

Anything But Straight

by Wayne Besen . Contributing Writer

Religion and Republicanism losing converts

In pandering to the fanatical and the fearful — both religion and Republicanism may have compromised their future.

First, the Republican Party seems in an awfully big rush to implode with Rush Limbaugh as its mercurial mouthpiece. The GOP's other savior, Michael Steele, is just a big mouth who seems more suited to Limbaugh's talk show gig than chairman of the party. The GOP's first African-American leader, Steele, promised a "hip hop makeover" that would attract even "one-armed midgets." It is Steele, however, who is the incredibly shrinking chairman, with his promised "Big Tent" turning into a circus act.

This carnival of "conservatives" has led the once-mighty Republican Party to O.J. Simpson-like popularity levels. An NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll recently put Republican approval at just 26 percent, compared to Barack Obama's 68 percent.

The state of the modern GOP was best captured on CNN's "D.L. Hughley Show," when the host interviewed Frank Schaeffer. A former member of the Religious Right and author of "Crazy For God," Schaeffer said the GOP had created a "hard-assed neo fascist kind of direction in America."

He went on to say, "The Republican base is now made up of religious and neoconservative



ideologues and the uneducated white underclass with a token person of color up in front of the TV to obscure the all-white, all reactionary, all backward and there is

no global warming, rube reality."

The Republicans Schaeffer is referring to have lately come out of the woodwork in Utah, where State Sen. Chris Butters called LGBT advocates, "the meanest buggers." A right-wing organization, America Forever, placed full-page ads in the Salt Lake dailies comparing gay men and lesbians to "druggies" and "hookers." Of course, Utah Republicans might know about these things. A new study reveals that the conservative state leads the nation with 5.47 internet pornography subscribers per thousand.

Similar to the Republican Party, religious organizations have catered to the crazies for far too long. The "ex-gay" organization Exodus International is a perfect example. It travels the world to proclaim its "love" for homosexuals. Yet, a board member, Don Schmierer, spoke at a Ugandan conference that pledged to "wipe out" gay practices. Schmierer joined Holocaust revisionist Scott Lively to urge Uganda to continue its persecution of gay people, including life prison sentences for the "crime" of homosexuality.

On March 8, the Vatican defended the excommunication of a nine-year-old Brazilian girl's mother and doctors, who helped abort the pregnant child's twins. The procedure was recommended because delivering these babies

might have killed the 80-pound girl. The local archbishop, Jose Cardoso Sobrinho, justified this despicable decision by saying, "God's law is above any human law."

Such transparently vindictive versions of "love" is why Christianity has lost followers in Europe and is now draining them in the United States. A new survey by researchers at Trinity College in Hartford, Conn., documents that the percentage of Americans identifying as Christians has dropped to 76 percent of the population, down from 86 percent in 1990. Fifteen percent of Americans now say they have no religion at all.

It may be that socially conservative churches and their anti-gay pastors are directly responsible for much of the erosion of Christianity. Sure, their mega-churches may be growing. But, for every new person they attract, they likely turn off 10 others to all religion with their vituperative sermons.

Focus on the Family's "ex-gay" road show, Love Won Out, is a perfect example of how the radicals are ruining the image of Christianity. The conference may lure a few self-loathing dupes who briefly claim they have "prayed away the gay." But, for every temporary convert (it rarely, if ever, lasts a lifetime) they turn off thousands of gay people to all religious belief. How does Focus on the Family justify this as a "win"?

Even as the Religious Right rapidly contracts, conservatives are foolishly demanding that Republicans veer further right. Come to think of it, Rush Limbaugh may be the perfect leader for a party intent on alienating the majority while talking endlessly and aimlessly to itself. ▀

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