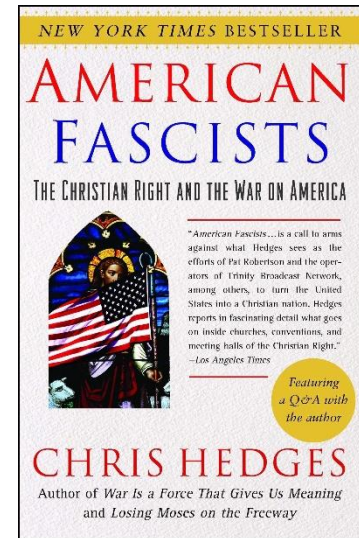


A Clarion Call to Resistance  
a review of

# American Fascists:

The Christian Right and the War on America  
By Chris Hedges (2006)



Renowned renegade author and interviewer Chris Hedges has long called for a principled resistance against US militarism, corporatism, and the forces of fascism. So I decided to see check out what our predicament looked like 16 years ago versus today. Back then the disillusionment from decades of escalating economic inequality was propelling the rightwing Christian fundamentalism of the televangelists.

Today the severe political consequences are the raw open wounds known as the cultural wars, fueling the political gridlock that sustains militarism and corporatism. Now it's not only totalitarian-like tactics and doctrines from the Right, in a religious setting, but also a similar reaction from the Left, in a secular setting, often referred to as "cancel culture".

The fundamental paradox remains: "If we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them". But should we "consider incitement to intolerance and persecution as criminal" (p 1)? Or, how should we respond to those false prophets who "ask us to hand over our moral choice and responsibility to them" (p 9)?

In traditional liberal Christianity "our faith saved us from despair, self-righteousness, and the dangerous belief that we knew the will of

God or could carry it out” ... “We took the Bible seriously and therefore not literally” (p 2). No so for the fundamentalist preachers who feed off the despair of those desperately seeking salvation in a cruel world. The consequence for ministers is that “silent complicity with apocalyptic rhetoric becomes collusion with plans for religiously inspired genocide” (p 6).

And we all need to know that “human kindness is deeply subversive of totalitarian creeds” (p 8). Also, “there are times when taking a moral stance, perhaps the highest form of patriotism, means facing down the community, even the nation”. What we are up against is the dominionism which “calls on the radical church to take political power”. According to Robert Paxton “it shares many prominent features with classical fascist movements” ... such as “preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood” (p 10).

Paxton adds to this plus “redemptive violence” and “internal cleansing”, yielding “a strident call for moral and physical supremacy of a master race, in this case American Christians” ... “denying the validity of stories other than their own” (p 11). “Old definitions are replaced by new ones. Code words of the old belief systems are deconstructed and assigned diametrically opposed meanings” (p 14). For example, “liberty, in a linguistic twist worthy of George Orwell, means theocratic tyranny” (p 15).

I find it significant that linguistic weaponization is also being used today in critical race theory, where attempts are made to redefine “racism” and “white supremacy” so that these racial slurs can be applied to more people or practices. As an example of meaning inversion, the word “accountable” in groups is redefined so that whites are deemed accountable to tiny subgroups of woke blacks, who are accountable only to themselves, transforming democratic rule into oligarchical rule, yielding power plays of censorship, cancel culture, and bureaucratic expansion. This is all in the name of racial justice, just as the Christian

Right claims the mantle of Jesus, but in both cases its is a perversion, a corruption.

For the Christian Right “the moral calculus no longer revolves around the concept of universal human rights” (p 17). “Extremists, while clamoring for liberty and toleration while they were in opposition, turn very authoritarian when they reach power” (p 20). Walmart is a huge corporate backer for the religious right, which has also seized control of the Republican Party. The wall between church and state is already being disassembled in the arena of social service grants. Meanwhile “the Christian Right and radical Islamists, although locked in a holy war, increasingly mirror each other” (p 24). The “seat of Satan is no longer in the Kremlin” ... It’s now “secular humanism” (p 27).

“The Christian Right is deeply involved in building America’s first modern mercenary army” – Erik Prince’s Blackwater (p 29). Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson sanction pre-emptive nuclear strikes (p 35). Such “leaders grasp the endemic hollowness, timidity, and hypocrisy of the liberal churches” (p 37), as “their communities, families, and lives splintered and self-destructed” (p 38). Religious believers have responded by abandoning “their trust and belief in the world of science, law, and rationality” and converting to a “world of magic” (p 39).

Hedges also shows how citizens are “converted” into these rightwing ministries and why they succeed. The success, of course, comes from decades of escalating inequality, especially the loss of good union jobs and of stable families. Due to de-industrialization “Ohio, seething, has more white nationalist groups than any other state in the Midwest” (p 47). Then “the most important tool in winning a convert to Christ: becoming a friend” (p 53). But it quickly becomes more aggressive: “Conversion is a form of sexual warfare, a form of seduction, finally a form of physical conquest” ... coming “with layers of deception ... false friendships and crooked testimonies” (p 55).

It starts with “love-bombing”, creating a false euphoria, then many church activities, “but the warmth and embrace soon brings new rules”

and the possibility of a sinful “backsliding”, such as Doubt or Questioning (p 57). Submission to the church and its spiritual elitism soon causes the “destruction of old communities and friendships” (p 58). “Their hope lies not in the real world but in this new world of miracles” and purity (p 59). Those in crisis – the most vulnerable – are targeted. “Belief systems that preach a utopian and unachievable ideal” ensure “feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, guilt, and self-loathing” (p 64).

“The hypermasculinity of radical Christian conservatism ... is a way for the men in the movement to compensate for the curtailing of their own independence” (p 81). “The movement, to compensate for the loss of personal power and submission, fosters a warrior cult” projecting its dreams “for power through the leader” (p 82), reflecting a “deep dread of ambiguity, disorder, and chaos” (p 83), fearing romantic love as a strong competitor to its own control (p 86). “It permits followers to kill in the name of God” (p 87). Starting with “family values”, ... “they use this structure power to control the family, the church, then the nation” (p 89)

“This is the genius of totalitarian movements. They convince the masses to agitate for their own incarceration” (p 150). “The heart of the Christian religion, all that is good and compassionate within it, has been tossed aside, ruthlessly gouged out ... In its name they kill it” (p 168). The renowned professor of ethics, James Luther Adams, had escaped from Nazi Germany and understood how Nazism would emerge in the US: “We will all end up fighting the Christian Fascists” because their goal is a “global Christian empire”, not unlike Hitler’s world Aryan domination (p 197).

“Adams had seen how the mask of religion hides irreligion” and “liberals did not understand the power and allure of evil or the reality of how the world worked” (p 199). Watch closely, “for radical movements expose their own intentions and goals by tarring their enemies with their own nefarious motives” (p 200). Today, on the Right Trump has been a perfect illustration of this, such as with his vote fraud conspiracy theory.

On the Left, James Lindsay describes the how “Iron Law of Woke Projection” works the same way. Similarly, debate with either the Christian Right and the Woke is useless, demonstrating the pseudo-religious / totalitarian nature of both.

In conclusion, Hedges calls us to proclaim our “humility before the unknowable ... makes possible self-criticism, self-awareness, self-possession, and self-reflection. This makes possible compassion and acts of kindness” (p 210).