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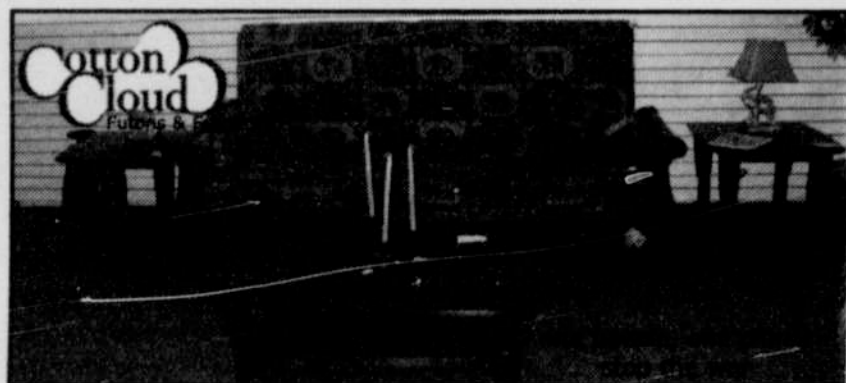
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NATIONAL news

HE IS RISEN

Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority returns with a face-lift

by Allen White

Proving few things are all they're cracked up to be, President Bush's reelection gets him one of the last things he might hope for. Namely, evangelist Jerry Falwell has announced the resurrection of the Moral Majority.

The newly formed Faith and Values Coalition will have his son, Jonathan, as executive director and will be based in Lynchburg, Va. Falwell, 71, said the organization will have three goals: "confirmation of pro-life, strict constructionist U.S. Supreme Court justices and other federal judges; passage of a constitutional Federal Marriage Amendment; and election of another socially, fiscally and politically conservative president in 2008."

Falwell founded the Moral Majority in 1979; at its peak, he claimed an organization of more than 100,000 pastors, priests and rabbis and nearly 7 million families. He once said, "Many historians believe the result was the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 and the genesis of what the media calls the 'religious right.'"

In the November election, Falwell noted, pollsters credit 30 million with voting "their moral convictions," which he translates to mean, "They voted Christian." As national chairman of the new coalition, he said, "I am committed to lending my influence to help send out at least 40 million evangelical voters in 2008."

Falwell added, "We will be organizing in all 50 states and enlisting and training millions of Americans to become partners in this exciting task of bringing this nation back to the moral values of faith and family on which it was founded." He said his newspaper, *The National Liberty Journal*, "will serve as a springboard for this great effort."

For Falwell to give the Moral Majority a face-lift should be no surprise, especially reviewing this past election. If nothing else, he knows full well this rainbow leads to a pot filled with cash, if not gold. That's a sure thing, if he accomplishes nothing else.

While Falwell would appear to be king of the Christians, appearances can be deceiving. In his own analysis, he credited James Dobson of Focus on the Family, Donald Wildmon of the American Family Association, D. James Kennedy of Coral Ridge Ministries, John Hagee of Cornerstone Church in San Antonio and the Internet news site Arlington Group for the "Christian" voter turnout.

Significant is the absence of Pat Robertson, founder of his competing Christian Coalition. For the politically savvy Falwell, this was not an oversight. In 1988 Robertson stole the thunder from Falwell and the Moral Majority with his own bid for president.

Falwell's snub could also be sparked by comments made by Robertson while on a book tour just days before the November election. He implied that Bush told him before the Iraq war that there would be no real U.S. casualties. In a statement released last month in *Newsweek*, Robertson said he called the Bush campaign offering to do damage control. Robertson said: "They told me: 'Don't say anything. Nothing at all.'"

Being told to shut up by Bush operatives is sufficient reason to leave Robertson off Falwell's list. It is also an indication of the conflict between religious radicals. Keeping the lid on the theological infighting could be much more problematic in 2004 than in 1979.

History has shown these guys understand moral values are tied much more to profit than to prayer. Should their financial resources be threatened, this time the public fight by these self-described moral saviors might more resemble jackals fighting for scraps on the Discovery Channel.

The past quarter-century has earned Falwell some seriously negative baggage. As the AIDS crisis emerged in the early '80s, he was a leader in demonizing all infected with the disease. His remarks, and those of allies like Gary Bauer, played a huge role in blocking funds for research and educational efforts to fight the disease.

When they began using God as the hammer on people with AIDS, less than 1,000 had been diagnosed with the disease. As 2004 began, the United Nations and the World Health Organization estimate 37 million adults and 2.5 million children younger than 15 are living with HIV/AIDS.

They estimate 5 million acquired HIV in 2003. Two and a half million adults and half a million children younger than 15 died just last year.

More than 20 years ago, Falwell and his cohorts were blaming gay men for spreading the disease. Today, Americans can look back at the history of this pandemic. Falwell was a leader—like one of the top five people in the world—blocking

efforts to educate and fund even the most basic forms of research.

His goal is 40 million voters in the 2008 election. Today, 40 million people are infected around this world with HIV and AIDS. The statistical irony might give new meaning to the phrase "moral values."

For most reasonable people, nothing quite compares with the total lack of responsibility shown Sept. 13, 2001, when Falwell was a guest on Robertson's *The 700 Club*. He said, "I really believe that the pagans and the abortionists and the feminists and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People for the American Way, all of them who have tried to secularize America—I point the finger in their face and say, 'You helped this happen.'"

What happened was the attack on the World Trade Center.

Who needs enemies, to apply the overused phrase to the Bush White House. In fact, to emphasize the point, Falwell said in his announcement, "Over the past few days, I have been inundated with requests from across America to 'finish what you started 25 years ago.'"

ALLEN WHITE is a San Francisco free-lance writer.



Jerry Falwell enjoying a ride down a water slide, 1987