildmon Quote: “Anti-prayer/Anti-Christian groups - like the ACLU and Americans United for Separation of Church and State - have teamed up with liberal judges on the U.S. Supreme Court and are stripping away our religious freedom.” (Fall 2000 fund-raising letter)

#### 6. American Center for Law and Justice

Founder and President: The Rev. Pat Robertson

Chief Counsel: Jay Sekulow

2005 Revenue: \$14,485,514

Location: Virginia Beach, Va., and Washington, D.C.

Web site: <http://www.aclj.org>

Overview: The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) was founded by TV preacher Pat Robertson in 1990, originally as a joint project of Robertson’s Christian Coalition and Regent University. Closely modeled on its nemesis, the American Civil Liberties Union - the organization whose name it mimics - the ACLJ was among the first Religious Right legal groups in the nation. Headed by Jay Sekulow, a Jewish convert to evangelical Christianity, the group seeks to roll back Supreme Court rulings upholding church-state separation, abortion rights and gay rights.

Although it claims to be non-partisan, the ACLJ works closely with far-right Republicans in Congress and even tried to intervene in Bush v. Gore, the Supreme Court case that awarded the 2000 election to George W. Bush. Sekulow has a close relationship with Bush, and several media accounts have reported that he is among a small group that helps select and promote Bush federal court nominees, including appointments to the Supreme Court.

Sekulow, 49, hosts a television show, “ACLJ This Week,” that airs on several Christian cable networks. (His son Logan hosts a Christian variety program as well.)

In November, Legal Times reported on a series of shady financial deals involving Sekulow. His salary at the ACLJ, for example, exceeds \$600,000 per year and he is listed as an independent contractor so the figure does not have to appear on financial disclosure forms. Sekulow maintains control of a separate legal group, Christian Advocates Serving Evangelism, with annual revenues of \$14 million, that also solicits donations. He often hires family members to help run his various operations, and

the groups he works for have leased or purchased three homes for him.

Sekulow Quote: "The fact is the phrase 'separation of church and state' is not found in the U.S. Constitution, the framework of our freedom.... Too often, the 'separation of church and state' phrase is allowed to take the place of our actual constitutional provisions." (Ministry Magazine, Fall 2004)

#### 7. Family Research Council

Founder: James C. Dobson  
President and CEO: Tony Perkins  
2005 Revenue: \$9,958,115  
Location: Washington, D.C.  
Web site: <http://www.frc.org>

Overview: The Family Research Council (FRC) was founded by religious broadcaster James C. Dobson in 1983 to give his views a presence in the nation's capital. For many years, the group was merely an arm of Focus on the Family. In 1992, Dobson severed the official ties, although he says they remain "spiritually one."

Gary Bauer, a former Reagan administration official, ran FRC for several years. The group's current president is Tony Perkins, a 43-year-old former Louisiana state legislator and anti-abortion activist. The FRC focuses on culture war issues such as abortion, gay rights and end-of-life care. Recently, it has led the Religious Right effort to attack the federal courts and strip judges of their ability to hear church-state cases, sponsoring a series of anti-court rallies called "Justice Sunday."

Headquartered in a 10-year-old building on the edge of D.C.'s Chinatown, FRC has become the leading Religious Right group in the nation's capital and enjoys a close relationship with the GOP leadership. In March of 2005, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist and then-House Majority Leader Tom DeLay spoke at an FRC briefing. DeLay made controversial remarks about Terri Schiavo, a Florida woman in a persistent vegetative state. (Americans United released a tape of the remarks to the media.)

Perkins Quote: "The [Supreme] Court has become increasingly hostile to Christianity. It represents more of a threat to representative government than any other force - more than budget deficits, more than terrorism." ("Confronting the Judicial War on Faith" conference, March 7, 2005)

#### 8. Jerry Falwell Ministries

Founder and Director: The Rev. Jerry Falwell  
2005 Revenue: \$8,950,480

Location: Lynchburg, Va.

Web site: <http://www.falwell.com>

Overview: Jerry Falwell is perhaps the best-known Religious Right leader in America today, if only due to his long service to the cause. His Moral Majority is long gone, but Falwell remains on the scene and continues to attack church-state separation through several vehicles.

Falwell's empire includes his congregation, the 20,000-member Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg; Liberty University; "The Old Time Gospel Hour" television program; the Liberty Alliance and a legal group headed by Mat Staver called Liberty Counsel. Although no longer in his prime, Falwell continues to be a frequent guest on the Fox News Channel and regularly cranks out fund-

raising mail touching on all the standard Religious Right themes.

Falwell, 72, has a long track record of intolerant and bizarre pronouncements. His newspaper labeled the children's show character Tinky Winky a stalking horse for the gay-rights movement in 1999. He has asserted that the Antichrist is alive today and is Jewish. Two days after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Falwell appeared on Pat Robertson's "700 Club" and opined that God had lifted his protection and allowed "the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve." The comments sparked nationwide revulsion.

Despite all of this, Falwell continues to be embraced by leaders of the Republican Party and makes regular media appearances.

Falwell Quote: "Separation of Church and State has long been the battle cry of civil libertarians wishing to purge our glorious Christian heritage from our nation's history. Of course, the term never once appears in our Constitution and is a modern fabrication of discrimination." ("Falwell Fax," April 10, 1998)

9. Concerned Women for America  
Founders: Tim and Beverly LaHaye  
2005 Revenue: \$8,484,108  
Location: Washington, D.C.  
Web site: <http://www.cwfa.org>

Overview: Formed in 1979 by Beverly and Tim LaHaye, Concerned Women for America brings "biblical principles into all levels of public policy." It was originally intended to counter feminism, including opposing ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. When that issue died with the failure of the amendment, CWA focused on opposing communism. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the group has dealt mainly with culture war issues such as abortion, gay rights, sex education and alleged "secular humanism" in public schools, pornography and opposition to church-state separation. The group adds a heavy dose of United Nations-bashing to the list. It claims 500,000 members, although the figure is probably exaggerated.

CWA regularly brings volunteer lobbyists to Capitol Hill under an effort called "Project 535." As the group Web site puts it, "These ladies fearlessly speak with the member or his staff to discuss a particular piece of pro-family legislation."

Despite its name, men hold some leadership positions at CWA. Mike Mears is executive director of CWA's political action committee. Bob Knight heads the group's Culture & Family Institute. Wendy Wright, 43, serves as president. Now in semi-retirement, the LaHayes, now both 80, are less heavily involved with day-to-day operations.

Tim LaHaye has a long history of involvement in far-right politics. He lectured on behalf of the John Birch Society throughout the 1960s and '70s and later helped found the Council for National Policy. More recently, he is known to most Americans as the coauthor of the best-selling Left Behind novels. These apocalyptic potboilers have made LaHaye a very wealthy man.

Tim LaHaye Quote: "America's public education is purposely designed to eradicate Jesus from the scene and replace Him with the likes of John Dewey, Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Wundt, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, and many more." (Mind Siege: The Battle for Truth in the New Millennium, 2001)

## 10. Traditional Values Coalition

Founder and Chairman: The Rev. Louis P. Sheldon

2005 Revenue: \$6,389,448

Location: Anaheim, Calif. and Washington, D.C.

Web site: <http://www.traditionalvalues.org>

Overview: The Rev. Louis P. Sheldon founded the Traditional Values Coalition (TVC) in 1980 primarily to work on issues in California. The group later branched out, establishing a Washington beachhead. The D.C. office is run by Sheldon's daughter, Andrea Lafferty. The organization is a 501(c)(4) group, which means donations to it are not tax deductible. However, it maintains a fully tax deductible arm called the TVC Education and Legal Institute. (Sheldon also runs a small political action committee that in 2006 gave all of its money to Republican candidates in California.)

Sheldon, 72, claims to represent 43,000 churches, but critics dispute that figure. In the world of the Religious Right, the Presbyterian minister has a reputation as something of a money-grubbing huckster. He has been criticized for acting as a front for gambling interests on at least two occasions. An aide to disgraced Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff once called Sheldon "Lucky Louie" in an e-mail when the two worked together on a lobbying project on behalf of the legalized gambling industry.

Sheldon's rhetoric is shrill, even by Religious Right standards, and he makes no efforts to moderate his extreme goals. His daughter is equally florid, once claiming in a 1999 fund-raising letter that she had confronted a "witch" who had sown a "spirit of confusion" over the Senate.

For many years, Sheldon carved out a niche for TVC by engaging in unrelenting gay bashing. When other Religious Right groups began moving in on this turf in the 1990s, Sheldon diversified, ramping up his assaults on church-state separation, public education and the federal judiciary.

None of this has hurt TVC's standing in Washington. After Bush's re-election in 2004, Sheldon held a "Christian" inaugural event that drew White House strategist Karl Rove, Republican National Committee Chairman Ken Mehlman and others.

Sheldon Quote: "A dangerous Marxist/Leftist/Homosexual/Islamic coalition has formed - and we'd better be willing to fight it with everything in our power. These people are playing for keeps. Their hero, Mao Tse Tung, is estimated to have murdered upwards of 60 million people during his reign of terror in China. Do we think we can escape such persecution if we refuse to fight for what is right?" ("The War on Christianity," column, TVC Web site, Dec. 13, 2005)

Lauren Smith, Americans United Communications assistant, provided research for this article.

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