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Creation, cultural wars and campus crusade

By Alan Matheson

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The debate about creationism and intelligent design (ID) is more than a debate about whether or not God did it.

The issue of evolution is but one dimension of a broader Christian agenda concerned as much with theocracy as democracy. Evolution has been on the periphery of Australian church concerns until the Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC) injected new life into the debate.

While commentators noted that CCC had met with Brendan Nelson and other politicians, and that following those meetings and his support, it would begin distributing thousands of ID DVDs into schools, little information was given about CCC.

CCC is no marginal group in the new religious Right with its broader agenda to combat secular humanism, promote and defend "family values" and "to implement their Christian world view to Christianise America".

It is, "the largest evangelical organisation in the USA"; "the richest fundamentalist enterprise in the world". *Money Magazine* (1996) wrote of it as "the most efficient religious ministry". The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) noted that CCC "has grown into the world's largest Christian ministry as well as one of the largest non-profits (organisation) in the USA".

But as with other new Right Christian organisations it also has problems with cash and transparency. NCRP reported that while it distributes an annual report, "it does not include a host of details ... including staff and board salaries, listing of outside contracts, detailed investment information and lobbying expenditures".

However the role it plays in shaping the religious and political Right, either in Australia or the US, has attracted little attention in Australia.

Bill Bright, founder and chair of CCC, was originator, participant and advocate of most of the significant political and religious Right-wing organisations in the US. With Pat Robertson, he believed, "Christians founded this nation. Christians built this nation. And for 300 years they governed this nation. And we can do it again".

First he positioned CCC as a major behind-the-scenes player in the creation of a network of organisations with overlapping memberships and finances. These included the Christian Freedom Fund, Moral Majority, Religious Roundtable, Christian Coalition, Alliance Defence Fund, Christian Voice (which pioneered the use of "moral report cards" and were seen in the Australian 2004 election) and the National Religious Broadcasters.

The most significant of all of these was the Council for National Policy (NCP), described by the *New York Times*

as "the club of the most powerful" (28/8/04). Membership is confidential and meetings are closed to the public and media. According to the

New York Times

it's "a little known club of a few hundred of the most powerful conservatives in the country. They meet at undisclosed locations for a confidential conference ... to strategise about how to turn the country to the Right".

CCC plays big time.

His second major contribution was rounding up corporate cash. Nelson Bunker Hunt (of silver market fame) and Wallace Johnson (Holiday Inn founder) poured millions not only into CCC but also into favoured Bright projects. Richard M. deVos, president of Amway, was recruited as "the quiet godfather and financial angel of the religious Right".

And finally, as a part of his broader strategy, he structured CCC, both nationally and globally, into a complex network of front and sector organisations. Currently it has 27,000 staff and 225,000 trained volunteers in 190 countries. It operates through some 60 ministries and projects. These include Campus Ministries, Professional Women's Fellowship (once headed by Mary Walker, the chief legal officer of the US Department of the Air Force, removed after her involvement in the torture scandal at Abu Ghraib), Athletes in Action, Christian Embassies, and Military Ministry. One of its best known projects is *The Jesus Film*. Corporately funded, it reportedly has been seen by about four billion people.

CCC has been active in all of the major issues of the new Right agenda: global issues and the new world order, "family values", and education and the role of schools.

From its beginnings CCC saw America not only as a Christian nation but a nation called by God to fulfill its ordained role in world affairs. This belief saw it in action in solidarity with the white minorities in Rhodesia and South Africa, and in Latin America. According to the University of Chicago's seminal work on fundamentalism, CCC saw "itself as recruiting" shock troops "to turn back communism and liberation theology". The other direction it took was into unqualified and unquestioning support for Israel, and denial of the Palestinian existence or rights. As the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ) declared, "The Jewish people have the absolute right to possess and dwell in the Land, including Judea, Samaria, Gaza and Golan".

Bright positioned the CCC within a network of organisations such as ICEJ, the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, Stand for Israel campaigns, fundraising for settlements, and the International Day of Prayer and Solidarity with Israel.

While currently there is considerable debate and disquiet both within the American Jewish community on relations with the Christian Right, and the Christian Right's increasing concern with Sharon's policies, nevertheless the Israeli Government in meetings with evangelical leaders (including the CEO of Hillsong) has promised them land in Israel, and *The Jerusalem Post* has just announced the beginning of a regular edition for evangelical Christians.

Family values are a core issue for the Christian Right and are usually code words for opposition to abortion and homosexuality, and a "vision of family which sees men in control and women

submissive".

These values are reflected in CCC, in their organisational structure with the board made up of 27 men and one woman. *The Godly Business Woman's magazine*, published by CCC has much about "evangelical hospitality" and the "joys of hospitality". Bright was party to the setting up and funding of two organisations which furthered his family ministry; Alliance Defence Fund ("to defend family values ... prolife and antigay") and Promisekeepers (the goal of which was "to restore men's leadership role in the family").

With the family now covered, schools, as the major influence outside the family, became a major focus of CCC. And it is in this context of combating secular humanism and placing God at the centre of education, that CCC has been involved in creationism-Intelligent Design. Sponsoring conferences, endorsing books and producing and distributing ID DVDs are now fairly standard activities of CCC.

In the US, the NCRP noted "the rise of the evangelical Christianity has had a profound impact on American politics".

CCC has and is one of the major players.

In Australia, national days of prayer and thanksgiving, parliamentary prayer breakfasts, moral report cards, attacks on school curricula and school "values", identification of nations as "Christian", well-funded education resources including pro-family and ID resources, and "holy land tours" - all have their origins in the American religious Right.

Organisations on the Right, such as the Institute of Public Affairs, monitor and dissect (frequently with Federal Government funding) what they perceive to be Left-wing religious and community organisations.

Perhaps the time has come for a similar systematic monitoring and understanding of the significance of the religious Right.

Alan Matheson is now retired. He worked in a migration centre in Melbourne for many years, then with the human rights program of the World Council of Churches(Geneva), before returning to work with the ACTU. Alan is a minister of Churches of Christ and has had a long time interest in right wing organisations in Australia, particularly those related to the church. He is currently researching the background on Campus Crusade, the organisation behind the intelligent design debate in Australia.

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