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Theocracy Alert

Deathbed dollars

By Bill Berkowitz

Online Journal Guest Writer

May 5, 2005 ([WorkingForChange](#))—During the weeks preceding Terri Schiavo's death, a number of radical Christian fundamentalist groups took full advantage of what the Traditional Values Coalition's Rev. Lou Sheldon characterized as a "blessing . . . to the conservative Christian movement in America." Established organizations like the TVC, relative newcomers like RightMarch.com, and newly minted coalitions like Voice for Terri had their websites sizzling with news of the case and extensive fundraising appeals.

Before Terri Schiavo died on Thursday, March 31, her parents apparently had agreed to sell the names and e-mail addresses of donors to their daughter's case to Response Unlimited, a right wing direct mail house. However, within 20 hours of David Kirkpatrick's March 29 *New York Times* piece exposing the arrangement, Response Unlimited withdrew Schindler's list from its catalogue.

Before removing the list from its website, the Waynesboro, Virginia-based [Response Unlimited](#), headed by Philip Zodhates, was asking \$150 a month for 6,000 names and \$500 a month for 4,000 e-mail addresses of people who responded last month to an e-mail plea from Terri Schiavo's father, the *Times* reported. Advertising the list's availability and fundraising potential on its website, the firm said: "These compassionate pro-lifers donated toward Bob Schindler's legal battle to keep Terri's estranged husband from removing the feeding tube from Terri." The selling point was that the people on the list "are passionate about the way they value human life, adamantly oppose euthanasia and are pro-life in every sense of the word!"

Response Unlimited's client list contains a number of radical right-wing personalities and organizations, including the Alliance Defense Fund, the Christian Action Network, the Christian Coalition of America, Christianity Today, Focus on the Family, the Heritage Foundation, the Jerry Falwell Ministries, Judicial Watch, the National Rifle Association, National Right to Life, the Parents Television Council, Prison Fellowship Ministries, the Republican National Committee, the Traditional Values Coalition and the Washington Times.

Now that Terri Schiavo has passed, what will happen with Schindler's list? And how will the money raised around the Schiavo case be used by Christian right organizations?

The short answer to the latter question: "Onward to the 'nuclear option.'"

Saving Terri and Savings Accounts

"Help Save Terri Schiavo's Life!" was the plea on the website of the Rev. Lou Sheldon's Anaheim, California-based Traditional Values Coalition (TVC), an anti-gay network of fundamentalist Christian churches. "What this issue [the Schiavo case] has done is it has galvanized people the way nothing could have done in an off-election year," the Rev. Sheldon, the founder of the TVC, told the *New York Times*. "That is what I see as the blessing that dear Terri's life is offering to the conservative Christian movement in America."

A coalition of anti-abortion Christian right groups—including representatives from Priests For Life, the Christian Defense Coalition, the National Clergy Council, the Pro-Life Action League, Operation Rescue, Generation Life and the Family Life Educational Foundation—formed Voice for Terri to raise money for their work around the Schiavo case. According to the *Times*, these groups sent e-mail messages and set up websites attacking Michael Schiavo, Terri's husband.

Troy Newman, a spokesperson for Voice for Terri and the president of the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue—the group founded by Randall Terry, who also resurfaced in Florida as an invited spokesperson for the Schindler family—said that the money raised was going to cover the costs of their Florida activities as well as e-mail and letter-writing campaigns.

"This is not something you make money off of," Newman told the *Times*. "It is a tragedy."

Randall Terry, writes Kirkpatrick, "asked his friends and fellow conservative activists, William Greene and Philip Sheldon—the son of Lou Sheldon of Traditional Values—to help raise money through RightMarch.com, whose organization whose slogan is "Patriotism in Action."

Greene is president of RightMarch.com PAC and Strategic Internet Campaign Management ([SICM](#)), an organization whose mission is "Helping nonprofit organizations, corporations and political candidates to achieve a better bottom line by using the Internet for fundraising and grassroots activism."

Terri's parents also set up a website, [The Terri Schindler-Schiavo Foundation](#), where they accept donations to the cause. According to the *Times*, the website, which is "the only legitimate places to contribute to her legal defense," and asks donors to bring to their attention "any other source that claims to be a fund-raising effort on [Terri's] . . . behalf."

Although officials at Response Unlimited refused comment on Schindler list issues, Gary McCullough, director of the Washington, DC-based Christian Communication Network—a "media relations service"—and a spokesman for Terri Schiavo's parents, "confirmed" that Terri's father had made the deal after the company agreed to send a fundraising e-mail solicitation on the family's behalf.

McCullough has worked with Operation Rescue and is a media advisor for Randall Terry. According to SourceWatch, a project of the Center for Media and Democracy, McCullough and Terry have been involved with the Schindler family since October 2003, when they first visited the family.

Even the "man" himself, Richard Viguerie, thought that selling the list before Schiavo's death was a bit premature. But Viguerie predicted that the controversy would blow over in good time. "I think it sounds a little unusual right now because of the situation where she is in the process of dying," Viguerie, told *The New York Times*. "If you came across this information six months or a year from now, I don't think you would give it too much thought."

In a few months, when the Terri Schiavo case has drifted into the ether now inhabited by such cultural cataclysms as the Elian Gonzalez case, those who sent money or a supportive message to the Terri Schindler-Schiavo Foundation might discover that they've made Schindler's list.

Their e-mail boxes and snail-mail boxes will be stuffed by a host of appeals from organizations pushing everything from the privatization of Social Security to school vouchers to an anti-gay-marriage amendment to the constitution.

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.