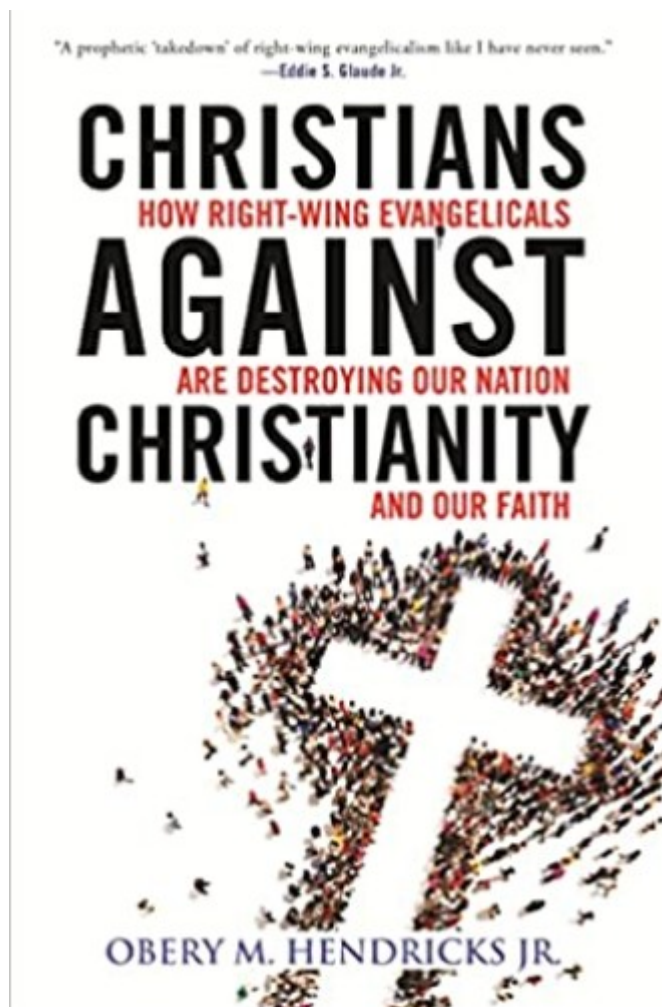


Obery Hendricks condemns the sins of right-wing evangelicalism

If his book were a trial, the verdict would be clear: guilty.

by [Martin Thielen](#) in the [March 23, 2022](#) issue

In Review



Christians against Christianity

How Right-Wing Evangelicals Are Destroying Our Nation and Our Faith

By Obery M. Hendricks Jr

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Eddie Glaude describes *Christians against Christianity* as “a prophetic ‘takedown’ of right-wing evangelicalism like I have never seen before.” Brittney Cooper describes it as the “prophetic troublemaking and truth-telling” of “a righteous rabble-rouser.” Michael Eric Dyson says, “This book is pure fire!” The fiery prophetic tone that these scholars identify is a strength of the book. But it’s also a limitation.

The book has the feel of a courtroom trial. The defendants are right-wing evangelicals, and they are charged with the crime of “destroying our nation and our faith.” The fiery prophetic prosecutor is Obery Hendricks, an ordained elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and a biblical scholar who teaches at Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary. His opening argument can be found in the first five sentences of the book:

A travesty. That’s how I would characterize Christianity in America today. A travesty, a brutal sham, a tragic charade, a cynical deceit. Why? Because the loudest voices in American Christianity today—those of right-wing evangelicals—shamelessly spew a putrid stew of religious ignorance and political venom that is poisoning our society, making a mockery of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Hendricks then lays out the prosecution’s case: eight biblically based, historically documented, and contemporarily illustrated accusations against the defendants. He provides unrelenting and damning exhibits of evidence that the defendants are corrupting Christianity and doing immeasurable damage to America.

Exhibit A: Right-wing evangelicals worship false gods, including Christian nationalism and partisan politics. Hendricks is especially disgusted with their unwavering support for Donald Trump, who “has perhaps debased Christianity in America more than anyone before him.”

Exhibit B: Right-wing evangelicals foster racism. Hendricks finds that White supremacist presumptions and Christian nationalism underpin powerful evangelical groups, including the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council, and the Values Voter Summit.

Exhibit C: Right-wing evangelicals reject social justice. They falsely assert that “social justice presents an onslaught of dangerous, false teachings that threaten the gospel,” Hendricks writes, in order to ignore the Bible’s pervasive call for systems and actions that foster the common good.

Exhibit D: Right-wing evangelicals enable hatred of gay people. After examining the biblical passages that are generally used to name homosexuality as a sin, Hendricks concludes that they “are simply too ambiguous, and the supporting evidence too slim” to condemn same-sex relationships. Such condemnation is not only unbiblical; it leads to anti-Christian behavior: “Nothing gives anyone the right to make gay men and women objects of hatred, ridicule, violence, and exclusion. . . . No one can demonize homosexual people and follow the teachings of Jesus Christ too.”

Exhibit E: Right-wing evangelicals dehumanize immigrants and Muslims. They quote the Bible selectively, hiding the fact that “extending hospitality to immigrants is one of the Bible’s highest ethics,” Hendricks asserts. Religious right leaders also “parrot corrosive anti-Muslim rhetoric, spewing avalanches of anti-Islamic malevolence.”

Exhibit F: Right-wing evangelicals are hypocritical in their stance on abortion. Hendricks writes, “If evangelicals were really ‘pro-life’ and not just obsessed with the unborn, they would be similarly filled with righteous indignation over the massive social injustices that bedevil our nation and our world.” In related arguments, Hendricks critiques right-wing evangelicals for supporting gun ownership and allying with the National Rifle Association (exhibit G) and for opposing social welfare programs and organized labor movements (exhibit H).

Hendricks structures his closing argument around a question: How can right-wing evangelicals openly support positions “that are essentially antithetical to the message of Jesus Christ?” His answer is that “they have succumbed to . . . the spirit of the antichrist.” He’s not talking about the beast that appears in Revelation, but rather an ideology “that cynically distorts the teachings of Christ—in the name of Christ—to serve their selfish interests.” This ideology reached its climax when evangelicals made “a devil’s bargain with Donald Trump to defend his avalanche of lies, hate mongering, blatant moral indecency, and outright attacks on the democratic rule of law in return for his support of their agenda to dominate American society. For this they chose to ignore all that Jesus has taught.”

The stakes of right-wing evangelicals' bargain with the devil extend far beyond church walls, Hendricks writes. "In God's name they have visited upon our nation a plague of lies, a harvest of hate, the rotted fruit of unchecked corruption and moral chaos." He concludes his book with the accusation of Jesus, "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me," and the condemnation of Paul, "For such people do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded."

Hendricks lays out a compelling case. If this were a trial, conscientious jurors would be hard-pressed to come up with any verdict other than guilty. But *Christians against Christianity* speaks to a limited audience. Right-wing evangelical leaders are not going to read—or heed—this book. Hendricks doesn't attempt to find common ground with evangelicals or invite them into dialogue. Why? Because he believes "these people will not change. They are comfortable with their evil." Although he still believes that a few rank-and-file evangelicals might see the light, he writes that "for the vast majority of the leaders of right-wing evangelicalism, I harbor no such hopes."

As a former evangelical clergyperson who once worked at the national headquarters of the largest evangelical denomination in America, I confess, with overwhelming sadness, that I mostly concur with Hendricks's tragic assessment. But it leaves unanswered a crucial question: What can Christians do about right-wing evangelicalism in America? This question has no easy answers. Hendricks demonstrates a good first step—naming and condemning the problem. He leaves it up to readers to discern where to go from there.