

The Public Eye

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Christian Reconstructionism

Religious Right Extremism Gains Influence—Part Two

Part One of this article (The Public Eye, March, 1994) introduced readers to Christian Reconstructionism, a little-known theological movement that advocates rule by Biblical law rather than by secular legal guides such as The Constitution. For these religious right extremists, the purpose of instituting rule by the laws of the Old Testament is to reconstruct society towards the Kingdom of God on Earth. Contemporary matters are, under Reconstructionist thought, examined according to a Biblical worldview and Biblical Principles. Part One reviewed the origins of Reconstructionist thought, the movement's founders and current leaders, and its major institutions. In Part Two, I examine the relationship between Christian Reconstructionism and other sectors of the right wing, and explore the influence of Reconstructionism within the Christian Right. The purpose of this discussion is to review Reconstructionism's political affiliations, successes, and significance.

NO LONGER WITHOUT SHEEP

Reconstructionism has been of interest to few outside the evangelical community until recently, as its political significance has begun to emerge. At the same time that the Coalition on Revival (COR) provided a catalyst (and a cover) for the discussion, dissemination, and acceptance of Reconstructionist doctrine, these ideas have percolated up through a wide swath of

American Protestantism. Nowhere, however, is Reconstructionism (sometimes known as dominionism) having a more dramatic impact than in Pente-

costal and charismatic churches. Essentially-oriented, and often theologically-amorphous, Pentecostal and charismatic traditions. Following a 1987 Reconstructionist/Pentecostal theological meeting, Joseph Morecraft exclaimed: "God is blending Presbyterian theology with Charismatic zeal into a force that cannot be stopped!"

Gary North claims that "the ideas of the reconstructionists have penetrated into Protestant circles that for the

most part are unaware of the original source of the theological ideas that are beginning to transform them." North describes the "three major legs of the Reconstructionist movement" as, "the Presbyterian oriented educators, the Baptist school headmasters and pastors, and the charismatic telecommunications system."

What this means is that hundreds of thousands of Pentecostals and charismatic Christians, as well as many fundamentalist Baptists, have moved out of the apolitical camp. Many have thrown themselves into political work—not merely as voters, but as ideologically-driven activists, bringing a reconstructed "Biblical worldview" to bear on their area of activism.

This is probably the lasting contribution of Reconstructionism. Whether it is Operation Rescue activists called to anti-abortion work because of Francis Schaeffer's books, or Pentecostals who responded to the politicizing ministry and electoral ambitions of Pat Robertson during the 1970's and 1980's, the politicization

"Nobody has the right to worship on this planet any other God than Jehovah. And therefore the state does not have the responsibility to defend anybody's pseudo-right to worship an idol."

—REV. JOSEPH MORECRAFT,

CHALCEDON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, MARIETTA, GEORGIA

costal and charismatic churches. Pentecostals, best known for speaking in tongues and practicing faith healing and prophesy—known as "gifts of the spirit"—include televangelists Jimmy Swaggart and Oral Roberts. Among well-known charismatics are Pat Robertson and Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. Historically, Pentecostals have been apolitical for the most part. However, over the past 15 years, much of Pentecostalism has begun to adopt aspects of Reconstructionist/dominion theology. This is not an accident.

Reconstructionists have sought to graft their theology onto the experi-

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of Pentecostalism is one of the major stories of modern American politics.

Indeed, Robertson has been pivotal in this process: mobilizing Pentecostals and charismatics into politics through his books, TV programs, Regent University, the 1988 Presidential campaign, and his political organizations—first The Freedom Council in the 1980s and now The Christian Coalition.

Gary North and others see opportunities for Reconstructionism to build its influence through an activist response to crises in established institutions, from the public schools to democracy itself. This “decentralist” activism is not necessarily independent or “grassroots.” Political brushfires are “a fundamental tool of resistance” observes North, “but it takes a combination of centralized strategy, and local mobilization and execution.” This is precisely what we are beginning to see clearly in the con-

temporary politics of the Christian Right. From the lawsuits brought by the Rutherford Institute and the American Center for Law and Justice to stealth takeovers of school boards, the effort is to subvert the normal functioning of society, in order to make room for the growth of theocratic evangelicalism.

North sees a special role for the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) TV satellite, as the epitome of the political effectiveness of televangelists. He appreciates CBN’s ability to magnify local battles, and communicate them to a national audience. “Without a means of publicizing a crisis” writes North, “few pastors would take a stand.” Thus North sees CBN as a key component in increasing the impact of decentralized “brush-fire wars” in which the battles over abortion, pornography, zoning for Christian schools, etc., happen in many places at once to strain the system.

RECONSTRUCTIONISM AND THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT

Reconstructionism has played an important role in shaping the contemporary Christian Right, as indicated by the number of Christian Right leaders involved in COR. Reconstructionism’s influence is also pronounced in another major hub of the Christian Right: the multifaceted organization of Pat Robertson. Although it denies a Reconstructionist orientation, the Robertson organization is doing exactly what Gary North describes. Robertson’s Christian Coalition, for instance, follows a clearly decentralist political plan, directed and encouraged by highly centralized media, educational and political units.

The Christian Coalition, forged from Robertson’s mailing lists and his 1988 Presidential campaign, has in four years become the largest and most politically significant formation within the religious Right. Its comprehensive, locally-focused efforts to take over the Republican party “from the bottom up” and to run “stealth candidates” for local offices have been widely reported and discussed.

Robertson himself seems to lack the long-term vision of Reconstructionist thinkers, but he is clearly driven by a short-term militant “dominion” mandate—the mandate that Christians “Christianize” the country’s social and political institutions. He offers a fevered vision of power and “spiritual warfare,” perhaps even physical conflict with the forces of Satan in the near future. “The world is going to be ours” he once confided, “but not without a battle, (not) without bloodshed.” At a recent Christian Coalition national strategy conference, Robertson railed against “Satanic forces,” declaring: “We are not coming up against just human beings to beat them in elections. We’re going to be coming up against spiritual warfare. And if we’re not aware of what we’re fighting, we will lose.” No longer the exclusive revolutionary vision of Christian Reconstructionist extremists, dominionism now has

The Jewish Reconstructionist Movement

There is also a Reconstructionist movement in Judaism, not to be confused with Christian Reconstructionism. The two could hardly be farther apart! Reconstructionist Jews see Judaism as the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people, comprising its culture, arts, language, symbols, texts, and practices. The religious aspect of this civilization is understood not as rooted in divine revelation, but as the people’s collectively developed expression of a vision of what is ultimately meaningful, its highest values and most cherished inherited wisdom. God is thought of as the Process that (or the One who) makes for salvation, working through the world and people rather than upon them.

The project now facing Jews, in this view, is to “reconstruct” a Judaism for the present era that will advance the lasting values of individual fulfillment, treating all people as the reflection of the divine image, and pursuing social justice and peace among all the world’s communities. That will, by the attraction of its own intrinsic worth, also sustain the Jewish people.*

—Hayyim Feldman

* Based on *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach*, by Rebecca Alpert and Jacob Staub. New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1985, with apologies for the mangling, which is my own. —H.F.

achieved virtual hegemony over many forms of Christian fundamentalism. Historian Garry Wills sees dominionist doctrine not only in those "thorough and consistent dominionists, the followers of Rousas John Rushdoony, who are called Christian Reconstructionists," but also clearly present in Pat Robertson's book, *The Secret Kingdom*.

Robertson works not only dominionism, but Old Testament Biblical law into his books. In *The New World Order* Robertson writes that "there is no way that government can operate successfully unless led by godly men and women operating under the laws of the God of Jacob." Impatient with Robertson's public equivocations, Reconstructionist author Gary DeMar describes Robertson as an "operational Reconstructionist."

Reconstructionist influences are also evident at Robertson's Regent University. For example, the long-time Dean of the Law School, Herb Titus, though not himself a Reconstructionist, has used Rushdoony's book in his introductory Law course. Texts by North and Rushdoony have been used for years in the School of Public Policy, where Reconstructionist Joseph Kickasola teaches. The library has extensive holdings of Reconstructionist literature and tapes.

Regent University board chair Dee Jepson is a longtime COR Steering Committee member. She was an active advocate for the school's change of name from Christian Broadcast Network (CBN) University to Regent University, arguing that "Regent" better reflected its mission. Robertson explained that a "regent" is one who governs in the absence of a sovereign. And that Regent U. trains students to rule, until Jesus, the absent sovereign, returns. Robertson says Regent U. is "a kingdom institution" for grooming "God's representatives on the face of the earth."

Dee Jepson, in addition to her membership on the COR Steering Committee, is married to former Sen. Roger Jepson (R-Iowa), who signed a fundraising letter for Rushdoony's Chalcedon Foundation in 1982.

THE CONSPIRACY FACTOR

One aspect of Reconstructionism's appeal to the Christian Right is that it provides a unifying framework for conspiracy theories. Gary North explains that: "There is one conspiracy, Satan's, and ultimately it must fail. Satan's supernatural conspiracy is *the* conspiracy; all other visible conspiracies are merely outworkings of this supernatural conspiracy." Pat Robertson makes a similar argument in his book *The New World Order*, which all new members of Robertson's Christian Coalition receive.

R. J. Rushdoony states that: "The view of history as conspiracy...is a basic aspect of the perspective of orthodox Christianity." A conspiratorial view of history is a consistent ingredient of Christian Right ideology in the United States, and is often used to explain the failure of conservative Christian denominations with millennial ambitions to achieve or sustain political power. The blame for this is most often assigned to the Masons, particularly an 18th century Masonic group called the Illuminati, and ultimately, to Satan.

Panicked Congregationalist clergy, faced with disestablishment of state churches (and thus their political power) in the 18th and 19th centuries, fanned the flames of anti-Masonic hatred with conspiracy theories. To this day, Pat Robertson claims Masonic conspiracies are out to destroy Christianity and thwart Christian rule. Throughout *The New World Order* Robertson refers to freemasonry as a Satanic conspiracy, along with the New Age movement. The distortion of reality that can follow from such views is well-represented by Robertson's assertion that former Presidents Woodrow Wilson, Jimmy Carter, and George Bush are unwitting agents of Satan because they supported international groups of nations such as the United Nations.

Another example of Christian Right conspiracy theory is the writing of Dr. Stanley Montieth, a California activist who is a member of the Chris-

tian Coalition and the Coalition on Revival. He is a leading anti-gay spokesperson for the Christian Right. In his book, *AIDS, The Unnecessary Epidemic: America Under Siege*, Montieth argues that AIDS is the result of a conspiracy of gays, humanists and other "sinister forces which work behind the scenes attempting to destroy our society."

Montieth's book is published by a self-described Reconstructionist Dalmar D. Dennis (who is also a member of the National Council of the John Birch Society). Montieth's actions underscore his words. At a recent conference of the anti-abortion group Human Life International he helped staff a literature table stocked with crude anti-Semitic books as well as books claiming to expose the Masonic conspiracy.

THE WRATH OF MORECRAFT

If the Christian Right ever came to power, it's anyone's guess what would actually occur. But it may be instructive to examine what has happened as theocratically-informed factions advance locally. In Cobb County, Georgia, for example, where the powerful County Commission is controlled by the Christian Right, homosexuality has been banned, arts funding cut off, and abortion services through the county public employee health plan banned. This series of steps by the Cobb County Commission made national news in the summer of 1993.

Rev. Joseph Morecraft, whose politically-active Reconstructionist Chalcedon Presbyterian Church is located in Marietta, Georgia, the Cobb County seat, provided a Reconstructionist view of these events. Asked at the time where he saw Biblical law advancing, he cited "the county where I live," where "they passed a law...that homosexuals are not welcome in that county, because homosexuality was against the community standards. The next week" he continued, "they voted on whether or not they should use tax money of the county to support art—immoral, pornographic art, so they make the an-

nouncement, not only are we not going to use tax monies in this county to sponsor pornographic art, we're not going to use tax money to sponsor any art, because that's not the role of civil government. And last week" he concluded, "that no tax money in Cobb County will be spent on abortions."

Such views pale before Morecraft's deeper views of life and government. In his book, and especially when speaking at the 1993 Biblical World View and Christian Education Conference, Morecraft discussed with relish the police power of the state. His belief in the persecution of non-believers and those who are insufficiently orthodox is crystal clear.

Morecraft described democracy as "mob rule," and stated that the purpose of "civil government" is to "terrorize evil doers...to be an avenger!" he shouted, "To bring down the wrath of God to bear on all those who practice evil!"

"And how do you terrorize an evil doer?" he asked. "You enforce Biblical law!" The purpose of government, he said, is "to protect the church of Jesus Christ," and, "Nobody has the right to worship on this planet any other God than Jehovah. And therefore the state does not have the responsibility to defend anybody's pseudo-right to worship an idol!"

"There ain't no such thing," as religious pluralism, he declared. Further, "There has never been such a condition in the history of mankind. There is no such place now. There never will be."

TRANSCENDENT ACTS

Meanwhile, perhaps the chief accomplishment of the Reconstructionist movement has been the forging of an ideological pole (and an accompanying political strategy) in American politics, a pole by which the Christian Right will continue to measure itself. Some embrace it completely; others reject it. As recently as a few years ago most evangelicals viewed Reconstructionists as a band of theological misfits without a following. All that has changed, along with

the numbers and character of the Christian Right. The world of evangelicalism and, arguably, American politics generally, will not be the same.

Among those Reconstructionists who have already moved into positions of significant power and influence are two directors of R.J. Rushdoony's Chalcedon Foundation; philanthropist Howard Ahmanson and political consultant Wayne C. Johnson epitomize the current political strategy of the new Christian Right.

Heir to a large fortune, Howard Ahmanson is an important California power broker who has said, "My purpose is total integration of Biblical law into our lives." He bankrolls Christian Right groups and political campaigns, largely through an unincorporated entity called the Fieldstead Company which has, for example, been a major contributor to Paul Weyrich's Free Congress Foundation. Fieldstead has also co-published, with Crossway Books, a series of Reconstructionist-oriented books called *Turning Point: Christian Worldview Series*, which are widely available in Christian bookstores.

Ahmanson and his wife have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars supporting California political candidates, as well as supporting the 1993 California school voucher initiative and the 1992 voucher initiative in Colorado. He has also teamed up with a small group of conservative businessmen, notably Rob Hurtt of Container Supply Corporation, to form a series of political action committees. The direct donations from these PACs and the personal contributions of Ahmanson and Hurtt, coupled with those of other PACs to which the group substantially contributed, amounted to nearly three million to 19 right-wing candidates for the California State Senate and various other conservative causes in 1992. A dozen candidates backed by the Christian Right won. Ahmanson himself is a member of the GOP state central committee, along with many other Christian Rightists, who have gained power by systematically taking over California GOP county committees.

A political operative named Wayne Johnson, who had been an architect of California's 1990 term limits initiative, managed the campaigns of several Ahmanson-backed candidates in 1992. The practical impact of term limits is to remove the advantage of incumbency (both Democrat and Republican) which the extreme Christian Right is prepared to exploit, having created a disciplined voting bloc and the resources to finance candidates.

At a Reconstructionist conference in 1983, Johnson outlined an early version of the strategy we see operating in California today. According to Johnson, the principal factor in determining victory in California state legislative races is incumbency, by a factor of 35-1. The legislature at the time was dominated by Democrats (and Republicans unacceptable to conservatives). The key for the Christian Right was to be able to: 1) remove or minimize the advantage of incumbency, and 2) create a disciplined voting bloc from which to run candidates in Republican primaries, where voter turnout was low and scarce resources could be put to maximum effect. In the past few years, Christian Rightists have been able to do both. Thanks to Ahmanson, Hurtt and others, they also now have the financing to be competitive.

Since the mid-1970's, the extreme Christian Right, under the tutelage of then-State Senator H.L. Richardson, targeted open seats and would finance only challengers, not incumbents. By 1983, they were able to increase the number of what Johnson called "reasonably decent guys" in the legislature from four to twenty-seven. At the Third Annual Northwest Conference for Reconstruction in 1983, Johnson stated that he believed they may achieve "political hegemony...in this generation." In 1994, they are not far from that goal. Rob Hurtt won a 1993 open seat by-election for State Senate. Now State Sen. Hurtt is also the chairman of the Republican campaign committee for the State Legislature, an important power brokering role for a freshman State Senator. The GOP, led by con-

servative Christians, is only four seats away from majority control.

A WHOLE GENERATION OF GARY NORTHS

Still, it is in the next generation that most Reconstructionists hope to seize the future. "All long term social change" declares Gary North, "comes from the successful efforts of one or another struggling organizations to capture the minds of a hard core of future leaders, as well as the respect of a wider population." The key to this, they believe, lies with the Christian school, and the home schooling movement, both deeply influenced by Reconstructionism.

Unsurprisingly, Reconstructionists seek to abolish public schools, which they see as a critical component in the promotion of a secular world view. It is this secular world view with which they declare themselves to be at war. "Until the vast majority of Christians pull their children out of the public schools" writes Gary North, "there will be no possibility of creating a theocratic republic."

Among the top Reconstructionists in education politics is Robert Thoburn of Fairfax Christian School in Fairfax, Virginia. Thoburn advocates that Christians run for school board, while keeping their own children out of public schools. "Your goal" (once on the board), he declares, "must be to sink the ship." While not every conservative Christian who runs for school board shares this goal, those who do will, as Thoburn advises, probably keep it to themselves. Thoburn's book, *The Children Trap*, is a widely-used sourcebook for Christian Right attacks on public education.

Joseph Morecraft, who also runs a school, said in 1987: "I believe the children in the Christian schools of America are the Army that is going to take the future. Right now...the Christian Reconstruction movement is made up of a few preachers, teachers, writers, scholars, publishing houses, editors of magazines, and it's growing quickly. But I expect a massive acceleration of this movement in

about 25 or 30 years, when those kids that are now in Christian schools have graduated and taken their places in American society, and moved into places of influence and power."

Similarly, the Christian "home schooling" movement is part of the long-term revolutionary strategy of Reconstructionism. One of the principal home schooling curriculums is provided by Reconstructionist Paul Lindstrom of Christian Liberty Academy (CLA) in Arlington Heights, Illinois. CLA claims that it serves about 20,000 families. Its current curriculum includes a book on "Biblical Economics" by Gary North. Home schooling advocate Christopher Klicka, who has been deeply influenced by R.J. Rushdoony, writes: "Sending our children to the public school violates nearly every Biblical principle...It is tantamount to sending our children to be trained by the enemy." He claims that the public schools are Satan's choice.

Klicka also advocates religious self-segregation and advises Christians not to affiliate with non-Christian home schoolers in any way. "The differences I am talking about" declares Klicka, "have resulted in wars and martyrdom in the not too distant past." According to Klicka, who is an attorney with the Home School Legal Defense Association, "as an organization, and as individuals, we are committed to promote the cause of Christ and His Kingdom."

Estimates of the number of home schooling families vary enormously. Conservatively, there are certainly over 100,000. Klicka estimates that 85-90 percent of home schoolers are doing so "based on their religious convictions." "In effect," he concludes, "these families are operating religious schools in their homes." A fringe movement no longer, Christian home-schoolers are now being actively recruited by the arch-conservative Hillsdale College.

A COVERT KINGDOM

Much has been made of the "stealth tactics" currently practiced by the Christian Right.

Whereas the Moral Majority, led by Jerry Falwell, was overt about its Christian agenda, many contemporary Christian Rightists have lowered their religious profile or gone under cover. In fact these tactics have been refined for years by the Reconstructionist movement, as Robert Thoburn's education strategy suggests. Gary North proposed stealth tactics more than a decade ago in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* (1981) urging "infiltration" of government to help "smooth the transition to Christian political leadership...Christians must begin to organize politically within the present party structure, and they must begin to infiltrate the existing institutional order."

Similar stealth tactics have epitomized the recent resurgence of the Christian Right, as groups like Citizens for Excellence in Education, and the Christian Coalition have quietly backed candidates who generally avoided running as overtly "Christian" candidates. The Christian Coalition actually proposed something similar to Gary North's notion of "infiltration" when its 1992 "County Action Plan" for Pennsylvania advised that "You should never mention the name Christian Coalition in Republican circles." The goal, apparently, is to facilitate becoming "directly involved in the local Republican Central Committee so that you are an insider." "This way" continues the manual, "you can get a copy of the local committee rules and a feel for who is in the current Republican Committee." The next step is to recruit conservative Christians to occupy vacant party posts or to run against moderates who "put the Republican Party ahead of principle."

Antonio Rivera, a New York Christian Coalition political advisor, suggested similar ideas at a 1992 Christian Coalition meeting. While urging that Coalition members seek to place themselves in influential positions, he advised that "You keep your personal views to yourself until the Christian community is ready to rise up, and then wow! They're gonna be devastated!"

Central to the Christian Right's strategy is to exploit the national pattern of low voter participation by turning out their constituents in a strategically disciplined fashion and in greater proportion than the rest of the population. An important vehicle for achieving this goal is the ideology of Christian Reconstructionism or its stripped-down root, dominionism, which at once deepens the political motivation of their constituency and widens that constituency by systematically mobilizing a network of churches. Many of these churches were politically uninvolved until recently.

Much has been written about the success of Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition in accomplishing these

goals. But it could be argued that the Christian Coalition would not have been possible without Reconstructionism, and that Operation Rescue would not have been possible without the Reconstructionist-influenced Francis Schaeffer. Twenty years ago, Pat Robertson was an apolitical charismatic televangelist, and Randall Terry a would-be rock & roll star.

CONCLUSION

Christian Reconstructionism's ultimate moment may or may not arrive. However, it has already had tremendous influence as the catalyst for an historic shift in American religion and politics. Christian colleges, bookstores, and magazine racks are full of

Reconstructionist material. The proliferation of this material and influence is likely to continue. Christian Reconstructionism is largely an underground, underestimated movement of ideas, the rippling surface of which is the political movement known today as the Christian Right.

—Frederick Clarkson

Frederick Clarkson is a free-lance journalist and researcher who has written extensively on the religious Right. He has recently been appointed as coordinator for publications at Planned Parenthood Federation of America's Public Policy Institute.

(Write or call for footnotes for this article.)

BOOKS RECEIVED

A Selected, Annotated List

Mueller, Marnie

Green Fires: Assault on Eden

Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1994
318 pages. \$19.95

Though novels are not usually listed in *The Public Eye's* Books Received section, we make an exception in this case. Marnie Mueller has written a gripping, page-turning account of a young woman who returns to Ecuador to revisit the site of her traumatic Peace Corps assignment. She and her new husband venture into the rainforest in search of birds, and find instead a genocidal program against the indigenous people, with U.S. involvement. Mueller's political sensibility is clear-headed but she is not afraid to explore the complexity of real-life situations and the ambivalence they can create.

Himmelfarb, Gertrude

On Looking Into The Abyss: Untimely Thoughts on Culture and Society

New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.
161 pages, with footnotes and index. \$23.00.

Gertrude Himmelfarb is Emeritus Professor of History in the CUNY Graduate School. A cross between Alan Bloom and Jeanne Kirkpatrick, she is a neo-conservative academic traditionalist embittered over recent changes in the canon. This

collection of recent lectures and essays makes interesting and thought-provoking points, but they are delivered with hostility, pretentiousness, and snide disdain of anyone who questions tradition. What could have been a valuable contribution to the debate over literary criticism, historiography and the curriculum is instead a drumbeat of attacks on liberalism.

Kane, Robert

Through the Moral Maze: Searching for Absolute Values in a Pluralistic World

New York, Paragon House, 1994.
210 pages with footnotes, bibliography, and index. \$27.95

Robert Kane, a professor of philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin has made a noble attempt to sort out political conflicts by applying the discourse of social ethics. This promising exercise is a good reminder that dogmatic clinging to political or moral positions does not move one past conflicts, but Kane offers a watery liberalism that eases tensions by failing to take clear stands. His musings on a better world do not acknowledge the power of forces of injustice and oppression, or the need for a philosophy of morality that starkly opposes it.

Delgado, Gary

Beyond the Politics of Place: New Directions in Community Organizing in the 1990's

Oakland, Applied Research Center, 1994, 85 pp., plus Appendix and footnotes.

Funded by the Ford Foundation, Delgado's study presents a brief history of the evolution of community organizing, its successes and failures and the different models used as a background to the situation facing community organizing in the 1990's. Although too summarial to be generally useful to experienced activists, it would be very useful to introduce new activists and organizers and potential funders to critical concepts. Experienced organizers would also find its lists of training and support organizations nationwide helpful. Regardless of who is reading it, *Beyond the Politics of Place* should be commended for its stress on the importance of race and gender issues in community organizing, the importance of an infrastructure for such a movement and the situation which community organizing faces in the 1990's. It is in stressing the linkage between these larger issues and the local issues often addressed by community organizations that Delgado is at his best.

RUTHERFORD INSTITUTE CONTINUES SCHOOL CAMPAIGN

The Rutherford Institute continues an aggressive campaign to threaten and pursue litigation in public schools where parents contend their children are being discriminated against on the basis of religious beliefs. The Institute is circulating a 50-page pocket-sized pamphlet titled *Your Rights in the Public Schools*, by Rutherford director John W. Whitehead. The text is supported with over 247 footnotes which gives the impression that the legal advice represents the current state of case law in the U.S. In fact, according to the ACLU, the opinions of Whitehead represent an idiosyncratic view of the law that is not widely shared in the legal community. The Rutherford strategy appears to be a form of intellectual sleight-of-hand coupled with intimidation through threat of litigation to manipulate local school



boards into caving in on church-state separation issues. Without outside legal assistance, most school boards have neither the time nor money to counter the clever legal arguments put forward by Rutherford, and compromising on principles may often seem the lesser of two evils. Rutherford also offers 100 copies per month of their *Religious Liberty Bulletin* for three months as a trial offer to local churches who will distribute them to parishoners.

ROBERTSON-BACKED CANDIDATES LOSE IN HIS BACKYARD

All five candidates backed by Pat Robertson and the Christian Coalition lost a hotly-contested local school board election in Robertson's home base of Virginia Beach, VA. The evangelical Kids First slate lost to a slate endorsed by the teachers' union, the Virginia Beach Education Association. The leader

of the losing slate, Edward G. Kreyling, Jr. told the *New York Times* "The rumor was that we were a right-wing takeover... Christians are being persecuted. Calling someone a religious person in politics these days is not a compliment." A spokesperson for Robertson told the *Times* that attacks on the evangelical slate had been a campaign strategy that's bigoted, and wrong."

The attempt by right-wing evangelicals to portray themselves as beleaguered victims of discrimination is part of a national strategy designed to blunt criticism by falsely suggesting that any criticism of the effects of their political agenda is an attack on their right to free exercise of religion. The tactic also blurs the fact that right-wing evangelicals do not represent the entirety of those religiously devout, which spans the political spectrum; and inaccurately implies that their specific theological viewpoint is the only view accurately described as religious or Christian.

The Public Eye

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Eye Lashes

THE RIGHT LOOKS AT THE WORLD

"The Anti-Abortion Movement Stands Erect Before the Nation"

Headline from an unintentionally priapic flyer from the intentionally theocratic American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property.

PRA LOOKS AT THE RIGHT

Theocracy makes mockery of democracy.

God's spokesmen coincidentally a patriarch-racy.

How convenient this view retains privilege for the few.

Divine ordination's male autocracy.

THE PUBLIC EYE Resources

The most concise introductory pamphlet on the Religious Right currently available is *The Political Activity of the Religious Right in the 1990's: A Critical Analysis*, by Rabbi Lori Forman of the American Jewish Committee. Published in 1994, the pamphlet is available upon request by mail. Call one of AJC's thirty local and regional offices or write American Jewish Committee, Institute of Human Relations, 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022-2746, or call 212 751-4000.

Catholics for Free Choice has published *A New Rite: Conservative Catholic Organizations and Their Allies*. Researched and written by veteran investigative reporter Steve Askin, the 91-page guide provides detailed descriptions of the major organizations. A cross-referenced list of key individuals mentioned in the organizational section is also included. To order call (202) 986-6093.

Massachusetts may seem an unlikely venue but growing grassroots activism by religious right groups has prompted two spiral-bound handbooks published in 1994 for persons fighting for democracy, pluralism and separation of church and state.

■ *Meeting the Challenge of the Religious Right in Massachusetts: A Handbook for Citizens Who Care* is available from the Lighthouse Institute for Public Policy, P.O. Box 5039, Cochituate, MA 01778. Each handbook is \$25.00 plus \$3.50 shipping and handling.

■ *The PURPOSE Massachusetts Advocacy Kit* PURPOSE stands for Parents (and others) United for Responsible Policies on Sexuality Education. The handbook costs \$34.50 by mail and is available from the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts, 99 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge, MA 02139.

■ The Rutherford Institute, Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, Concerned Women for America,

American Family Association, and Unification Church have all been active in organizing, litigation, training sessions, and media outreach in the Bay State, providing a case study of how a state is targetted. An overview analysis of the situation by PRA associate (and former PRA director) Jean Hardisty appears in a recent issue of the *Resist* newsletter. For a free copy of the May/June 1994 issue (Vol.3 No. 5), please write Resist, One Summer Street, Somerville, MA 02143.

When studying the Christian Reconstructionist movement Sara Diamond's *Spiritual Warfare* and George Marsden's *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* have been mentioned here before, but don't overlook the historical background provided by Leo P. Ribuffo's *The Old Christian Right* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).

The Public Eye

NEWSLETTER

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