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## *Theocracy Alert*

### Crusader for a Christian nation

**Bill Berkowitz**

Online Journal Guest Writer

April 29, 2005 ([WorkingForChange](#))—In all the hullabaloo raised by the coverage of the Terri Schiavo case and the cable news network's fixation on the so-called miracle of Ashley Smith—the Atlanta woman freed by her kidnapper, after he murdered four people and subsequent to her reading passages from Rick Warren's best selling Christian self-help book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, to him—few are talking about the elephant in the room: the Christian right's vision of transforming America into a Christian nation.

From supporting the embattled Alabama Judge Roy Moore's right to display a 5,000-plus pound monument to the ten commandments at the state courthouse to collecting signatures on petitions to keep Terri Schiavo alive, and from campaigning for a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage to advocating the teaching of creationism in the public schools, Dr. D. James Kennedy, the senior minister of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida's Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church and the president of Coral Ridge Ministries (CRM), is making his voice heard loud and often these days.

Beneath the radar of the mainstream media, Dr. Kennedy has spent the past three decades building a ministerial and media empire that now packs a powerful political punch in Washington.

Dr. Kennedy's media empire reaches millions around the globe: *Truths That Transform* was named "Best Radio Teaching Program" for 2004 by the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB); and *The Coral Ridge Hour* was named the NRB's 2003 "Television Program of the Year." In addition, Dr. Kennedy comments on hot-button issues during *The Kennedy Commentary*, a 90-second daily radio feature produced by his ministry.

In early February, Dr. Kennedy's Coral Ridge Ministries held its 10th annual political training session, the Reclaiming America For Christ conference, an event sponsored by the ministries' Center for Reclaiming America. Speakers at the two-day conference included some of the most prominent figures on the Christian right: Christian historian David Barton, the head of WallBuilders; columnist David Limbaugh, author the bestselling book *Persecution: How Liberals Are Waging War Against Christianity*; Dr. Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission; Dr. Wanda Franz, president of the National Right to Life Committee; Tim Wildmon, president of the American Family Association; Alan Sears, president of the Alliance Defense Fund; Dr. Daniel Dreisbach, author of *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation Between Church and State*; and Dr. Rick Scarborough, president of Vision America.

"Their mission is not simply to save souls," the Christian Science Monitor reported. "The goal is to mobilize evangelical Christians for political action to return society to what they call 'the biblical worldview of the Founding Fathers.' Some speak of 'restoring a Christian nation.' Others shy from that phrase, but agree that the Bible calls them not only to evangelize, but also to transform the culture."

In 1995, Kennedy took one of his boldest political steps by setting up the D. James Kennedy Center for Christian Statesmanship in Washington, DC. The center runs several projects, including: The Statesmanship Institute, a seven-month weekly program "for Christians in government" to give them "the tools to integrate biblical principles with your calling to public service"; a Capitol Hill Bible Studies for staff

on Capitol Hill; a monthly series of lunches called Politics & Principle which "features a modern-day Christian Statesman who shares from a personal perspective, the challenges of living out Christian faith in today's political environment"; and the Distinguished Christian Statesman Award, which "recognizes one outstanding public leader" each year.

Having mostly operated under the radar, Dr. Kennedy's activities are only now getting media attention. A recent center press release pointed out that Bill O'Reilly, the host of the Fox News Channel's *The O'Reilly Factor*, had been surprised to discover that Kennedy's 10 year-old operation existed. When O'Reilly asked Kennedy "which political leaders had been influenced by the Gospel message the center proclaims," Kennedy refused to divulge the information, saying that "There are thousands of lobbyists in Washington who are trying to get something. We're trying to give people something. We give them something that's free."

Dr. Kennedy has been deeply embedded in Christian right politics: He was a member of the first board of directors of the Rev. Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, and served on the initial executive board of the Coalition for Religious Freedom (CRF). The CRF was set up by Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church when Rev. Moon was in prison in 1984. According to Sara Diamond's book *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right*, CRF "was financed primarily by the Unification Church, which gave an initial donation of \$500,000." CRF's executive board included such religious right heavyweights as Jerry Falwell, James Robison, Rex Humbard, Jimmy Swaggart, Kennedy and Tim LaHaye, the co-author of the wildly popular "Left Behind" series of apocalyptic novels.

Kennedy, along with more than 30 Christian organizations, was a founder and funder of the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF), an organization formed to pursue "religious liberty" and "family preservation" lawsuits. In her 1996 book, *Facing the Wrath: Confronting the Right in Dangerous Times*, Sara Diamond presciently wrote that "the ADF represents a serious escalation in the Christian Right's legal action project." And that is exactly what has happened.

What distinguishes Dr. Kennedy from his more telegenic and colorful colleagues is that "He has shepherded his flock in a more orderly, and Presbyterian style into the Christian Right," Fred Clarkson told me in an e-mail interview. "For many years, Kennedy did a fundraising cruise called The Bible Boat to the Caribbean in the winter. In 1994, this was replaced with the annual Reclaiming America for Christ conference. Although he had lent his name and involvement to Christian right groups in the past, this was his first foray into forming his own political network. Extending his operations to Washington, DC, through The Center for Christian Statesmanship appears to be a logical outgrowth of this process," said Clarkson, a veteran reporter on right wing movements.

In 1967, Dr. Kennedy launched Evangelism Explosion International (EEI), a lay witness training program through which the ministry claims that 4.5 million people came to Christ last year. According to a profile of Kennedy in the Institute for First Amendment Studies' *Freedom Writer*, the program is "a sophisticated 13-week training seminar in discipleship." EEI training "is the most intense evangelism training in the world. It is used by hundreds of conservative Christian churches across the country, and has made inroads into every single country in the world."

The Evangelism Explosion is one of Kennedy's primary youth outreach and indoctrination operations, said Clarkson. "An EEI event I attended was full of loud Christian rock music as a warm up to a talk by David Barton, [the head of WallBuilders] whose talk twists American history to make kids believe that the U.S. was founded as a 'Christian nation.' Kennedy believes this too, and has sermonized on the subject. It is this false, historical revisionism that is central to the ideology of the Christian right—it's a critical part of their justification to restore an idea that never was," added Clarkson.

In a 1999 profile of Dr. Kennedy that appeared on the Web site of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Rob Boston wrote that "Kennedy's 1994 book, *Character & Destiny: A Nation In Search of Its Soul*, is riddled with attacks on the constitutional principle" of the separation of church and state. "Among other things," Boston writes, "Kennedy calls church-state separation 'diabolical,' a 'false doctrine' and 'a lie' propagated by Thomas Jefferson."

In *The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail: The Attack On Christianity And What You Need To Know To Combat It*, coauthored with Jerry Newcombe, Dr. Kennedy calls the wall of separation a "great deception [that] has been used to destroy much of the religious freedom and liberty this country has enjoyed since its inception."

Recently Dr. Kennedy's mission turned another corner: The Center for Reclaiming America's Dr. Gary Cass has unveiled four new ambitious initiatives intended to expand the impact of its work. The initiatives include the establishment of Liberty's Voice, a lobbying office in Washington; the development of a Strategic Institute, a think tank that will "add intellectual muscle" to the center's pro-family efforts; the launching the National Grassroots Alliance, an initiative to boost the center's existing grassroots network of 400,000 evangelicals up to one million; and Reclaiming America Media, an effort aimed at better communicating the Center's message.

*Bill Berkowitz is a longtime observer of the conservative movement. His [WorkingForChange](#) column Conservative Watch documents the strategies, players, institutions, victories and defeats of the American Right.*

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