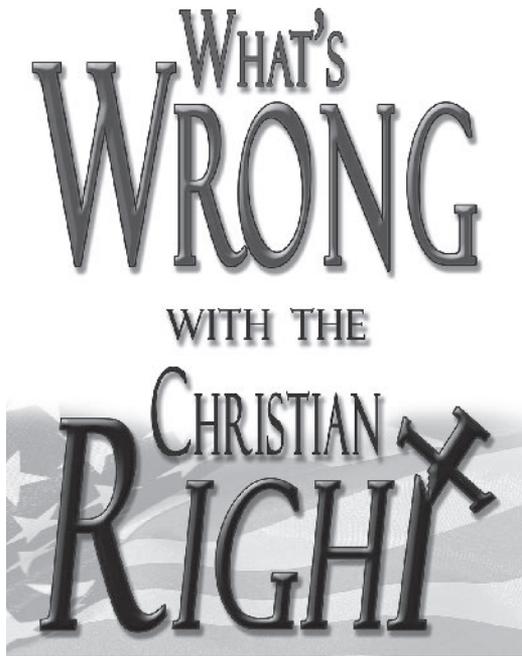


WHAT'S  
WRONG  
WITH THE  
CHRISTIAN  
RIGHTS

The image features a stylized title in a bold, serif font. The text is arranged in five lines: "WHAT'S", "WRONG", "WITH THE", "CHRISTIAN", and "RIGHTS". The word "RIGHTS" is the largest and most prominent, with a large, dark cross symbol superimposed over the letter "S". The background of the text is a faded American flag, showing the stars and stripes. The overall design is clean and impactful, with a strong visual message.



WHAT'S  
WRONG

WITH THE

CHRISTIAN  
~~RIGHT~~

JAN G. LINN

*What's Wrong With The Christian Right*

Copyright © 2004 Jan G. Linn  
All rights reserved.

Bible quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover design: Bob Willbanks  
Interior design: Lynne Condellone

BrownWalker Press  
Boca Raton , Florida  
USA • 2004

ISBN: 1-58112-424-4

[BrownWalker.com](http://BrownWalker.com)

**FOR DAVID POLK**



# CONTENTS

---

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction	1
1 When Enough Becomes Enough	4
2 Who Are They?	9
3 Who Are We?	15
4 Enough of Biblical Abuse	20
5 Enough of Christianizing America	30
6 Enough of Venomous Attacks	40
7 Enough of Baptized Partisan Politics	52
8 Enough of Blind Nationalism	57
9 Enough of Hypocrisy	68
10 Enough of Historical Revisionism	76
11 Enough of the Persecution Complex	85
12 Enough of the Wrong Issues	96
13 The Liberal Christian's Manifesto	127
14 The Future Belongs to Us	142
15 An Unexpected Call for Dialogue	149
Notes	161



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

---

I bear full responsibility for this book. That said, while writing it, I became more acutely aware of my dependence as an author on the encouragement, support, and suggestions of others.

Alice Lundy Blum's enthusiastic response after reading the first draft helped to rekindle my belief that this was a timely and important work to complete. Further, her suggestions added immensely to the quality of the writing and its content. Thanks must also go to Alice's father, Arvid Lundy, who got hooked into reading some of the book while visiting her. He provided an invaluable perspective as a retired scientist from Los Alamos Laboratories. Thanks also to Brenda Lightner for her amazing editorial eye. The positive responses to the material from colleagues Terry Steeden, Alison Roebuck, Mark MacWhorter, Ray Miles, and Gary Hesser also served to keep me at the task until it was finished. Some of them were among those who co-signed the original article about the Christian Right that became the basis for this book.

For the first time in my writing career, this book was a family affair. As has been the case so many times in the past, my wife, Joy, not only helped me to think through what I wanted to say, but in numerous instances she was able to bring

clarity to the material I could not seem to find on my own. Her loving and patient support for my writing life is more than I deserve, but not something taken for granted. But what made this book even more special was that this time son, Jos, and daughter, Krista, got involved. They were raised on a diet of family discussions, debates, and in more than a few instances, outright arguments about religion and politics. Despite the fact that they did not always recognize the wisdom of their father's insights, I took their suggestions quite seriously. Even more, the time spent discussing the chapters is now their father's treasured moments.

I also want to say a word about the cover design. It may be that books cannot and should not be judged by their cover, but in this instance I would hope this one might be. Bob Willbanks has captured the essence of the book. The cover says it all without saying it all. Thanks also needs to go to BrownWalker Press, and Jeff Young in particular, for being open to this arrangement, and for their seeing the value of this work.

Finally, every author should have a David Polk. Before entering into quasi-retirement, David served as editor and encourager for most of my previous books. When in need, you call the person you know will help you. David responded immediately with his professional skills. More than that, he showed an excitement for what he was reading that became infectious. I actually looked forward to the next day's emails full of suggestions for improvement. Writers need someone who believes in them. For many years, and for more than a few of us, David has done his editor's work in a way that has conveyed this message. Working behind the scenes can sometimes see the value of one's labors go unrecognized. Not this time. Thus, the book's dedication.

For a decade, I have watched with growing apprehension the rise to real political influence in our country of a genuinely radical movement known as the religious right wing. This movement, whose lead organization calls itself the Christian Coalition, has a militant ideology—one that encourages deep hostility toward those who disagree with its agenda.

As a political organization, the Christian Coalition has been a great success. It is a textbook example of what a relatively small number of skilled and committed political organizers can accomplish within our democratic system. But with the Christian Coalition, I have a real problem. I consider myself a person of faith. I work very hard at being a Christian. And certainly, the Christian Coalition does not speak for me.

What's more, I am absolutely sure that the Christian Coalition does not speak for the great majority of men and women of faith in this country. And I, for one, am not prepared to stand by and permit Mr. Robertson and his friends to get away with wrapping their harsh right wing views in the banner of religious faith.

*Walter Cronkite*<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

---

Among a wide spectrum of religious and non-religious Americans, there is a unity of alarm, if not outrage, over the public and private assault by the Christian Right on a principle endemic to American democracy: that freedom *of* religion depends upon freedom *from* religion. Often attendant to that assault is a self-righteous and mean-spirited attitude that sees personal attacks on those who disagree with them as a legitimate method of defense for what they believe.

Concern about the Christian Right has waxed and waned since Jerry Falwell founded the now defunct Moral Majority in the late 1970s. But with the increasing degree to which the Christian Right has become a major player in the political life of the nation, the stakes have been raised considerably. What was once thought to be a fringe movement within Christianity has become the dominant Christian voice, with political clout greater than anyone imagined possible twenty-five years ago. It is not enough to shake one's head and wonder how they can say and do what they say and do, and leave it at that. This is a movement whose intentions are not to be ignored.

Who better to do that than Christians themselves? The events of 9/11 awakened the world to the dangers of religious extremism. But most American Christians still find it difficult

## 2 *What's Wrong with the Christian Right?*

to believe Christians are capable of such extremism. The Christian Right is not a terrorist group, of course, but we believe it poses a real and present danger to the kind of free and just society that has come to be America.\* At the same time, we are convinced that most American Christians do not recognize this danger. Because Christianity is the dominant religion in this country, Christians are the ones who should be leading the way in exposing the Christian Right's agenda. But that has not happened on a scale large enough to blunt their efforts. The virtual silence within the Christian community about the rise of the Christian Right is partly responsible for its gaining mainstream status. The reluctance of concerned Christians to be openly and persistently critical of the Christian Right must end. The most effective critics of Jewish and Islamic extremism are those who speak from within those traditions. The same should hold true for Christianity. The most important critics of the Christian Right must be Christians. Silence at a time such as this in the name of love is not virtuous, but shows a lack of discernment about what is happening.

Like most Americans, those of us whose views are expressed in these pages believe the events of 9/11 permanently changed the world and the role of the United States in it. The direction and meaning of the changes this catastrophic event set in motion have yet to become firmly fixed. What we can know, however, is that we must resist attempts to use 9/11 and the war on terrorism to further divide the nation along political and religious ideological lines. We believe such attempts are being made, not least by members of the Christian Right. It seems to us that they are willing to play on people's fears to advance a very narrow agenda to turn the United States into a Christian nation patterned after themselves. Those of us not aligned with them, but who identify ourselves with the Christian tradition, have a special responsibility not to sit on the sidelines and watch them use Christianity as a sword

\*This book is the work of one person whose faith tradition is Christian, but it also reflects the minds and hearts of many others, Christian and non-Christian. For this reason I have chosen to use the plural pronoun "we" throughout the book, except in those few instances where personal experience added important material to the discussion.

against anyone whose views differ from theirs. We will stand with them in protecting their right to believe as they do, but we want them to know that we will also stand against them in their refusal to extend to all others the same privilege and respect.

Even though this is a book written by a Christian about Christians, we believe its message is for all Americans. We who are not hesitant to call ourselves “liberal” Christians (“open-minded”) want non-Christians to know that the Christian Right does not represent what we believe, does not reflect the heart and soul of the Christianity we find in the Bible, and does not speak for us on matters of public policy. We confess that among ourselves we are not of one mind regarding the great issues of our times. But the common denominator within our ranks is the disdain we share for the Christian Right’s agenda and the narrow-mindedness they display in promoting it. It is a good thing that non-Christians are uneasy about the Christian Right’s influence in the political life of this nation. Christian history would suggest Christian extremism has caused much pain and suffering for them. But that is not the whole story. In every generation there have been Christians of strong faith and open minds. Without seeking to be presumptuous, we hope we stand in that tradition.

What follows, then, is an effort to expose the serious dangers the Christian Right poses to the body politic of this nation, using their own words, actions, and attitudes to indict them. Throughout the discussion, we defend liberalism in general, and liberal Christianity in particular, both of which take the brunt of their attacks. Our purpose is a simple one: to educate all Americans about a disturbing group of Christians we know well, for we occupy the same household of faith. In a sense this material consists of the content of a debate within Christian circles on which we invite non-Christians to eavesdrop. Perhaps this will help those outside our tradition to gain a better image of who Christians really are. At the least it will help them to know that, in the public arena, what they often hear as the “Christian” position hardly speaks for all who share that name. We have endeavored to speak in the spirit of peacemakers, but not without candor or passion.

# 1

## WHEN ENOUGH BECOMES ENOUGH

---

In an October 6, 2002, interview on *60 Minutes*, Jerry Falwell was asked by Bob Simon, “You wrote an approving piece recently about a book called *Unveiling Islam*, And the authors of that book wrote, ‘The Muslim who commits acts of violence in jihad does so with the approval of Mohammed.’ Do you believe that?”

“I do,” Falwell answered. “I think Mohammed was a terrorist. He—I read enough of the history of his life written by both Muslims and, and non-Muslims—that he was a, a violent man, a man of war.”

“So, in the same way that Moses provided the ultimate example for the Jews and same way that Jesus provided the ultimate example for Christians, Mohammed provided the ultimate example for Muslims and he was a terrorist?” Simon responded.

“In my opinion,” Falwell answered. “And I do believe that Jesus set the example for love, as did Moses. And I think that Mohammed set an opposite example.”

In response to Falwell’s comments, the article below appeared in the Saturday, October 19 edition of the Minneapolis *Star-Tribune*. From that point it took on a life of its own. It apparently touched a nerve among liberal Christians around the world. We hope it will continue to do so.

*Jerry Falwell and His Christian Right  
Have It Wrong*

Enough is enough. When Jerry Falwell declares on national television (*60 Minutes*, Oct.6, 2002) that Muhammad was a terrorist and Christians believe there will be no peace in Jerusalem until the second coming of Jesus, the time for silence on such religious arrogance is over. Put bluntly, the Christian Right Falwell represents is neither—neither Christian, nor “right.”

It is not Christian in attitude and actions because both represent what Jesus spoke and acted against. The Christian Right are the Pharisees of today’s Christianity. They play the role of moral and thought police who condemn to hell anyone whose actions they consider wrong and whose views are different from their own. Their religiosity runs a mile wide but their spirituality seems to be an inch deep.

The Christian Right is not right because it is intellectually dishonest. Falwell speaks as if he knows the Bible when what he actually knows is that which he already believes and imposes on the Bible. He doesn’t interpret the Book of Revelation which he claims is the basis for his views on the Middle East, the fate of the world, the second coming of Jesus, and just about anything else he says he believes. Instead, he espouses the views of a man named John Darby whose interpretation of Revelation was popularized by the Scofield Bible in the nineteenth century. That’s where Falwell and his Christian Right still live—in the nineteenth century when a triumphal Christianity preached a message of oppressive legalism.

The news media love to put Falwell and his kind on national television because it creates conflict. It also makes Christianity look bad. Through the years we have tried to ignore this man and others like him who are an embarrassment to many of us who claim the Christian tradition as our own. But their views have won a large following among Christians who either refuse to think for themselves or who have been duped into believing Christian Right leaders speak from understanding. They don’t. Their views represent religious prejudice that draws lines in

## 6 *What's Wrong with the Christian Right?*

the sand that separate people into opposing camps and sows the seeds of hatred, suspicion, and war.

Those of us who are the Christians the Christian Right loves to hate have been silent for too long. In the name of tolerance we have allowed Christianity's most radical believers to turn faith into a cover for self-righteousness and love into a sword for divisiveness. It is little wonder that Christianity is in decline in America. In our view the Christian Right gives new meaning to Gandhi's comment that he might have become a Christian had he not known so many.

We confess that we have been timid to say openly that the way the Christian Right reads the Bible has at the least no credibility and at worst is patently dishonest. The moment anyone declares "The Bible says..." they are misrepresenting truth. The Bible doesn't "say" anything. Every translation is an interpretation and every preacher is an interpreter of that interpretation. So what we say the Bible says is what we have interpreted the Bible to say. To pretend otherwise is to claim knowledge not even the biblical writers claim for themselves. Even more, it ignores what any good biblical student should know, namely, that in the Bible itself there are contrasting interpretations of the ways of God, as for example the Book of Job's rejection of the Deuteronomic ethic that claims God rewards the faithful and punishes the unfaithful.

We believe the Christian Right has every right to disagree with us. They have every right to believe we are misguided in what we believe. What they do not have the right to do is to speak as if they speak for God. They do not have the right to presume that their minds are not subject to the fallibility that inflicts the rest of us. They do not have the right to claim that their views represent true Christianity and any other is condemned by God.

Americans believe all people have a right to their views. We couldn't agree more. Sadly and tragically, the Christian Right does not. That is why enough is enough!<sup>1</sup>

Those of us who submitted the original Falwell article expected to be excoriated by the Christian Right. What we did not expect was a steady stream, at times a river, of positive

responses via emails, personal letters, and telephone calls. Clearly our statement had struck a harmonious chord in more than a few Christians. Here is a sampling of the positive reactions.

Could you hear us shouting “Amen!” from our rooftop last Saturday after reading your article? Thank you for articulating so perfectly what is in our hearts and minds. For some reason, we seem to be intimidated by the Christian right and do not often enough speak our minds. This was a wake-up call that may embolden and inspire us.

+ + +

I have just read your editorial in the *Star Tribune*, dated October 19, and I just want to thank you and your collaborators for saying, in such a public way, what I and many of my family and friends have said over and over again. It seems like many in the media, politics, and other public realms turn to people like Falwell for the “Christian perspective,” when, in fact, there is no such thing. We have a huge spectrum of ideas and opinions and beliefs within the umbrella of the Christian tradition, and I’m glad that you shared that with the public.

+ + +

Thanks for your trenchant message regarding Jerry Falwell and his exegesis. I’m afraid his hermeneutics carry the day in the White House and Congress these days, but it’s good to see that the spirit of Christ yet lives.

We did receive negative emails and letters, and more than a few phone calls. But the surprise was the overwhelming percentage of positive responses, some coming from as far away as England, Norway, and Nepal. It is clear that there is a deep and wide level of frustration with the Christian Right that needs to be voiced—that more Christians than we had realized feel disenfranchised by their own faith tradition, tolerating extremism without embracing it, but frustrated that

## 8 *What's Wrong with the Christian Right?*

it is the primary public voice of Christianity today. A simple statement in a public venue gave them a voice. In turn, their heartening reaction made us realize that we were not the only Christians in America who had had enough of Falwell and the Christian Right. Thus, this book was born.

## 2

# WHO ARE THEY?

---

As frustrating as Falwell's public comments are, he is a lightning rod for a much larger group of radical Christians called the Christian Right. But if you believe right-wing writer Ann Coulter, the Christian Right doesn't really exist—except in the minds of liberals.

Like all propagandists, liberals create mythical enemies to justify their own viciousness and advance their agenda. There is no bogeyman that strikes greater terror in the left than the apocryphal "religious right." The very phrase is a meaningless concept, an inverted construct of the left's own Marquis de Sade lifestyle. It functions as a talismanic utterance to rally the faithful against anyone who disagrees with the well-organized conspiratorial left.<sup>1</sup>

We shall have more to say about Coulter's invective writings later, but we admit that on one level what she says about the "religious right" is probably more correct than even she realizes. The "religious right" is made up of political ultra-conservatives that happen to be religious. As liberal Christians we have no quarrel with such people, although we certainly disagree with them. Religious or political conservatives are not the object of our concern. No, our quarrel is with the "Christian Right" who

apparently don't know they don't exist. They believe themselves to be very real and with a very clear agenda for promoting their political views in the name of their religion and trying to legislate their religious beliefs. Pat Robertson wrote, for example:

The Christian Coalition is launching an effort in selected states to become acquainted with the registered voters in every precinct. This is slow, hard work. But it will build a significant database to use to communicate with those people who are regular voters. When they are mobilized in support of vital issues, elected officials will listen...We must rebuild the foundation of a free, sovereign America from the grassroots, precinct by precinct, city by city, and state by state...

My goal is to see a pro-freedom majority in the United States Senate in 1992, and a reversal of leadership in the House of Representatives in 1996. My associates are now publishing a newspaper called the *Christian American*, which is slated for a circulation of ten million during this decade. Since in most congressional or senatorial elections a five percent swing in the vote means victory or defeat, the power of the concept of a free, sovereign America is so strong that, if properly presented, it can sweep the one worlders out of contention in the public policy arena in a short time.<sup>2</sup>

This sounds like a real group of people to us, and makes us wonder why Coulter's "research" didn't uncover them for her. At any rate, if these were simply Pat Robertson groupies, as Coulter believes, with conservative political views, our concerns would be bogus. But this is not the case. The Christian Right is comprised of highly organized, well-financed groups of radicals who insist that they alone are "real" Christians. While these different Christian Right groups compete among themselves for attention, money, and power, they are united in their efforts to label liberals as unAmerican and anti-God. The arrogance of their claims is what we find offensive and dangerous.

We, therefore, beg to differ with the notion that the Christian Right is the brainchild of liberals who want to beat up on conservative Christians. They are in fact people who are well known, people of wealth, power, and influence. Indeed, members of the Christian Right are the movers and shakers in American life today. They are religious leaders such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, James Dobson, and James Kennedy. They are also political leaders such as Attorney General John Ashcroft, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, Assistant Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert, Majority Whip Roy Blunt, Oklahoma Senator James Inhofe, and Alabama leaders Bob Riley, William Pryor, and Roy Moore—the current Governor, Attorney General, and Chief Justice respectively—all of whom have been in the news for various reasons,<sup>3</sup> and Phyliss Schlafly, whose views are as radical as anyone among the Christian Right.<sup>4</sup> There are numerous others. In fact, in 2002, 178 members of the House of Representatives identified themselves with the Christian Right.<sup>5</sup>

The most prominent Christian Right politician in America today is President George Bush. An acknowledged “born again” Christian, Mr. Bush does not demonstrate the kind of venomous spirit in attacking liberal Christians that is ubiquitous among other Christian Right leaders. Nevertheless, his policies and public statements support the Christian Right’s agenda about the kind of government we should have and what role America should play in world affairs. For example, Mr. Bush wants tax dollars used to support faith-based initiatives among Christian groups that discriminate against people who do not share their religious or moral views. When given the opportunity he has nominated and appointed people to the federal bench who are openly members of the Christian Right. These names come to mind: William Pryor, previously mentioned, who once wrote, “God has chosen through his son, Jesus Christ, this time and this place for all Christians...to save our country and save our courts;”<sup>6</sup> James Leon Holmes, former president of the Arkansas Right to Life, who said, “the wife is to subordinate herself to her husband;”<sup>7</sup> and Priscilla Owen, the Texas justice who once told a teenage minor she needed to prove she understood religious objections to abortion.<sup>8</sup>

What the Christian Right has come to realize is that politicians come and go, but justices are forever. If you want to change the nature of the American experience, you get justices appointed at every level. Mr. Bush seems quite willing to do all he can to enact this portion of the agenda for reshaping America into their image.

Perhaps even more revealing, Mr. Bush has made public statements that leave little doubt about how he views his own job and the role America must play in the world. In a conversation with Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, he said,

God told me to strike at Al-Qaida and I struck them, and then he instructed me to strike at Saddam, which I did, and now I am determined to solve the problem in the Middle East. If you help me, I will act, and if not, the elections will come and I will have to focus on them.<sup>9</sup>

We see nothing wrong with Mr. Bush or any other political leader claiming to be a “born again” Christian, though we do admit it makes us very nervous when he claims his actions are based on God telling him what to do. Most troubling, however, is the fact that the Christian Right claims him as one of their own, and he seems to welcome it. In his book, *Persecution: How Liberals Are Waging War Against Christianity*, about which we will have much more to say later, David Limbaugh characterizes criticism of Bush and his policies as an attack on Bush’s attempt to put his faith in action. In an extended section defending him, Limbaugh concludes,

Christians cannot and should not build a firewall between their private lives and their public persona, between their Christianity and their governance. It is impossible for anyone, including the president, to separate his belief system, his worldview, from his public life.”<sup>10</sup>

His statement suggests that Mr. Bush is simply living out his faith. That is too simplistic. When the most powerful man in the world says he is being led by God to do what he does, it

is much more than saying he is trying to live his faith. He is implying that to disagree with his decisions is to disagree with God. Moreover, what Limbaugh and the Christian Right ignore is the fact that Muslim terrorists whom they believe are the epitome of evil also claim to be serving God. Excessive radicalism can cut many ways. That one is a Christian does not justify political policies. Fundamentalist theology exists in Judaism and Islam as well as Christianity.

This is not to say that all fundamentalists are members of the Christian Right. Many are not. Moreover, some of them, especially within academic institutions, have views that reflect both humility and open-mindedness,<sup>11</sup> neither of which the Christian Right can be accused of demonstrating. More to the point, what distinguishes the Christian Right from other Christian fundamentalists is that its members *immerse their ultra-conservative political views and agenda in Christian baptism*. They do not hesitate labeling anyone who disagrees with them as immoral and anti-Christian. This is done openly and in subtle ways, and is present in and through all their words and actions. It, in fact, drives them. They thrive on having an enemy who must be vanquished.

This is what sets the Christian Right apart. Political activism by Christians is not a new or bad thing. What makes the Christian Right who they are is their exclusive claim to being Christian and following Christian morality. In making this claim they also demonize anyone whose views challenge theirs. In their world disagreement makes for enemies. Liberals are particularly that enemy. They are the people the Christian Right loves to hate. And that is not too strong a word to use when talking about the Christian Right. They speak of "hating the sin but loving the sinner," but fail miserably in their effort, if in fact they make any effort at all. They believe they are right because they are Christian and, therefore, have a corner on truth that is available to no one else. They hide their prejudice and close-mindedness behind a thin veil of religious slogans and Bible quotes that tell everything about them but nothing about the truth they claim to be espousing.

It's not that those who disagree with the Christian Right are always right on issues. What distinguishes us is that we

do not believe God is on *our* side in our disagreements, or that *we alone* know the mind of God when it comes to complex issues. We do not call our opponents “godless” conservatives. We do not believe God is going to send them to “hell.” We are willing, instead, to keep the debate on a human level and leave God out of it. We think that over the centuries Christians have done enough damage naming the enemies of God without our adding to it.

The Christian Right, of course, will have none of this. They are determined to drag God and the Bible into every comment they make about their enemies. We believe they are doing great damage to the nation and to Christianity. Non-Christians do not make the kinds of distinctions between Christians that we make among ourselves. Instead, they judge us by our public face, much the way Christians draw conclusions about other faith traditions. It distresses us that what non-Christians think of all Christians is in large part determined by what they hear from Christianity’s loudest voice today, the Christian Right. But even more sobering is the danger the Christian Right poses to the enduring principles of this nation. They are convinced this is a Christian nation and are, therefore, working hard to transform our present form of government into a Christian state. We will show that to achieve this goal they have adopted an ethic of “ends justifying means.” It is very troubling that a group of people who claim to be the only genuine Christians, and also the only true people of God, act this way. At the very least it requires those of us who claim to be of the same faith tradition to challenge what the Christian Right stands for and what it seeks to do.

Given who they are, it is little wonder they scare non-Christians. Truth be told, they scare other Christians! But not enough to keep us quiet.