

By Gary DeMar

What's Wrong with the Christian Coalition?

What is the best way to affect society with the claims of Christ? Groups that do not espouse a belief in a Christian civilization until Jesus sets up an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem — a claim that cannot be supported by a study of the Bible — design their activism programs in terms of a hold-the-fort mentality. As a result, they have little to offer in the way of positive Christianity. Their approach is more of a defense-only strategy. In the end, they often become pragmatists. Certain things are wrong because they do not work well. This is the wrong approach.

The Rise of the Moral Majority

Near the end of Jimmy Carter's presidency, Rev. Jerry Falwell cranked up the Moral Majority. In the beginning, the message of the Moral Majority was guided by what the Bible had to say about personal morality and specific social policies. In an "I Love America" rally, Falwell counseled the crowd to use "theological considerations" in their choice of candidates: "If a man stands by this book [holding up a Bible], vote for him. If he doesn't, don't."¹ As one might expect, Falwell and the Moral Majority got a lot of heat for equating morality with Christianity. Couldn't atheists be moral, the critics often asked?

Falwell soon learned that he could not defend a Bible-alone ethical position when religious pluralism ruled the day. In fact, it

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**ACTIVE
FAITH**

**HOW CHRISTIANS
ARE CHANGING THE SOUL
OF AMERICAN POLITICS**

was his own Baptist background that stopped Falwell dead in his tracks. The ghost of Roger Williams continued to haunt Christian activism in the '80s, as it does today. Religious pluralism and toleration rule. As a result, in time, the message of the Moral Majority changed from an influence group that was specifically Christian to a lobbying group that espoused an unspecified morality described as "traditional moral values," later shortened simply to "family values." The transition can be seen from quotations from two of the original founders of the Moral Majority.

Jerry Falwell: "Moral Majority is a political organization and is not based on theological considerations."²

Tim LaHaye: "The battle against humanism . . . is not theological; it is moral."³

The switch came for Falwell in 1980 when he "renounced his earlier vows to Christianize America."⁴ Theological considerations were out, while traditional values were ushered in. Falwell admitted that "we count among us Fundamentalists, Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews, Mormons, and *persons of no particular religious convictions at all who believe in the moral principles we espouse.*"⁵

A Change in the Rules

The rules by which fundamentalists used to play the game had changed. For a long time fundamentalists had built their identity around "separation," separation from the world and separation from those who didn't separate. Billy Graham was one of the first to breach the self-erected wall dividing fundamentalists and everyone else; he was often condemned for turning his crusades into an ecumenical retreat. Falwell jumped the wall and was declared by Bob Jones to be "the most dangerous man in America"⁶ for forming coalitions with unbelievers, papists (Roman Catholics), and cultists (Mormons). With a *moral* rather than a *biblical* common denominator, the Moral Majority sounded like every other advocate group touting moral virtues without a base.

The Virtuecrats

William Bennett, former Secretary of Education and the nation's leading "virtuecrat,"⁷ has been calling "for a new approach to moral education, one that gives kids a grounding in ... 'those values all Americans share.'"⁸ If there is still a consensus morality, one has to ask where this consensus originated. Bennett is a prime example of not defining the true origin of virtue.

Bennett, though frank and provocative, has a keen sense of marketing and showmanship. While he upholds the value of religious faith, he distinguishes himself from TV evangelists and reaches a larger

audience by keeping his discussion of virtues accessible even to secular readers and listeners.⁹

Bob Dole promises to revive "old values," and Bill Clinton promises to "protect our values." Clinton's former presidential advisor, Dick Morris, while entangled in a sex scandal, "managed the obligatory nod to virtue. His parting statement embraced Clinton's vision of an America of 'opportunity and' — yes — 'responsibility.'"¹⁰

Virtue for Virtue's Sake?

Don't get me wrong. Virtue is a good thing. Morality, even if it doesn't have a discernable foundation, is not all bad. Over time, however, "virtue" and "morality" can be made to mean anything. Homosexuals, for example, want to get in on the family-values bandwagon. They are adopting children. Singer Susan Ethridge and her lesbian "companion" (the former wife of actor Lou Diamond Phillips) are having a baby. Susan was artificially inseminated by a male homosexual friend. As of this writing, more than 450 U.S. corporations recognize "domestic partnerships."¹¹ Welcome to the world of family values homosexual style. Once Hawaii's Supreme Court rules favorably on homosexual marriages, conservatives will no longer be able to talk about "family values."

With theological considerations gone, the Moral Majority was no longer biblically specific in its message. Robert E. Webber makes this observation: "Thus, what the Moral Majority espouses is a morality based on civil religion, not on the unique revelation of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ."¹² As the Moral Majority broadened its tent to include moral compatriots, the specifics of the Christian worldview were left outside the tent. The same is becoming true of the Christian Coalition.

The Christian Coalition

Ralph Reed and the Christian Coalition are heading down the same path as Jerry Fal-

well and the Moral Majority. Both groups reject biblical law. Over time the Christian Coalition will find it difficult in developing a biblical world and life view because their critics will force them to be consistent with the *whole* Bible. Reed's latest book, *Active Faith*, is a good place to start in demonstrating this critical point.¹³ After spending several pages criticizing evangelical conservatives who bash Clinton on a regular basis, Reed writes: "Some of the harshest criticisms of Clinton have come from the 'Christian nation' or Reconstructionist community, which argues that the purpose of Christian political involvement should be to legislate biblical law."¹⁴ This is a gross oversimplification, but I'll let it pass. In 1992 Pat Robertson wrote the following:

We must earnestly seek moral and spiritual revival so that mankind will live in peace in accord with God's law. The world's ethical standards must keep pace with its technological advances. We should also try to establish a Society of Democratic nations to guarantee the rule of law and order, free trade, proper stewardship of the environment and the sanctity of human rights.¹⁵

Pat Robertson is working to ensure that mankind will live "in accord with God's law." Further, he wants to set up a governmental agency to enforce "the rule of law and order." The thing Reed falsely condemns in the Reconstructionist community, Pat Robertson is pushing on an international scale! What law? He tells us that it's the "law of God." Whose God? Allah? Zeus? Jehovah? We're never told. It can't be biblical law since Reed condemns using "the ancient Jewish law laid out in the Old Testament."¹⁶

On page 261 of *Active Faith* Reed condemns Reconstructionists for wanting to "legislate biblical law." On page 263 he approves of John the Baptist's warning to

Herod "that it was wrong for him to have his brother's wife." John's appeal was to "biblical law." Again, Reed approves of using Old Testament law, "the ancient Jewish law laid out in the Old Testament," when it comes to bearing false witness and committing adultery.¹⁷ He goes on to write that "old-fashioned values still have relevance today. As [Ted] Koppel observed, they are the Ten Commandments, not the Ten Suggestions. God's standards still apply against murder, stealing, lying, adultery, coveting the possessions of others, and homosexuality."¹⁸ Reed continues his intellectual and theological schizophrenia when he writes,

The Christian view of homosexual practices derives from a belief in the moral principles of human sexuality found in the Bible. From descriptions in the Book of Genesis of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the injunctions against sexual misconduct in Leviticus to the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, in both the Old and the New Testament, the Bible makes it clear that homosexuality is a deviation from normative sexual conduct and God's laws [T]he totality of Scripture is clear in treating homosexuality in the same terms as adultery, incest, and other forms of sexual temptation that deviate from God's plan of heterosexual conduct within the institution of a monogamous marriage.¹⁹

Reed equates homosexuality and incest and then goes on to write that "Gays should be afforded the same protections that other citizens enjoy: to register to vote, turn out at the polls, run for office, and affect the public policy process."²⁰ Really. Let's substitute "those who commit incest" with "gay" and see what we get: "*Those who commit incest* should be afforded the same protections that other citizens enjoy: to register to vote, turn out at the polls, run for office, and affect the

public policy process." Like Falwell and the Moral Majority, Reed and the Christian Coalition are schizophrenic. What they give with one hand (God's law), they take away with the other hand (traditional moral values).

Reed takes the biblical *prohibitions* against homosexuality but does not want to have anything to do with the biblical *sanctions*. The Bible not only condemns homosexual practices, but it calls for the death penalty for anyone who is caught, tried, and convicted of such practices. You cannot have one without the other. Instead, we find Reed calling for equal participation with homosexuals in the political process. Homosexuality should not be tolerated. Those members of Congress who are admitted homosexuals should be censured and driven from office.

Conclusion

At least Jerry Falwell shut down the Moral Majority in 1989 when he realized that he could not take the organization any farther using the schizophrenia paradigm. Reed should get out while he can or refocus the Christian Coalition. Organizations like the Christian Coalition should stick to educating Christians and preparing them for biblical-world-and-life-view Christianity. They should not serve as political action committees. Such an approach will ensure that society will change because people are first changed.

Notes

1. *Time* (October 1, 1979), 62.
2. Jerry Falwell, "Moral Majority Opposes Christian Republic," *Moral Majority Report* I:13 (October 15, 1980), 4.
3. Tim LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1980), 187.
4. Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman, *Holy Terror: The Fundamentalist War on America's Freedoms in Religion, Politics and Our Private Lives*

(Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1982), 168.

5. Jerry Falwell, "Moral Majority: A Response to Attack on Basic Values of Millions of Americans," *Conservative Digest* 7:1 (January, 1981), 28. Quoted in Robert E. Webber, *The Moral Majority: Right or Wrong?* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1981), 39. Emphasis added by Webber.

6. Quoted in Nancy T. Ammerman, "North American Protestant Fundamentalism," *Fundamentalisms Observed*, eds. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

7. Howard Fineman, "The Virtuecrats," *Newsweek* (June 13, 1994), 33.

8. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* (November 28, 1986), 49A.

9. Dan Goodgame, "The Chairman of Virtue Inc.," *Time* (September 16, 1996), 46-49.

10. Robert Wright, "The False Politics of Values," *Time* (September 9, 1996), 42.

11. Margaret Carlson, "The Marrying Kind," *Time* (September 16, 1996), 26.

12. Webber, *Moral Majority*, 39.

13. Ralph Reed, *Active Faith: How Christians are Changing the Soul of American Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

14. Reed, *Active Faith*, 261. Reed writes that Reconstructionists "believe that the primary objective of Christian activism should be to perfect society so that it is ready when Christ returns for His millennial reign" (261-62). This is nonsense. It seems that Reed, a Ph.D., has not done his homework. For anyone who wants the scoop on this question, I suggest that you read Gary DeMar and Gary North, *Christian Reconstruction: What It Is, What It Isn't* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), 96-99.

15. Pat Robertson, *Time* (Fall 1992), 75.

16. Reed, *Active Faith*, 261.

17. Reed, *Active Faith*, 263.

18. Reed, *Active Faith*, 263.

19. Reed, *Active Faith*, 264-65.

20. Reed, *Active Faith*, 266.