

From where I stand, it seems that the poor who will be most affected by these budget cuts have no political voice with which to protest them and the rich can hardly be expected to object since they are benefiting from them.

That leaves only the Christians -- the pastors and the bishops and the Religious Right -- who worked so hard to put this administration into office, to require that the rest of the Christian agenda finally be faced. Otherwise, forget the prayer in schools, the definition of marriage, or the fight against abortion. We lost the Christianity of this Christian nation a long time ago.

*—By Joan Chittister, OSB – Founder and executive director of Benetvision.*

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## The Progressive Christian Witness

*A Ministry of Pacific School of Religion*

*The Progressive Christian Witness: A Ministry of Pacific School of Religion*, [www.progressivechristianwitness.org](http://www.progressivechristianwitness.org), aims to strengthen the voices of progressive Christianity in the public square by publishing theologically grounded resources -- brief articles like this one and longer essays -- for laypeople and pastors on significant issues in American life. Contact us at [pcw@psr.edu](mailto:pcw@psr.edu) or 800/999-0528.

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## IS THIS KIND OF CHRISTIANITY CHRISTIAN?

**T**HE PROBLEM WITH THE POLITICAL AGENDA of the Radical Right is not that they're wrong. Who isn't concerned about the so-called "moral values" on which this last presidential election is said to have hinged.

I understand the so-called "conservative" agenda. I even share its concerns. They are real and they are important. But they are also incomplete -- which is why I doubt that, as they are being framed right now, they are either "right" or "religious." The agenda is simply too narrow, too concentrated on issues around human sexuality alone, and too self-centered to be the agenda that drove Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem curing lepers, feeding the hungry and raising the dead to life.

Anyone has the right, of course, to privatize religion and call that "Christianity." But no one has the right, in a nation based on the separation of church and state, to impose it on everyone else. After all, while some people are getting a patent on their definition of Christianity, the rest of the Christian agenda may well pass us by. If we're going to create a party platform on "Christian" values, we ought to at least ask whose Christianity we are selling -- and how.

There are many Christian churches, for instance, that oppose abortion on demand but leave room in their moral pantheon for therapeutic abortions. Some

religions, in some circumstances, would even require it.

School prayer, one of the icons of the movement, sounds very good in principle. But in a nation now decisively pluralistic, whose population is now more Buddhist, more Hindu, more Muslim, more Jewish than ever before in history -- and each of them getting larger every day -- whose prayer shall it be?

From 1990-2000 devotees of Islam in the United States rose 109 percent, of Buddhism 170 percent, of Hinduism 273 percent and of Christianity 5 percent.

Do Christians of the radical right really want their grandchildren reading from the Koran or the Vedas or the Flower Sutras for morning prayer? And if not, what will those same Christians do when school boards under different ethnic influences require them? Will they declare that minority schools in ethnic areas must use the Christian scriptures to satisfy our definition of God because this nation was settled, founded, incorporated by Christians over 200 years ago?

Obviously, there is a difference between questions of personal faith and questions of public politics.

But politics do touch on the rest of the Christian value system, if not in its speeches, certainly in its budget. Here politics and morals become one, are public, are universal, are not amenable to individual choice.

National budgets are a nation's theology walking.

In an era in which we call poverty "low-income" and

hunger "lack of food security," the number of poor, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, is increasing and the number of hungry in the richest country in the world has been rising steadily for four years. To pay for a war we should never have fought -- at least not for the reasons they gave us -- this budget is slashing domestic programs.

The budget of this Christian presidency cuts food stamps. It reduces support for subsidized housing. It suggests pillaging Social Security. It reduces environmental enforcement programs and scientific research in a scientific age. It even reduces veterans' health benefits.

Clearly, the country is in danger of going the way of all oligarchies; power and wealth are sucked to the top, while those on the bottom bleed. We can call it "Christian" as it collapses.

And all the while, we watch more food lines forming, more homeless on the streets, more environmental degradation and more of the elderly living destitute lives.

More than that, according to the budget analysis done by Bread for the World, ([www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org)) while we honor our tax breaks to the rich in this country, we are not keeping our promise to fight HIV/AIDS around the world or to support the Third World development programs that might really make us secure in the future.