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*file Christian
Coalition*

Addendum

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PLAYING THE CATHOLIC CARD

THE CHRISTIAN COALITION'S
POLITICAL STRATEGY

SPECIAL REPORT

Research Portfolio

A NEW RITE:
CONSERVATIVE
CATHOLIC
ORGANIZATIONS
AND THEIR ALLIES

Catholics for a Free Choice

On October 10, 1995, barely a year before the 1996 elections, the Christian Coalition announced a new division to attract Catholic membership. This "fully-owned subsidiary" of the coalition is one more organizing tool in one of the highest-profile political organizing machines around.

While the Christian Coalition already claims a large membership, its clout would grow if it could claim to represent a significant percentage of the largest denomination in the United States, the Roman Catholic Church. "I don't have to do the math for you," says one Catholic ally. "The possibilities are endless."

Ralph Reed, executive director of the Christian Coalition, may have done the math. US Catholics number 60 million, account for almost 30 percent of registered voters, and make themselves both accessible and influential through a huge infrastructure: about 200 dioceses with 20,000 parish churches; 605 hospitals and more than 4,800 social service centers; 235 colleges and universities, 1,350 high schools, and 7,200 grammar schools, which often distribute political materials to parents through their children. Reed has said that the Christian Coalition plans to distribute forty million candidate scorecards in Catholic parishes during 1996. The conversion of the House and Senate from Democratic to Republican majorities already has been ascribed largely to the Christian Coalition. Appealing to Catholics to broaden its reach, the Christian Coalition hopes to go further in 1996.

Apparently anxious to catch the wave of the presidential election cycle, the Christian Coalition launched its Catholic initiative before cementing the project's identity or enlisting significant Catholic leadership in official directive or advisory capacities.

The Christian Coalition almost immediately published a "Catholic Alliance" congressional scorecard with content identical to the coalition's main scorecard, although two Catholic aides soon said future scorecards would cover an overlapping but different set of issues.

That early congressional scorecard also made bold claims from which the Christian Coalition/Catholic Alliance has retreated. "Catholic Alliance is making sure America's 50,000,000 Catholics gain a voice in our government," it said (understating the number of Catholics); the division "represents Catholics" and "provides America's 50 million Catholics with the information and knowledge they need to make sure Catholic voices are heard in government." Catholic bishops disagreed, and the project's executive director now says that "the Catholic Alliance does not pretend to represent all Catholics. Our goal is to galvanize like-minded Catholics."¹ But the Christian Coalition reflects the views of a small minority of US Catholics, polls show: Only 15 percent of US Catholics believe abortion should be illegal in all circumstances; only 17 percent believe homosexuals should not have equal employment rights and opportunities; only 24 percent reject the statement that welfare reform must begin by increasing spending, to fund job training; and only 26 percent view the Christian Coalition and its positions positively.² Perhaps this is why the funfare—and the fears—that attended the Christian Coalition's announcement have gone flat just a few months later.

Still, the current political moment is full of talk about "the Catholic vote." This special report outlines the Christian Coalition's project for commanding as much of that vote as it can.