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Theocracy Alert

Theocon Valley: A door in the wall of separation

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"Fascist theology in this town sees God on the side of the U.S. The U.S. government is an agent of evangelization that provides a security cover for them." —[Former Catholic Priest in Colorado Springs](#)

April 29, 2005—Colorado Springs is a military town, home to the US Air Force Academy, NORAD Headquarters, Air Force Space Command, multiple Air Force Bases, and numerous other military installations. There is, however, one additional compound being used to launch, not a military, but a cultural offensive against what evangelical extremists believe to be the deterioration of America's "traditional" values.

As one writer put it, "Colorado Springs [is] a testing ground not just for new artillery but for ideas, as if the mental frontier of America is still up for grabs."

One of the many casualties of this "war on culture" has been the US Air Force Academy, which has traveled through a door in the wall that is supposed to separate church from state . . . a door that has been installed by a group of "Theocons" called Focus on the Family.

After the Colorado-based Savings and Loan scandal erupted in the late 1980s, Colorado Springs became known as "the forfeiture capital of America." The city council and a local foundation, in an effort to boost the economy and diminished spirit, turned to and offered *Focus on the Family*—a highly influential radio-based evangelical ministry—a generous grant and land deal. A new Focus on the Family headquarters was opened in 1993, located just across the highway from the Air Force Academy.

Today, the majority of Colorado Springs' evangelical organizations, churches, and people fall under Focus on the Family's web of evangelical influence, which extends from Colorado Springs to Washington, DC, and beyond.

Focus on the Family's radio show, hosted by the organization's founder James Dobson, has about 200 million listeners in over 170 countries. In a recent survey of Protestant pastors, Dobson was voted one of the four most influential Christians in the world, placing him well ahead of former Pope John Paul II.

By urging his listeners to become politically active in the promotion of "Christian" morals, Dobson has been successful at bringing several religious issues, gay marriage, abortion, and the life of Terri Schiavo, to the political forefront. During an interview with [The Globe and Mail](#), Dobson spoke enthusiastically about the growing evangelical influence on American politics:

"Not only is there a Christian in the White House, but the top four leaders of the House of Representatives are Christians, and the top three leaders of the Senate are Christians. And because of those three branches of government, the chance of reforming the judiciary is certainly a possibility."

According to Focus on the Family's website, "Judicial tyranny, the homosexual agenda, pornography and gambling are among the front burner issues that threaten the foundation of the family;" and in addition to the *political* promotion of these values, Focus and its affiliates have also gained influence within the armed forces.

Most recently, Focus—now so large that it has its [own exit off Interstate 25 and zip code](#)—has been accused of pushing its radical agenda at the US Air Force Academy. Tom Minnery, an official from Focus on the Family who believes he has a "[Biblical Mandate to Shape Our Culture](#)," blamed the accusations on what he called, "an anti-Christian bigotry developing" at the school.

The academy leadership, which maintains close relationships with Focus, has proactively contributed to creating a religious institution out of the Air Force Academy. Over the past four years, the academy population (95 percent Christian), has issued [numerous complaints](#) that range from being called religious slurs, to hearing religious jokes, to feeling religious pressure from evangelical commandants, chaplains, and fellow cadets, to simply feeling uncomfortable with the integration of Christianity and everyday academy life.

"I don't think you separate religion from normal, everyday life," said the school's football coach at a symposium in February. "Football, academics, military training—everything—all encompasses everything. Religion is a part of life," he said.

The academy is "systematically biased against any cadet that does not overtly espouse Christianity," said one cadet.

During basic training, an academy chaplain urged cadets to warn other cadets that those who were not "born again will burn in the fires of hell." The cadets were also told that Jesus had "called" them to the academy as part of God's plan for their lives.

A [Yale University](#) report, based on first-hand observations, took notice of an academy worship service that had an "overwhelmingly evangelical tone" and "encouraged religious divisions rather than fostering spiritual understanding." An official from Yale said non-Christian cadets who feel the leadership is endorsing a certain faith are being intimidated by the call to evangelize.

Additionally, according to Yale's [report](#):

"Protestant Basic Cadets were encouraged to pray for the salvation of fellow BCT members who chose not to attend worship. . . . Cadets were encouraged to return to tents, proselytize fellow BCT members, and remind them of the consequences of apostasy."

According to Vice Commandant Col. Debra Gray, normal conversations around the campus are closing with: "If you don't believe what I believe, you are going to hell." The atmosphere has gotten so out of hand that a Jewish cadet was called a "filthy Jew" on numerous occasions, while another was told the Holocaust was revenge for the crucifixion of Jesus.

Other issues of concern include:

- The academy's born-again commandant, Brig. Gen. Johnny Weida, stated that the cadets' first responsibility is to their God.
- Commission ceremonies for graduating officers have been held at off-campus churches.
- Every December, until this past year, the academy's official newsletter praised and proclaimed Jesus as the one and only true savior.
- To motivate the players of the football team, the coach [hung a banner](#) in the locker room stating: "I am a Christian first and last. . . . I am a member of Team Jesus Christ."

- During official Air Force Academy reunions, graduates are being invited to the Focus on the Family facility. They are offered a tour that promotes James Dobson's religious/political views and encompasses a video portraying Dobson as a hero [receiving accolades](#) from such figures as Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and George W. Bush.

The people of Colorado Springs and the academy have been deeply affected by the religious presence in their community and many are speaking out against Focus on the Family's influence in their city and at the academy. A common bumper sticker in the area reads "Focus On Your OWN Damn Family."

In March, speaking out on an Internet forum for the [Free Thinkers of Colorado Springs](#), one town resident wrote:

"Why did the AFA (Air Force Academy) go way out of its way to promote "The Passion of the Christ" by placing posters all over campus and at every place setting in the dining hall? Why does the AFA have such close ties to the Focus on the Family church group? . . . When [the football coach] put up a poster saying, "I am a Christian first and last . . . I am a member of team Jesus Christ," was [he] spelling out that his loyalty to this nation and its defense comes second to his belief in and service to some religion? Seems so."

A former Air Force Officer and Vietnam Veteran of Colorado Springs expressed his concerns in a letter to the commandant, superintendent, and head football coach of the academy:

"What has transpired and continues to transpire despite lip-service to the contrary, is a true bastardization of the US Constitution and an homage to the majority religion.

The actions and words of the Commandant, Superintendent and Head Football Coach, which appear to me to advocate a total subordination to a brand of extreme Christianity, are a chilling reminder of what can happen when those, enthralled by religious dogma, begin to commingle religion and nationalism which, even according to Pope John Paul II, is a 'dangerous enterprise.'"

"At least over the last 10 years or possibly more, it looks like the academy's record in maintaining separation of church and state and honoring religious tolerance is a constitutional train wreck," said a [former graduate](#) who now has two sons at the academy. He believes Congress should get involved because "the academy leadership has failed at every level."

Beginning last month, in the face of such complaints and public controversy, the academy began a training program designed to teach religious sensitivity. Evangelicals at the school, however, especially those who have been criticized, are attempting to undermine the classes. In effect, the sessions have further polarized the academy, as Christian faculty members, cadets, and generals now believe their religious rights are being attacked.

"The problem is people have been across the line for so many years when you try and come back in bounds, people get offended," said Lt. Gen. John Rosa, who was forced to intervene when he discovered cadets using government e-mail accounts and facilities to promote the "The Passion of the Christ."

"When those things happen and the chain of command doesn't stop it, it's tacitly approved by chain of command," said Kristen Leslie who holds a doctorate in pastoral care and counseling. "For anyone to differentiate themselves is very problematic and even threatening," she told the Colorado Springs Gazette earlier this month.

Focus on the Family is part of a much larger—in their own words "invisible"—pyramid organization known simply as [The Family](#) or [The Fellowship](#). Through a loose network of government affiliations and connections, this religious organization, based in Arlington, Virginia, has established an enormous amount of influence over government decisions and policies both at the state and federal levels; and when it comes to the military, the atmosphere at the Air Force Academy is by no means an isolated

theme. Whether it is James Dobson and his fellow "Family" members of the "[Arlington Group](#)" attempting to rewrite Constitutional Law as Biblical Law, their affiliated "[Patriot Pastors](#)" openly attempting to take control of Ohio's state and local governments, a military [recruiting event](#) in Kentucky playing video of Christ's crucifixion during a salute to the armed forces, or the evangelization of military institutions such as the Air Force Academy, the Wall of Separation has been breached.

"The danger we all face is that one day an extremist like Dobson may become powerful enough to throw a monkey wrench of intolerance into the machinery of consensus building and threaten the entire system by which we confront issues like abortion and move forward as a society." —[Gil Alexander-Moegerle](#), Focus on the Family co-founder and former vice president

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