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The American Religious Right and James Dobson's “Family Values Empire”

The aim of this article is to discuss the role of such organizations as the Family Research Council and Focus on the Family, which together constitute what is sometimes called Dr. James Dobson's “family values empire.” Both of these organizations are an important part of the American Religious Right movement. While the Family Research Council has been extremely important in terms of political involvement, it would probably not have been able to gain its strength without cooperation with Focus on the Family, which in many cases served as a tool in its grassroots networking. Therefore, this paper includes an analysis of both organizations' agendas.

Introduction

“Of all the shifts and surprises in contemporary political life, perhaps none was so wholly unexpected as the political resurgence of evangelical Protestantism in the late 1970s” (Wald, Calhoun-Brown 202). According to many researchers fascinated with modernization and secularization theories, traditional religion was a “spent force” in American life and politics. And yet, by the end of the 1970s, an evangelical¹

¹ The term “evangelicalism” is very broad. Generally, it is an interdenominational revivalist movement within Protestantism, which has its roots in German pietism and Wesleyan Methodism. It became popular in America through the 18th and 19th-century Great Awakenings. Evangelicals emphasize the experience of an intense personal conversion (new-birth) received thanks to faith and God's grace, literal understanding of the Bible and missionary work. At the beginning of the 20th century, in response to new scientific discoveries including Darwin's theory, conservative evangelicals created the American Protestant fundamentalist movement, stressing biblical inerrancy and opposition to modernism. They modified the character of evangelicalism by accepting dispensationalism, a militant approach (Marsden), and later “separation” from secular world matters. Fundamentalist movement soon became divided over the issue of “separation”. Jerry Falwell, founder of the Moral Majority, for

political awakening led to the creation of the so-called New Christian Right, which was later labeled as the Christian Right or Religious Right. This 'evangelical resurgence' is sometimes considered as the second mobilization of American Protestant fundamentalism – a conservative social movement which was created at the beginning of the 20th century.²

The New Christian Right was created in the late 1970s when 'secular' conservative activists from the Republican Party offered assistance to the emerging leaders of the Christian conservative movement (Wald, Calhoun-Brown 209). The basis for the coalition with the Republican Party was opposition to the 'big government,' which was supposed to be a threat not only to economic free-market values but also to traditional religious values. Since then, Christian Right groups have been working in order to convince politicians as well as the general public to apply the teachings of conservative Christianity to politics and public policy.

Among the first Christian Right groups there were: Moral Majority, Religious Roundtable, Christian Voice, and National Christian Action Coalition. The most prominent of the new organizations was Moral Majority, which was founded in 1979 by television evangelist Jerry Falwell. All of these organizations shared a common agenda. They strongly protested against the Supreme Court's tendency to interpret the First Amendment in terms of "the wall of separation between church and state" (Zunes; Casanova), and blamed "secular humanists" for "destroying the Christian heritage of the USA" (Wald, Calhoun-Brown 208). They supported voluntary prayer and Bible reading in public schools, as well as non-interference by the authorities with Christian schools.³ They advocated the responsibility of the government to encourage the "traditional family unit," and strongly opposed abortion, feminism and homosexuality. They also declared that teaching evolution and sexual education in schools as well as promoting "immoral" behavior on TV were some of the worst social evils (Wald, Calhoun-Brown 210).⁴

In the 1990s, the New Christian Right was not so new, and the term was dropped in favor of the Christian Right or Religious Right. Also at that time, the Christian Right underwent a transformation (Moen; Rozell, Wilcox; Watson; Wald, Calhoun-Brown). Formerly a collection of "direct mail lobbies, led by prominent fundamentalists who championed a moralistic agenda on Capitol Hill," the Christian Right became "a variety of well-established membership organizations, whose leaders

example, was a neo-fundamentalist (a fundamentalist who accepted involvement in matters of the secular world). Currently, however, the terms "evangelical" and "fundamentalist" are often used interchangeably.

² According to the social movement theory, there are several stages of its development: creation, mobilization, structures extension, and ceasing the activity (Sztompka). It seems that the Protestant fundamentalist movement went through all of these stages between the beginning of the 20th century and the 1920s, then suspended its activity and re-mobilized due to the activity of neo-fundamentalists in the 1970s (Napierała 2007a).

³ Some of the fundamentalist schools and universities still practised racial segregation at that time.

⁴ The leaders of the Christian Right also discussed other issues which were important to "secular" conservatives, justifying their positions with a religious rationale. These issues included, for example, increased defense spending, fighting communism, low inflation, flat-rate taxation (Wald, Calhoun-Brown 210), as well as social welfare cuts.

use mainstream language and organize followers in the grassroots" (Moen qtd. in Wald, Calhoun-Brown 212). Some of the organizations were replaced by new mass-membership organizations with stronger local chapters. In many of them the leadership (at least formally) was passed from media ministers to political operatives who tried to avoid the divisive moral language and militant religious rhetoric used by the first generation of Christian Right organizations' leaders (Wald, Calhoun-Brown 212; Watson 233). The new leaders were also trying to reach out to voters outside of the evangelical tradition and to build alliances with "religious conservatives" from other religious traditions. The terms "religious conservatives" or "people of faith" were used to replace the word "Christians," which for many members of the Christian Right meant "evangelical Protestants." Additionally, such terms as "traditional values" or "family values" started to be used much more often than the term "Christian values" (Wald, Calhoun-Brown 214). Some leaders also decided to use the term "Judeo-Christian heritage" instead of "Christian heritage," and started to call their organizations a "Religious Right" instead of a "Christian Right." All of these efforts can be considered as an attempt to broaden the social base of the movement (Watson 66). According to social movement theory, it can be inferred that the first generation of the Christian Right played an important role in re-mobilizing the fundamentalist movement after a period of political and social withdrawal (1920s-1970s), and the second generation organizations took an active role in extending the structures of the movement.

Among the new groups or groups with renewed influence, there were: the Christian Coalition, the Family Research Council, the Traditional Values Coalition, Citizens for Excellence in Education, and, for a time, the Promise Keepers (Wald, Calhoun-Brown 215). The Christian Coalition, founded by Pat Robertson and led by Ralph Reed, was the most prominent and typical of the new organizations. Therefore, the strategy of this organization has been thoroughly analyzed by researchers (e.g. Moen, Watson, Martin, Rozell).⁵ Gradually, however, the Christian Coalition has been losing influence, although it has achieved some of its main goals. Many commentators saw its decline as a sign of the beginning of the fall of the Religious Right movement (and fundamentalist social movement in general). However, researchers, including Professor Mark J. Rozell, underlined that:

it's important to recognize that the big name organizations are not to be equated with the general movement that we call the Christian right. In other words, particular organizations may rise or fall at particular points in time, but the movement itself is here to stay. The Moral Majority departs the scene; Christian Coalition takes over. Maybe it wanes, but another organization emerges (Rozell).

Professor Rozell turned out to be right. The Christian Coalition lost its power, but it was soon replaced by another organization. In 2007, Dan Gilgoff wrote that the Family Research Council "has long replaced Christian Coalition's D.C. office as the capital's premiere Christian Right lobbying shop" (xvi). In fact, the Family Research Council, founded by James Dobson and listed by Kenneth Wald as one of the Religious Right's second generation organizations (next to the Christian Coalition), not only continued to advance the Religious Right's agenda in Washington,

⁵ See Napierala 2007a.

but also, thanks to a specific uncompromising attitude and to cooperation with Focus on the Family (another organization established by James Dobson), extended the movement's structures and strengthened the role of religious conservatives' interest groups.

These processes have been extensively studied by American scholars, including sociologists, political scientists, jurists, religious studies scholars, and others. However, in Polish academic literature, the activity of the Religious Right, and especially the shifts within the movement, have not been thoroughly examined. There have not been many analyses concerning particular Religious Right organizations, especially those listed as the second generation ones. The significance of such organizations as the Family Research Council and Focus on the Family, which together constitute what is sometimes called Dr. James Dobson's "family values empire," have not been studied extensively by Polish political scientists. Therefore, my main aim is to discuss the role that James Dobson's "family values empire" played in the development of the Religious Right movement, as well as in American politics.

It is worth stressing that the Family Research Council's role has been extremely important in terms of the Religious Right movement's political involvement. However, this organization would probably not have been able to gain its strength without cooperation with Focus on the Family. The latter, according to some researchers, served as a tool in the Family Research Council's grassroots networking. Therefore, this paper includes an analysis of both organizations' agendas. I am going to present previous research (conducted by American researchers) concerning the activity of Dobson's organizations, and discuss their current political involvement as well as the strategy of their founder.

It is also important to note that despite the fact that both the Christian Coalition and the Family Research Council are considered to be the second generation of Religious Right organizations, their leaders disagreed on several details of the new strategy (Rozell; Martin; Gilgoff; Wald, Calhoun-Brown; Watson). Therefore, I will also present major differences between strategies applied by James Dobson and by the leaders of the Christian Coalition.

Dr. James Dobson

It is crucial to begin by introducing the founder of Focus on the Family and of the Family Research Council. James Dobson, who has been portrayed by the media as a successor to evangelical leaders such as Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson,⁶ grew up in Texas and Oklahoma, the son of an evangelist and small-town pastor in the deeply conservative Church of Nazarene. Not only was his father a minister in this church, but also his grandfather. His parents, Rev. James C. Dobson and Myrtle Georgia Dillingham Dobson, relocated from Bethany, Oklahoma, because his father was called to be the pastor of San Benito's First Church of the Nazarene. James graduated from San Benito High School in 1954 and shortly thereafter left for California

⁶ Although officially it was Tim LaHaye whom the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals named "the most influential American Evangelical of the last 25 years" in 2001, the media found James Dobson much more vocal in politics and especially in the presidential campaigns of 2001 and 2004 (Olsen; Crowley).

to pursue his education (sanbenitohistory.com). He studied academic psychology, which in the 1950s and 1960s was not viewed favorably by most evangelical Christians. After graduating from a Nazarene college in California, he earned a doctorate in child development at the University of Southern California in 1967, and joined the pediatric faculty of the USC medical school (Martin 341). At that time he was drawn to 'Christian psychology' by Paul Culbertson, a professor who "was forced to heavily supplement secular textbooks with his own teachings because the field was so new" (Gilgoff 20-21). While still at USC, Dobson wrote his first book, *Dare to Discipline* (1970), famous for promoting corporal punishment as one of the means of disciplining children. According to religion journalist Steve Rabey, it was a blend of "biblical principles, Christian psychology, common sense, a nostalgia for the 1950s, and a conservative reaction to trends like the sexual revolution, youth rebellion, psychedelic experimentation, and the women's movement" (qtd. in Martin 341). In one of the interviews in 2005, Dobson explained, "my involvement in the field of child psychology is precisely what convinced me, beyond a shadow of doubt, that the family was in serious trouble" (qtd. in Gilgoff 21).

His first book turned out to be a best-seller. Afterwards, other books followed, including another blockbuster, *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women*.⁷ By 1976, Dobson had left academia to devote himself full-time to writing, speaking, and responding to an ever-growing volume of telephone calls and letters (Martin 341). In 1977, he founded Focus on the Family, a tax-exempt non-profit organization, whose stated mission of "nurturing and defending the God-ordained institution of the family and promoting biblical truths worldwide" ("Foundational Values") was initially advocated mainly through radio programs.

Dobson's opinions have been very popular among many evangelical communities in the United States. They have included a strong stance on "traditional marriage" wherein there is a homemaker mother and breadwinner father, according to "each gender's biblically-mandated roles,"⁸ opposition to sex education curricula that are not abstinence-only, promotion of discipline that includes spanking of children up to eight years old, strong opposition to pornography,⁹ and strong views on homosexuality, which, according to Dobson, "is neither a choice nor genetic, but caused by external factors during early childhood" ("James Dobson on Ted Haggard"). James Dobson has been one of the most well-known advocates of considering homosexuality as a disorder ("For the Bible tells me so" 1:01:50). In his radio and TV programs as a Christian psychology expert, he often counseled Christian

⁷ Until today James Dobson authored 26 books, and co-authored at least four, including three which were written together with his wife, Shirley. The most famous titles include: *Marriage Under Fire: Why We Must Win This Battle*; *Temper Your Child's Tantrums*; *The Strong-Willed Child*; *Straight Talk: What Men Should Know, What Women Need to Understand*; *Love Must Be Tough: New Hope for Families in Crisis*; *Bringing Up Girls: Practical Advice and Encouragement for Those Shaping the Next Generation of Women*; *Bringing Up Boys: Practical Advice and Encouragement for Those Shaping the Next Generation of Men*.

⁸ See Dobson, Bauer.

⁹ In 1989, Dobson interviewed serial killer Ted Bundy on camera the day before he was executed. In this interview, Bundy blamed his crimes (the rape and murder of 30 young women) on "violent pornography," something he had never mentioned in police and psychological interviews.

families that were suffering due to the homosexuality issue. According to him, homosexuality should never be accepted because it will destroy American families and threaten American culture ("For the Bible..." 1:01:15). He has stressed that the Bible condemns homosexuality,¹⁰ and therefore, if a child "suffers from homosexuality," Christian parents should try to help them change through Christian therapy.

Dobson's views on homosexuality have not been popular among many representatives of the American mental health community. They are contradictory to the views presented by the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association. Some psychiatrists, including Paula J. Caplan, PhD, a clinical and research psychologist at Harvard, have criticized him for recommending reparative therapies for homosexuals, arguing that homosexuality cannot be changed at will ("For the Bible..." 1:02:00). Dobson's opponents have often stressed that the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) declared that "since homosexuality is not a disorder or a disease, it does not require a cure, that there is no medical indication for changing sexual orientation," and that practices known as "reparative therapy" or "conversion therapy" represent "a serious threat to the health and well-being—even the lives—of affected people" (Mirta Roses Periago qtd. in "Therapies..."). Despite criticism, James Dobson remains a strong advocate of such therapies and an evangelical authority on this matter. On an episode of the Larry King show, when James Dobson was asked to comment on a scandal surrounding Ted Haggard, a conservative minister whose homosexuality was revealed in 2006, he stressed his belief in Christian therapies' effectiveness ("James Dobson on Ted Haggard").¹¹

With time, Dobson's influence and reputation as the best Christian psychologist in the country have grown. Not only has he offered advice on family issues and faith-related problems, but he has also begun commenting on political life. Already in the 1980s he organized a number of meetings with congressmen and White House Officials – some of whom saw him as "a parenting guru and broadcasting star."¹² His fascination with Washington did not go unnoticed by researchers or the media (Gilgoff 29-30). Some have expected him to follow Pat Robertson's example and run for some high office (Martin 342). However, unlike other Christian Right leaders, including Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and Ralph Reed, Dobson has never decided to do so. What is more, he has preferred to downplay his role in politics. Although in 1981 he decided to form the Family Research Council, which aimed to represent "the interests of families" to legislators and other government bodies in Washington, he

¹⁰ It is important to note that various liberal churches in the United States do not interpret biblical passages as condemnation of homosexuality. Some biblical scholars claim that the word "homosexual" as found in many modern versions of the Bible is a transliteration and is not found in the original biblical texts (e.g. Rev. Jimmy Creech). Other scholars believe that biblical texts interpreted by some as discussing homosexuality actually refer only to specific sex acts and idolatrous worship, which lack relevance to contemporary same-sex relationships. They also explain that homosexual relations are referred to as unc customary and against tradition or ritual, but not as innately immoral (e.g. Rev. Dr. Laurence C. Keen, Rev. Peter Gomes, Rev. Steven Kindler). See more in: "For the Bible tells me so."

¹¹ After the scandal, Haggard decided to go through "reparative therapy." However, soon afterwards, another homosexual relationship of his was revealed.

¹² Especially since Republican congressman Frank Wolf and Republican senator Dan Coats sponsored screenings of Dobson's film *Where's Dad?* (Gilgoff 30).

chose someone else to be the president of the new organization. And although he often took part in political disputes, he always portrayed himself as a "reluctant warrior." According to Dan Gilgoff, he "tends to frame each act of political advocacy as an unprecedented foray into politics born of a new crisis that demands he stop biting his tongue" (Gilgoff 8).

Focus on the Family

Focus on the Family was the first organization established by James Dobson. It has been constantly active since 1977. According to the mission statement, Focus on the Family's aim is "[t]o cooperate with the Holy Spirit in sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with as many people as possible by nurturing and defending the God-ordained institution of the family and promoting biblical truths worldwide." Focus on the Family's vision includes "[r]edeemed families, communities, and societies worldwide through Christ" ("Foundational Values"). The organization's guiding principles are described as follows:

Since Focus on the Family's primary reason for existence is to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ through a practical outreach to homes, we have firm beliefs about both the Christian faith and the importance of the family. This ministry is therefore based upon six guiding philosophies that are apparent at every level throughout the organization. These "pillars" are drawn from the wisdom of the Bible and the Judeo-Christian ethic, rather than from the humanistic notions of today's theorists. In short, Focus on the Family is a reflection of what we believe to be the recommendations of the Creator Himself, who ordained the family and gave it His blessing ("Foundational Values").

The six above-mentioned pillars include: the preeminence of evangelism, the permanence of marriage, the value of children, the sanctity of human life, the importance of social responsibility, and the value of male and female.¹³

At the heart of Dobson's ministry there have been radio programs, including a 30-minute one called *Focus on the Family*, which gained incredible popularity. Most of Focus on the Family's radio and TV programs have included Dobson's commentaries, Christian psychology-based advice, and counseling on various psychological and religious problems. By 1988, Focus on the Family was receiving 150,000 pieces of mail per month, almost all of which were addressed to Dobson (Gilgoff 27). Dobson did not reply personally, but Focus on the Family correspondents "culled their reply letters from Dobson's books, and broadcasts" (Gilgoff 27). Additionally, monthly bulletins, also called *Focus on the Family*, have been dispensed as inserts in some Sunday church service bulletins.

Dobson's internationally syndicated radio programs, according to Focus on the Family's data, have been "heard on over 3,000 radio facilities in North America and in twenty seven languages in approximately 4,130 additional facilities in over 160 other countries" (FoF web.archive). Dobson's commentaries, according to the same data, have been followed by more than 220 million people by way of radio every

¹³ The last pillar is explained as follows: "God created humans in His image, intentionally male and female, each bringing unique and complementary qualities to sexuality and relationships" ("Foundational Values").

day. His programs have been transmitted by approximately 60 television stations daily in the U.S. (FoF web.archive).

Apart from producing daily and weekend radio and TV programs, Focus on the Family has also offered magazines, videos, and audio recordings as well as programs for targeted audiences. There have been many programs for children whose aim was "to win their souls" in what Dobson calls "Civil War of Values." This "war," according to him, is "a coordinated, well-thought-out strategy" devised by secular humanists who, for unclear reasons, seek to destroy their own civilization (Martin 344). To help parents make sure their children do not become casualties in this "war of values," especially as victims of "professional snipers" on secular college and university campuses, Dobson has encouraged parents to equip their children with "the whole armor of anti-humanism" (Martin 345) by using his programs and publications.¹⁴

Currently, Focus on the Family also provides its advice through its website, where conservative Christians can ask questions concerning issues connected with marriage, parenting, faith and managing life challenges. The website also provides information on social issues that Focus on the Family is concerned with, including abortion, abstinence before marriage, abstinence education, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, "counseling for unwanted same-sex attractions," and other issues ("Social Issues"). According to Dan Gilgoff, the overwhelming majority of those seeking advice from Focus on the family have been women (27, 50). Many of the questions that the Focus staff have been asked concern such issues as alcoholism, child abuse, and what to do if a husband, friend or a child is gay, or if a spouse uses pornography or is unfaithful (FoF Website).

Additionally, Focus on the Family's website includes a section on "Christians in politics" which encourages Christian activism, and informs people about all of the ministries through which the organization has operated: Adoption and Orphan Care Initiative/Wait No More,¹⁵ Adventures in Odyssey, Be a Voice for Life, Boundless, Citizen Link, Focus on the Family Clubhouse/Focus on the Family Clubhouse Jr., Enfolque a la Familia, Focus Leadership Institute, Heartlink, Plugged In, Pure Intimacy, Focus on the Family Radio Theatre, Rising Voice, Thriving Family, Thriving Pastor & Church Outreach, True Tolerance, True U, and Focus on the Family's Truth Project ("Web Sites and Ministries").

Although many of Focus on the Family's activities have been focused on spreading religious views, counseling families with religious and personal problems, and advocating adoptions, others have also focused on advocating certain political views, training local activists and influencing the media. For example, although Focus on the Family's 501(c)(3) status prevents the organization from advocating any individual political candidate, in its radio broadcast, political issues and current events have

¹⁴ Apart from all the programs and publications for children, Dobson has also encouraged parents to send their children to a summer camp program called Summit Ministries. The program, run by David Noebel and Billy James, has promoted the worldview of "Biblical Christianity" as opposed to Marxism/Leninism, Secular Humanism, Cosmic Humanism (New Age) (Martin 345).

¹⁵ Adoption and Orphan Care Initiative/Wait No More encourages people to adopt children or become foster parents, but is also very vocal in supporting laws preventing couples who are cohabiting together outside of marriage as well as homosexuals from adopting.

been frequently discussed. Focus on the Family also publishes a magazine, *Citizen*, which is exclusively devoted to politics. Additionally, in 2004 it created an affiliated group, Focus on the Family Action (later it changed its name to CitizenLink), which, as a 501(c)(4) social welfare group, has had fewer political lobbying restrictions. According to Focus on the Family's website, its "experts grapple with contemporary social issues and provide a biblical perspective on national and local news" because "[j]udicial tyranny, the homosexual agenda, pornography and gambling are among the front burner issues that threaten the foundation of the family" ("Web Sites and Ministries"). There are also several Focus on the Family ministries whose aim is to train new political and local activists. For example, the Focus Leadership Institute "exists to provide a unique Christian educational community that nurtures passionate and persuasive leaders who are committed to Jesus Christ, equipping them to promote healthy families, vibrant churches and a civil society" ("Web Sites and Ministries"). There is also the Rising Voice ministry, which "is an outreach to millennials who want to help transform the culture" ("Web Sites and Ministries"). Additionally, Focus on the Family's Be A Voice outreach is supposed to equip conservative Christians "to be a voice for life" in their communities, campuses, churches, and families by providing access to free, downloadable resources that help "understand how the sanctity of human life applies to each stage of life" ("Web Sites and Ministries"). Apart from operating through Love Won Out, an ex-gay ministry which provided therapy for homosexuals¹⁶, and through trueTolerance.org, which was created in order to "help parents respond in a winsome, factual way to pro-gay advocacy in public schools," Focus on the Family has also been involved in many political campaigns opposing LGBT rights. One of the most important political campaigns concerning this issue that Focus on the Family became involved in was the promotion of the so-called Amendment 2 in Colorado that nullified gay-rights ordinances. Other political campaigns and legal debates in which Focus on the Family has been engaged have also included such issues as promotion of school-sponsored prayer, teaching intelligent design in public schools, eliminating sex-education from school curricula, opposing abortion, pornography, and gambling ("Social Issues"). Additionally, as many researchers underline, it has promoted a religiously-centered conception of American identity and political support of Israel¹⁷.

Therefore, according to Dan Gilgoff, despite its stated mission, Focus on the Family is in fact a part of the Religious Right. He stresses that one reason Focus on the Family was long overlooked by the media as being a part of this socio-political movement was that it is more complex than other organizations which are straightforward political advocacy groups. "However, Focus's political power actually stems from the very fact that it is primarily apolitical" (xv).

In fact, research shows that despite the fact that Focus on the Family has often been promoted as an apolitical organization, already in the 1980s James Dobson wanted the organization to become more involved in politics. He led delegations of the top Focus on the Family donors to Washington for meetings with congressmen, and insisted that Focus on the Family's programs should include more political comments and discussions on the air than earlier. However, in the 1990s, "certain

¹⁶ Love Won Out was later sold to Exodus International.

¹⁷ More in Napierała 2007 b.

leaders within the organization were expressing concern that the organization was becoming too political" (Zettersten qtd. in Gilgoff 36). It was important to them that Focus on the Family had grown out of Dobson's parenting seminars and family-oriented radio show aimed at helping troubled couples (Gilgoff 36), and that it was different in character from Moral Majority or Christian Coalition, which were both seen as political machines. Dobson was trying to defend his engagement in politics by insisting that the national debates he took part in were moral, not political, in nature. He underlined that the issues he discussed both in Washington and on the Focus on the Family programs were not political issues, but family issues (Gilgoff 37). Nevertheless, there were signs that many of the Focus on the Family supporters had little interest in becoming citizen activists. They simply wanted to hear Dobson's parenting advice (Gilgoff 36). Therefore, according to Dan Gilgoff, in order to protect his credibility among his followers who preferred to see him as a psychologist, James Dobson chose the role of a behind-the-scenes political fixer (8). Since then, Focus on the Family has been promoted as an apolitical organization that "helps families thrive" (FoF Website). Although, as it turned out later, Focus started to include a political message anyway, back in the 1990s it defended its status as a Christian counseling organization. James Dobson, on the other hand, found a different way to maintain his status as the main spiritual adviser and most prominent Christian psychologist while at the same time (indirectly) engaging in politics.¹⁸ The solution was to transfer most of the political activity to another organization (also established by James Dobson) – the Family Research Council.

The Family Research Council

James Dobson decided to form the Family Research Council in 1980. During the White House Conference on Families, Dobson and several other evangelical leaders agreed that there was a need for an organization that would represent their interests to legislators. The result was the Family Research Council, headquartered in Washington and officially independent, but always associated with Focus on the Family (Martin 342). The organization, which, according to Dobson, was "representing the interests of families" to legislators, was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1983, and Gerald P. Regier became its first president.

According to the Family Research Council's website:

FRC's immediate goal was to counter the credentialed voices arrayed against life and family with equally capable men and women of faith. Drawing upon his experience at the Department of Health and Human Services in the Reagan administration, Regier developed fresh means to link pro-family experts with government research and policy making offices. He arranged for Congressional testimony, provided reports to elected officials,

¹⁸ James Dobson served as the sole leader of the organization from 1977 to 2003. In 2003, Donald P. Hodel became president and chief executive officer. Dobson, however, remained in the organization as chairman of the Board of Directors. In March 2005, Hodel retired, and Jim Daly, formerly the Vice President in charge of Focus on the Family's International Division, assumed the role of president and chief executive officer. In February 2009, Dobson resigned his chairmanship, and by early 2010 he was no longer hosting the daily radio program.

amassed evidence for legal briefs on family issues, helped secure appointments on government panels, and offered media commentary. This foundational work formed the core for FRC's long-term success. ("History")

The Family Research Council was intended to shield Dobson and Focus on the Family from Washington's political fights, "while giving them an inside-the-beltway proxy" (Gilgoff 32). However, when Dobson was appointed to Ronald Reagan's Commission on Pornography in 1985, which brought him closer to Washington (Gilgoff 32), he was eager to engage in politics more directly. Additionally, in 1988, following financial difficulties, the Family Research Council was incorporated into Focus on the Family, which contributed to greater political involvement of the latter.¹⁹ Although Dobson's eagerness for political engagement was obvious to his closest colleagues, critical voices from within Focus on the Family discouraged him from merging the two organizations. As it was mentioned before, he finally decided not to be personally engaged in specific political actions organized by the Family Research Council.

Therefore, he appointed Gary L. Bauer, a former Under Secretary of Education and domestic policy adviser to President Reagan, as president of the Washington-based organization in 1988 and a representative of the Family Research Council in Washington.²⁰ Unlike Bauer, Dobson rarely talked to the secular media about his political views. However, although he declined several interviews on his books or TV documentary in the secular media, "he was not bashful about making them known to those he believed could affect their implementation" (Martin 343). For example, in 1995 he sent a letter to his supporters, 112,000 clergy, 8,000 national and local politicians, and 1,500 members of the media, in which he stated that "a struggle [is] under way for the soul of the [Republican] party, [and] I am committed never again to cast a vote for a politician who would kill one innocent baby" (Martin 343). While Dobson was working behind the scenes, Bauer's role was to represent the Family Research Council in the public, and to be a vocal advocate of the Religious Right's agenda in the media. Additionally, he was also a successful grassroots organizer. According to the Family Research Council's website:

With an infusion of funding from a generous family, he [G. Bauer] immediately helped raise its public profile and impact. With new battles over a national child care system and the arrival of the Clinton administration, FRC was thrust into the midst of several social issue debates that gripped the nation. In response, Bauer gave close attention to building a national network of concerned citizens and educated activists eager to engage the national issues. Throughout the 1990s FRC's expert and grassroots networks grew exponentially. ("History")

In 1992, the Family Research Council separated from Focus on the Family and became a formally independent non-profit, which made it much easier to keep Focus on the Family's distance from Washington. Its mission ever since has been to "advance faith, family and freedom in public policy and the culture from a Christian worldview" ("Mission").

¹⁹ The Family Research Council was a division of Focus on the Family from the 1980s until 1992, but Dobson was never officially its leader.

²⁰ Gary L. Bauer remained the face of FRC until 2000.

Family Research Council's strategy: disagreements with the Christian Coalition

When Dobson started to become more engaged in politics, the "insiders" to whom it was revealed thought that he would not make a good politician. Some of his proponents feared that he was not fit for politics, as he was a warm, caring man with deep convictions. Others – those who had worked with him – thought that it was his abhorrence of compromise that would likely make him ineffective and miserable in Washington (Martin 342). As one of his colleagues put it, "[...] He wanted to know what you were going to do about the stuff that mattered to him, and he wanted to know whether you would stand up and fight for those things, no matter what the consequences were" (Bauer qtd. in Martin 342). And yet Dobson's uncompromising attitude not only turned out to be quite popular among many Christian Right activists, but also shaped the agenda of one of the strongest Washington-based conservative organizations. His dislike for compromises adopted by the Family Research Council started to be considered as something positive, something resulting from contempt for the degrading "deals" made with cynical politicians by other leaders of the Christian Right movement.

By the mid-1990s, certain tensions concerning the Christian Right's strategy of cooperation with Republican politicians were evident. By that time, the position of the leading Christian Right organization, once cherished by the Moral Majority, was already taken by the Christian Coalition – the most famous Religious Right organization of the "second generation." Its founder, Pat Robertson, employed a young organizer, Ralph Reed, as executive director, whose role was to broaden the Religious Right's social base. Reed decided that in order to bring the Religious Right into the mainstream it was necessary to recruit secular professionals into the Christian Coalition leadership, target young suburban parents, win seats on school boards, create a more positive agenda, and use less militant language (Watson; Gilgoff; Martin). He stressed that everybody knew what the Religious Right was against, but not too many people knew what it was for. He criticized its fixation on such issues as homosexuality and abortion, and its lack of a positive agenda (Watson 65). His strategy was not to talk about homosexuality and abortion using militant metaphors which made the movement look intolerant and uncaring, but to start talking about strengthening two-parent families, "family values," tax reductions, limiting crime, and financial security. Apart from these changes, which were considered cosmetic by many researchers, the most important aim was to strengthen the grassroots activities.²¹

To some extent, these ideas were in accordance with the Family Research Council's strategy. Its leaders, especially Gary Bauer, as well as its founder, were also concentrating on building national grassroots networks (in which strong ties with Focus on the Family were very helpful). Reed's ideas concerning the rhetoric used by Religious Right leaders, however, were acceptable to James Dobson only to some extent.

On one hand, he agreed to use more of the "family values language." After all, he had taken on the role of a caring and gentle person deeply concerned with various

²¹ This issue was also discussed in Napierała 2007a.

"family problems." "Family values," promotion of two-parent families, "helping families thrive," and promotion of Christian counseling for families have always been at the center of his Focus on the Family rhetoric. On the other hand, he opposed the proposed abandonment of militant metaphors. He did not agree with Reed and others who criticized the "culture wars" rhetoric. He often used the term "Civil War of Values," and stressed that he would not abandon this expression for the sake of political correctness. He argued that the Bible frequently uses military metaphors to speak of a godly life, therefore he agitated the defense of the use of warfare language. He even wrote an article entitled "Why I Use 'Fighting Words'."²²

What is even more important is that James Dobson and Gary Bauer disagreed with Reed on the part of his strategy that involved making compromises with the Republican Party. In fact, they "expressed a great deal of disappointment with the leadership of the Christian Right for compromising too much and forgetting about the principal goals of the movement" (Rozell). The differences between the leaders of the Family Research Council and the Christian Coalition concerning this issue became most evident in 1995. After Ralph Reed and William Bennett had discussed a possible Colin Powell candidacy as Bob Dole's pro-choice running mate, Dobson wrote a letter to Reed, accusing him of a serious lack of character:

[sitting] passively while Bill Bennett spoke of rewriting the pro-life plank in the GOP Platform. You uttered not a peep of protest. [...] This posture may elevate your influence in Washington, but it is unfaithful to the principles we are duty-bound as Christians to defend (Dobson qtd. in Martin 344).

Dobson concluded that he and Bauer "had considered the need to distance [themselves]" from Reed and the Christian Coalition (Dobson qtd. in Martin 344). Gary Bauer summed the whole situation up by saying:

There has been a great deal of controversy about how organizations that believe in the pro-family issues ought to conduct themselves when it comes to elections in which you have a candidate who is less than ideal. I go back and forth in my own mind about whether you should accept a candidate who [disagrees with] you on several issues, because he or she is better than the opposition candidate. But when it comes to the 'right-to-life' issue, my own personal viewpoint is that this is so important that I would not recommend compromise in the political arena on it. And I think that, to the extent that candidates or organizations do compromise on that issue, they run the risk of alienating their own base and sending the message that they're really not serious about an issue like the sanctity of human life. (Bauer qtd. in Martin 357)

After receiving such criticism, Ralph Reed tried to reassure his Religious Right allies that he was not retreating from the pro-life and pro-family stance. However, when in May 1996 it became apparent that a strong stance on abortion was likely to cost Senator Dole and the Republicans critical support, particularly among women, he softened his position again. He told *The New York Times* that he and the Christian Coalition "favored an exception to an abortion ban only if the mother's life was endangered," and that "he would 'reluctantly' accept exceptions in cases of rape and

²² The article was a polemic to John Woodbridge, a respected church historian at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. More in Martin 366.

incest if that were the only way to get an anti-abortion law passed" (Martin 358). For James Dobson, it was unacceptable. He strongly disagreed with what he regarded as Reed's willingness to compromise on a fundamental issue.

Dobson and Bauer actually thought that Reed was "doing more to help the GOP's cause than Christ's" (Gilgoff 99), especially since in 1994 the Christian Coalition spent \$1.4 million on a national media campaign aimed at stopping President Clinton's universal health care plan, but did not protest when Newt Gingrich excluded "culture wars" items from "Contract with America" (as long as there was a child tax deduction). What is more, in the ten-point "Contract with the American Family" proposed by the Christian Coalition, Reed mentioned homosexuality only with regard to how it should be treated by public school curricula, and he did not call for a constitutional amendment to outlaw abortion. The only measure he was straightforward about was a legislative ban on the procedure called partial birth abortion (Gilgoff 101). For Dobson and Bauer, such compromises were unacceptable.

The shift in the Religious Right leadership

In 1997, Ralph Reed decided to leave the Christian Coalition and to establish his own political consulting firm. This decision caused a leadership crisis in the Christian Coalition, and in the long-run effect its position as the leading Christian Right organization. After Reed had left, Donald Hodel²³ was elected president of the organization, and Randy Tate became executive director. At that time, the Christian Coalition additionally suffered financial problems and faced a lawsuit from the Federal Election Commission. Moreover, the Republicans (supported by the Christian Coalition) lost in the U.S. House elections in 1998. Despite the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, the Democrats picked up five more seats in the House and lost none in the Senate (Watson 192). It was a huge disappointment for both the Republicans and the Religious Right. The Republicans, who were divided into the "Pragmatic Center" and the "Ideological Right" (Watson 194), were blaming each other for the failure: the Center blamed the "scary" Right, and especially the Christian Right, for alienating swing voters, while the Right blamed the "squishy" Center for compromising away a distinct and compelling message (Watson 194). The divisions that emerged within the Religious Right also became evident at that time. There were pragmatists who adopted an insider identity toward the Republican Party (mostly the Christian Coalition), and purists who saw themselves as outsiders. In February 1998, James Dobson articulated the purist position. He warned that if the Republicans continued to "betray" religious conservatives, he would leave the party and encourage other Religious Right activists to do the same (Watson 194).

He felt indignant that the GOP had failed to prevent the Clinton administration from funding Planned Parenthood operations abroad, as well as from spending two

²³ Hodel served as United States Secretary of Energy from 1982 to 1985, and the Secretary of the Interior from 1985 to 1989 under President Ronald Reagan. He was the president of the Christian Coalition from 1997 to 1999, then president and chief executive officer of Focus on the Family between 2003 and 2005.

million dollars on safe-sex education – as opposed to abstinence-only programs. He also criticized Republicans for the failure to require parental consent for minors seeking abortions and for not protesting when President Clinton had expressed solidarity with gay-rights groups during a hate crimes summit in the White House. He commented on the situation:

Does the Republican Party want our votes – no strings attached – to court us every two years, and then to say, 'Don't call me. I'll call you', and to not care about the moral law of the universe? [...] If it is I'm gone, and if I go – I'm not trying to threaten anybody because I don't influence the world – but if I go, I will do everything I can to take as many people with me as possible (Dobson qtd. in Gilgoff 110).

Reed criticized Dobson, saying, "If the pro-family movement leaves the Republican Party, they will enter a no man's land in which they lose influence and lose the ability to use a major political party as a vehicle" (Reed qtd. in Watson 195). However, Dobson's message became dominant. And although Dobson himself had to step back from politics for a while after he suffered a stroke in June 1998, the Family Research Council embraced his purist approach and started to formulate bolder demands on the GOP.

The Christian Coalition never regained strength after Reed had left. On the other hand, the Family Research Council, with its uncompromising approach, was becoming the Christian Right's prime Washington lobbying group. Its leaders stressed that if it had not been for their purist approach, the Religious Right would not have been able to manage several successes during Clinton's presidency: preventing the president's plan to lift the ban on gays in the military, passing the five-hundred-dollar-per-child tax credit, and introducing the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) (Gilgoff 118). The introduction of DOMA was one of the Religious Right's biggest lobbying successes. The act defined marriage as a legal union of one man and one woman for the purpose of interpreting federal law, which meant that the federal government would not recognize same-sex marriages or civil unions, even if those unions were recognized by state law. It was passed by the Congress in 1996 and reluctantly signed by President Clinton – who afterwards stated that it was "unnecessary and divisive" (Wald, Calhoun-Brown 341).²⁴

Stressing these successes, the Family Research Council replaced the Christian Coalition in Washington. What is extremely important is that at the same time, Focus on the Family's Family Policy Councils, state-level advocacy groups that acted like Focus affiliates, were replacing state Christian Coalition chapters as the most powerful local Christian Right outfits in the country (Gilgoff xvii).

Family Research Council, presidential elections, and necessary alliances

Despite the differences concerning various details of the Religious Right's strategy, and despite all of the Christian Coalition's problems, the Family Research Council needed its rival's help on at least two upcoming important occasions – the

²⁴ However, it is worth noting that just before the 1996 presidential elections, Clinton had declared the belief in marriage as an institution for the union of a man and a woman.

presidential elections of 2000 and 2004. As it turned out, the Christian Coalition managed to mobilize all its resources and, although already much weaker than the Family Research Council, it contributed a lot to the Religious Right's campaign in support of the candidate that seemed to be their best choice. In fact, if it had not been for the cooperation between the two most important Religious Right organizations, G.W. Bush might have lost the elections, especially the one in 2004.

The decision about which candidate to support, however, was not an easy one. During the presidential election of 2000, Gary Bauer, the president of the Family Research Council, decided to run an outsider campaign in the presidential race. Bauer's platform was built mostly on social issues such as abortion and tax cuts, including "pro-growth, pro-pocketbook, pro-family policy" (CNN.com). He did not gain much support and had to pull out of the race. To James Dobson's disappointment, at his withdrawal he supported John McCain. However, while McCain was unacceptable for Dobson due to the fact that in the past he had not supported policies postulated by the Religious Right, G.W. Bush was not a perfect candidate for him either. The reason for this was that although Bush declared himself to be a pro-life candidate, he mostly avoided the topic of abortion. When, in 2000, word spread that G.W. Bush might select a pro-choice running mate, such as former New Jersey governor Christine Todd Whitman, Dobson warned Bush that he would lose evangelical votes, and with them the White House (Gilgoff 15).

Bush Jr. was not the first choice for Pat Robertson and the Christian Coalition, either. Robertson supported John Ashcroft (Watson 197). However, when it turned out that there was only a choice between G.W. Bush and Al Gore, both Religious Right organizations supported G.W. Bush and organized many campaigns distributing a great number of voters' guides in churches. Dobson made it clear that he supported Bush Jr. very reluctantly, and it is suspected that his tepid support may have helped dampen turnout among evangelical voters (Crowley).

After the elections, the Family Research Council was busy advocating its purist strategy. In 2000, Kenneth L. Connor, "a prominent Florida attorney and national pro-life leader" ("History"), was appointed the Council's next president. During his term, the organization "sharpened" its public policy agenda "with special focus on the sanctity of human life, defense of man-women marriage, humane elder care, religious liberty, parental choice in education, and family tax relief" ("History"). The issue of defending the man-women marriage soon became the most important part of the agenda.

By the year 2003, Dobson resigned from Focus on the Family, and stepped into politics, directly joining the Family Research Council's battle against gay-rights. He considered the emerging issue of gay marriage "a looming catastrophe of epic proportions" (Crowley). He also compared the steps toward gay marriage to Pearl Harbor. Once again, Dobson maintained that he would have preferred to stay out of politics, but "the attack and assault on marriage" was so distressing that he just felt like he could not "remain silent." (Crowley). In summer 2003, a powerful new coalition of Christian Right leaders called the Arlington Group, in which Dobson and the Family Research Council were strongly engaged, began planning a strategy for passing a constitutional amendment that would ban gay-marriage.

Apart from campaigning against gay-marriage in 2003, the Family Research Council lobbyists also pushed for amendments to the international AIDS relief bill

that would ensure the money went to programs compatible with the conservative Christian agenda (also those rejecting condom distribution). They succeeded, and, at the signing ceremony, Bush used evangelical and pro-life language, calling the effort a "great mission of rescue" and affirming the belief in the "value and dignity of every human life" (Gilgoff 122).

When the next presidential elections were approaching, Religious Right organizations had to decide which candidate to support. In 2004 it was much easier for Bush to receive Dobson's presidential endorsement than in 2001. Dobson became convinced that G.W. Bush deserved support due to several decisions Bush had made during his first term: signing the ban on the procedure called "partial birth" abortion, accepting the Religious Right's amendments to the global AIDS relief bill, being vocal about faith-based initiatives, endorsing a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage, and appointing conservative judges to the Federal Court. It was also very important that G.W. Bush openly talked about his faith using evangelical language.

It was crucial for G.W. Bush to win the evangelical vote in 2004, especially since the issue concerning the war in Iraq was very controversial. Therefore, his advisors planned the so-called values campaign in which moral values and religion-related social issues were at the center of attention. Dobson seemed to have believed that by endorsing Bush he did not have to soften his purist position because:

This president is more actively pro-life and pro-family and pro-moral than any previous president, especially with his willingness to speak openly about his faith. (Dobson qtd. in Gilgoff 15)

For evangelicals, Dobson and the Family Research Council's opinion concerning the presidential candidate was extremely important. However, the Religious Right needed to join the efforts in convincing "value voters" to vote for Bush. Therefore, once again cooperation with the Christian Coalition was crucial. And once again, despite serious financial problems, the former leader of the movement mobilized all its resources to support the republican candidate. Both organizations sponsored a series of campaigns, summits, conferences and events during which they distributed "voters' guides" supporting G.W. Bush. The guides were also being distributed in churches. Additionally, in order to intensify the pro-Bush campaign in 2004, James Dobson created a Focus on the Family Action, a fund-raising outfit free from the IRS rules which was sometimes called the "political arm of the Colorado Springs family group" (The Pulpit).

The Religious Right's efforts paid off and G.W. Bush was elected president for a second term. This was the Christian Coalition's last huge effort. Since then, it has lost its strength and has not managed to build it back up. The power vacuum within the Religious Right was filled by the Family Research Council, and Dobson was even more frequently referred to as a natural heir of the movement. Despite the fact that the movement achieved its goals in the elections of 2001 and 2004, the American Protestant fundamentalist movement, as a whole, did not feel that it had lost its *raison d'être*. Unlike the Christian Coalition, the Family Research Council, which became its unquestioned leader, did not approve of compromises and pushed for more political gains, mobilizing and reorganizing the resources of the movement at the same time.

The most important issues on the Family Research Council's political agenda

After the 2004 elections, the agenda of the organization was very much dominated by the campaigns opposing gay-marriage. Tony R. Perkins, a former member of the Louisiana legislature who was appointed the fourth president of the Family Research Council in 2003 (and who is still in office), made it very clear that this issue was extremely important to him. According to the organization's website:

Tony began his tenure at FRC just as the nationwide struggle to preserve man-woman marriage exploded. With the unprecedented decision of Massachusetts' highest court, a new issue was joined and the stakes in the judicial confirmation process at the federal level were raised another notch. To all this Tony brought the profound conviction that campaigns to protect the family and the church could not succeed without a renewal of cultural engagement among the pastorate ("History").

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court's decision mentioned on the website was a decision taken in May 2003, when the Court ruled that the state constitution guarantees equal marriage rights to same-sex couples.²⁵ The Family Research Council considered it as the reason to press for a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage. This issue has remained on its agenda until now, although the efforts were most intensive during G.W. Bush's presidency.

The issue was not entirely new. Opposing gay-rights has had a long history among Religious Rights groups, including James Dobson's organizations. One of the most notable attempts to deny equal rights to gays took place in 1992. The so-called Colorado Amendment 2 nullified gay-rights ordinances in Aspen, Boulder, and Denver, and prohibited the passage of similar measures anywhere else in the state. The ordinances to which it responded prohibited bias in jobs or housing on the basis of sexual orientation (Martin 347). Amendment 2 prohibited "all legislative, executive, or judicial action at any level of state, or local government designed to protect the status of persons based on the homosexual, lesbian or bisexual orientation, conduct, practices or relationships" (Wald, Calhoun-Brown 146). The driving force behind the campaign to secure passage of Amendment 2 was a group called Colorado for Family Values (CFV) led by David Noebel, whose efforts were quite unpopular at first (Martin 347-348). According to Noebel, the press was against CFV, and if it had not been for Focus on the Family, the initiative would have died. James Dobson, however, devoted an entire broadcast to Amendment 2 and mobilized his grassroots network. In November 1992, the Amendment was passed in a referendum by 200 votes. However, in 1996 it was declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court.

For the Religious Right, however, the fight was not over. It was also in the 1990s when they started the campaign for a constitutional amendment barring same-sex marriage. It began after a court in Hawaii ruled that denying homosexuals the right to marry was discriminatory under the state's constitution. The 1993 Hawaii Supreme Court ruling, as well as pressure from numerous circles including the State

²⁵ More in Wald, Calhoun-Brown 342-343.

Bar Association of California and various liberal churches²⁶ to recognize marriages between homosexuals, influenced the Religious Right organizations, including the Family Research Council, to pressure Congressmen (especially Republican ones) to pass the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). For Gary Bauer, head of the Family Research Council at the time, this issue was supposed to be "a major battleground" (Gutis). The DOMA was introduced, and Hawaii amended the state constitution to ban same-sex marriage through a 1998 ballot initiative (Gilgoff 141).

These solutions, however, did not satisfy the Religious Right leaders. Since 2001, a group called Alliance for Marriage has promoted the introduction of the Federal Marriage Amendment (FMA), an amendment to the U.S. constitution to ban gay marriages.²⁷ In 2002, Kenneth Connor proposed the Family Research Council's version of the Amendment, which would not only bar the courts from legalizing civil unions, domestic partnerships, and similar arrangements for gay couples, but would also prevent state legislatures from doing so (Gilgoff 145). Since then, the Family Research Council has been strongly involved in initiatives promoting the FMA.

The Federal Marriage Amendment has been introduced in the United States Congress four times: in 2003, 2004, 2005/2006 and 2008 – each time strongly supported by the Family Research Council, and each time failing. However, further efforts to introduce the amendment have not been abandoned. In order to promote the FMA, the Family Research Council has been publishing numerous publications concerning homosexuality. In these publications it is often argued that "homosexual conduct is harmful to the persons who engage in it and to society at large, and can never be affirmed," and it is "by definition unnatural, and as such is associated with negative physical and psychological health effects" ("Human Sexuality"). The views presented in the Family Research Council's publications cause many controversies, especially among American psychologists and sociologists (Gilgoff 56).²⁸ Such organizations as the American Psychologist Association²⁹ and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), for example, argue that homosexuality is "a normal aspect of human sexuality" and is not a source of negative psychological effects. The Family Research Council activists do not agree with these opinions and remain very active in publishing both anti-gay-marriage materials as well as anti-gay-rights materials.³⁰ They argue that homosexuality not only is a disorder but also a deviation – therefore, gay marriages should never be accepted. Their strongest opponents, on the other hand, stress that scientific research has found no inherent association between

²⁶ Among churches that accept gay marriage, there are the Metropolitan Community Church, the United Church of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Episcopal Church of the United States, the Evangelical Lutheran Church In America, and the Unitarian Universalists Church. They argue that the Bible does not really deal with homosexuality (as there were no Greek, Arameic or Hebrew words for these concepts of human sexuality), and, therefore, there cannot exist a biblical prohibition of marriage rights. More on their views in "For the Bible tells me so."

²⁷ The FMA would also have prevented judicial extension of marriage rights to same-sex or other unmarried heterosexual couples.

²⁸ See also Dudley.

²⁹ APA is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States.

³⁰ For example Sprigg a.

any sexual orientation and psychopathology (APA Website). For example, APA has been stressing that:

[d]espite the persistence of stereotypes that portray lesbian, gay, and bisexual people as disturbed, several decades of research and clinical experience have led all mainstream medical and mental health organizations in this country to conclude that these orientations represent normal forms of human experience [...] [and] [t]herefore, these mainstream organizations long ago abandoned classifications of homosexuality as a mental disorder (APA Website).

Strongly opposing such views, the Family Research Council has underlined that efforts concerning banning same-sex marriage should be continued both at the state level and at the federal level. Therefore, in 2006, the Family Research Council spent more than half a million dollars to promote a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage in its home state of Colorado (Asay).

However, despite all of the Family Research Council's actions, publications and arguments, the efforts to pass FMA have not been successful. The general public remains divided on the issue. However, the social support for same-sex marriage has grown in recent years. According to the Pew Forum, in 2012 there were already more Americans who supported same-sex marriage than those who opposed it, with 48% in favor and 43% opposed. Among younger voters, called the Millennials, support for gay marriage was even higher – 64% ("Same-Sex Marriage Attitudes"). Moreover, on May 9, 2012, shortly after the official launch of Barack Obama's campaign for re-election as president, he declared that he personally supported the legalization of same-sex marriages.³¹ Obama explained that this position stems from the belief that equality should not be denied to any group of citizens.³²

Due to the language and methods used by the Family Research Council in its anti-gay campaigns, it has faced very serious charges. In 2010, the Southern Poverty Law Center designated it as a hate group, describing the organization as a "font of anti-gay propaganda throughout its history." According to Evelyn Schlatter's report, FRC senior research fellows Tim Dailey and Peter Sprigg (2001) had "pushed false accusations linking gay men to pedophilia" (Schlatter). According to the report, the Council and a dozen other groups put out "demonizing propaganda aimed at homosexuals and other sexual minorities" (Schlatter). As a reply to the report, Tony Perkins called the designation a "political attack by a liberal organization"

³¹ The president's support of same-sex marriage formally had little impact on law, as much of the activity on the issue occurs in the states and the courts. However, symbolically the declaration was extremely important, especially for those who consider gay marriage as connected with such issues as the equal rights of citizens, freedom of consciousness, and the separation of church and state.

³² His decision might have been also influenced by the opinion of some religious groups that having the government decide whether a same-sex marriage should be legally binding on the grounds of the ideology of certain religious groups would restrict the freedom of other religions. According to them, the FMA would deny the opportunity for religions which approve of same-sex marriage to perform legally binding same-sex marriages. A 2012 Democratic Platform also mentioned the party's support for the "freedom of churches and religious entities to decide how to administer marriage as a religious sacrament without government interference" (Hamilton 2012).

(Thompson), and suggested intolerance toward biblical views (PR Newswire). The Family Research Council has not given up on its campaigns.

Apart from opposing gay-rights and promoting FMA, the Family Research Council has been also constantly engaged in lobbying activities concerning 'pro-life' issues, such as opposition to abortion, stem cell research, which involves the destruction of human embryos, and euthanasia. One of the particular cases the Council was strongly involved in was the Terri Schiavo case. The question of whether to continue life-prolonging measures for a person in a vegetative state was answered very clearly by the Family Research Council activists. They urged President George W. Bush to sign legislation designed to keep Schiavo alive. According to Dan Gilgoff, it was a symbolic action – pro-life activists had embraced Schiavo as a way to show that the movement was about more than stopping abortion (Gilgoff 126).

The Family Research Council has also organized numerous actions in support of school prayer and an increase in pro-abstinence sex education, and it has been promoting the teaching of intelligent design as an alternative to evolution. It has also been involved in many actions opposing pornography and gambling, and it has actively supported increasing the child tax credit and the requirement of a one-year waiting period before a married couple with children can legally get a divorce ("Model Legislation").³³

One of the most important political activities that the Family Research Council was involved in was promoting conservative judicial nominations. When G. W. Bush decided to nominate John Roberts to the Supreme Court, Tony Perkins stressed that this nomination fulfilled Bush's campaign promise to appoint conservative justices and declared that the Family Research Council would "do all we can to mobilize concerned citizens" (qtd. in Gilgoff 217). In 2005 and 2006, they organized three conferences named Justice Sundays in order to bring an end to the "filibuster" of nominees to the Federal Judiciary made by President George W. Bush (King A19).

The Family Research Council also took certain actions concerning foreign issues. For example, in 2010 it was revealed that it had paid \$25,000 to congressional lobbyists to oppose the US House of Representatives resolution that condemned the Uganda Anti-Homosexuality Bill, which was intended to impose either the death penalty or life imprisonment for homosexual relations (McEwen). The FRC issued a statement denying that they were trying to prevent signing the US resolution, but rather that they wanted to change the language of the bill "to remove sweeping and inaccurate assertions that homosexual conduct is internationally recognized as a fundamental human right" (Weigel).

During the presidential elections in 2008 and 2012, the Family Research Council strongly opposed the candidacy of Barack Obama. On June 24, 2008, Dobson also used his radio program to criticize Obama for acting "as though he's some kind of biblical authority" (Schmalzbauer). He was referring to Obama's Call to Renewal Address in which Obama had opposed using literal interpretations of the Bible in politics, and had said that "democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values" (Obama).

³³ So that they can receive marital counseling, unless the marriage involves domestic violence.

Barack Obama's victory in the 2008 and 2012 elections was considered a failure by the Religious Right movement. In the end, it did not achieve its most important goal – electing another conservative president. Such a failure, according to social movements' theory, may result in halting the activity of a social movement which loses its strength and potential. However, such a failure may also provoke the leaders to another reorganization and re-mobilization (Sztompka 271), which certainly was the case in terms of the Family Research Council's response.

The movement mobilized intensively against the new president. Barack Obama was presented as “ungodly” liberal, atheist or possibly a Muslim (Pew Forum). His decisions (especially those relating to the separation of church and state issues) were presented as a threat to American religious heritage. Therefore, the Family Research Council very quickly took action to oppose Obama's decisions. In the end, during his first term in office the Religious Right movement mobilized itself in opposition to the president's “liberal views” and policies. The first decision that provoked the movement to a verbal and lobbying war against Obama was his decision to reverse a Bush-era policy which had limited funding of embryonic stem cell research. The decision to sign the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010, which ended the policy of 1993 that had prevented gay and lesbian people from serving openly in the military, was called an assault on moral values. Another wave of protests from the Family Research Council started in 2011, when the Obama administration announced that it had decided that Section 3 of DOMA (which codified the non-recognition of same-sex marriages for all federal purposes, including insurance benefits for government employees, Social Security benefits, immigration, and the filing of joint tax returns) was unconstitutional.³⁴ Certainly, when Obama expressed his personal support for gay marriages, the Council officials published a number of condemning comments.

What is very interesting is that the Family Research Council has been very engaged in organizing opposition to the so-called “ObamaCare.” According to the Religious Right leaders, Obama's project was unacceptable because it would subsidize abortion, ration health care for the elderly and create a huge tax burden (FRC Action Website). The Council has become especially involved in the struggle against the Obama administration's plans to ensure access to birth control for all Americans who want it. When the Obama administration announced that all employers, except houses of worship, would have to include no-cost birth control in a baseline health-care package, Catholic bishops and other conservative religious groups opposed this solution, claiming that such a law would infringe their religious freedom. According to the Family Research Council, Obama's solution “is an open attack on religious liberties. It forces payment for insurance coverage that violates the religious beliefs of many” (FRC Action Website). This offensive resulted in the Obama Administration modifying its plans concerning these issues and in constructing compromising solutions, which were announced during the 2012 presidential campaign (Boston). However, it did not satisfy the Religious Right. According to the Council's leaders, the struggle against ObamaCare is not over. In an Alert published on its website on April 3, 2013, it can be read:

³⁴ And though the administration announced that it would continue to enforce the law, it said it was not going to defend it in court.

We must keep the pressure on among members of Congress in the days ahead, as we **also** work to weaken the worst aspects of ObamaCare. This twin strategy – repeal the whole, weaken the worst – is our best chance of restoring the freedoms we've lost, reversing the damage, and sparing millions the sad side effects that will befall them if ObamaCare stands. (Boston)

The Family Research Council keeps mobilizing the Religious Right in the struggle against ObamaCare. It is worth mentioning that it closely cooperates with Focus on the Family on this issue. By 2009, the Focus on the Family Action had spent more than \$400,000 fighting Obama's health care proposal (The Pulpit). Therefore, it might be stated that James Dobson's "family values empire" still plays an important role in leading "Christian Soldiers" onward.³⁵

Conclusion

While Ralph Reed and the Christian Coalition were drawing most of the public attention paid to politically involved religious conservatives, James Dobson was quietly building his "family values empire" and gaining both political and cultural influence. The decline of the Christian Coalition did not mean the fall of the whole social movement that traces its beginnings to early 20th-century American Protestant fundamentalism. The fall of the Christian Coalition provoked the organizations that constitute Dobson's empire to redefine their goals and strategies in order to effectively advance the movement's general cause – reversing changes in American religiosity and in the American style of life. According to many researchers, the strategy that included the "division of power" between the two organizations was very successful. James Dobson won most of his followers by dispensing family advice on his Focus on the Family radio shows, and then built one of the most successful conservative Christian lobbying groups in Washington. Thanks to this strategy and to his declared reluctance to be involved in politics, he became more powerful than any previous Christian Right leader. The fact that he chose to act from behind the scenes (at least most of the time) resulted in the opinion that "[u]nlike his predecessors, he was seen to be above the partisan political fray" (Gilgoff xii). At the same time, he managed to build an "empire" that consists of a very powerful lobbying group which can use the resources and grassroots networks of his other (formally apolitical) organization. And even if the Religious Right movement does not seem to be as powerful as during G. W. Bush's presidency, it certainly continues to influence American politics.

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³⁵ The term was used to describe the Religious Right by Deal Hudson in his book *Onward, Christian Soldiers. The Growing Political Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States*. "Onward Christian Soldiers" is also the title of a 19th-century English hymn.

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