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## *Theocracy Alert*

### Targeted by the Traditional Values Coalition

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April 25, 2005—About 6 A.M. last Thursday, I checked the e-mail. There were more than a few with odd titles and from address I didn't recognize. I left them for later and began the daily media run: CNN, New York Times, LA Times and, of course, the web sites of several evangelical Christian lobbying organizations to see what new propaganda they were floating.

When I visited the Traditional Values Coalition [site](#), the title of the lead story caught my eye: "Leftist Web Site Writer Blasts Traditional Values Coalition." That looked interesting, so I read the blurb: "Homosexual activist and tenured Penn State Professor Mel Seesholtz sees Traditional Values Coalition and other religious organizations as a major threat to freedom in the United States. Seesholtz is a contributing writer for 'Online Journal,' a 'progressive' web site (progressive is a leftist code word for socialist)." The [article](#) was also the featured title in the Rev. Louis Sheldon's e-mail newsletter transmitted on April 20, Hitler's birthday.

"Leftist." Virtually everything is "left" of Sheldon's and the TVC's theofascist political ideology. "Progressive" as a "code word" for socialist? In the eleventh edition of Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, "progressive" is defined as "of, relating to, or characterized by progress; making use of or interested in new ideas, findings, or opportunities." Sheldon and the TVC fear social change and new ideas, so it's understandable the word "progressive" upsets them. In a political context "progressive" refers to "one believing in moderate political change and especially social improvement by governmental action." Sheldon and the TVC have enthusiastically supported any and all "governmental action" against gay and lesbian Americans and [jurists](#) whose decisions they didn't like. They claim such moves are "social improvement." Would their own definition of "progressive" make Sheldon and the TVC code red socialists? They're not of course, and neither is "progressive" a "leftist code word for socialist."

"Homosexual activist." I guess if you advocate equal civil rights for *all* citizens, that's makes you a "homosexual activist." The labeling is familiar. Caucasians who advocated equal [civil rights](#) for African Americans were once called "N - - - - lovers" and damned by those clutching their Bibles and, like Sheldon, claiming to speak for "God." I can live with that.

The TVC article was short, citing only one of the five pieces I've written for Online Journal and one of the three for Counterbias.com. It concluded with "Pray for Mel Seesholtz. If you wish to contact him, his email address is: [xxx]@psu.edu. Please be polite but don't expect a polite response."

My initial thought was, "Well, I must be doing something right if Sheldon and the TVC are after me!" Then I recognized the devious nature of the attack. It was inappropriate—at best—for TVC to list my professional e-mail address, emphasize my employer, and provide the "Mel Seesholtz" link to my colleagues' names and e-mail addresses when they had absolutely *nothing* to do with my writing. But the tactic was transparent: get "the flock" to pressure the university to silence me or take punitive action against me. As New York Times writer Paul Krugman noted in an April 5, [column](#), "political pressure [by conservative Christian groups] will nonetheless have a chilling effect on scholarship. And that, of course, is its purpose."

The “don’t expect a polite response” was typical of TVC’s boorish character assassinations of anyone who dares to publicly challenge them.

As for those messages in my in-box, reading them—and the multitude that followed—provided invaluable insight into the “minds” of those who embrace Sheldon’s and the TVC’s perversion of Christianity and unholy march toward theocracy. But more importantly, reading the e-mails confirmed what I’d suspected: more and more people inside and outside the “religious community” are getting fed up with Sheldon’s rhetoric of hate and specious arguments, lessons he himself hopefully learned when he fell flat on his face in the recent [debate](#) with Evan Wolfson at Stanford University.

A polite (albeit often brief) reply was sent to the authors of even the most disgusting, hate-filled e-mails I received from TVC “Christians,” including this depraved, grammatically-challenged one: “Why dont you catch aides and die,you pervert. One question..When queers make out,do they butt-fuck,or suck dick first??”

Persistent in his wanton perversion, “Don” sent a follow-up message a day or so later: “Yoy didn't answer the question. . . . After your ‘lover’ sodomizes you,do you at least wash him off before you go down on him???”

I’ll spare you the other, even more disgusting messages from so-called “traditional values Christians” who echoed Don’s vile bile, but I do want to share others.

Many did as asked: they “politely”—and unctuously—prayed for me:

Dear Prof: I have only one thing to say to you. When judgement day comes and God asks you what you have done for him, what are you going to say? Will you say, “I have tried to thwart everything that is good and comes from you Lord and I am a stumbling block to your people” If this is all you can answer, I suggest you review your life and come to Him in prayer, we Christians all over this country will be praying for you to come to your senses.

Others hailed the new United States of Jesus in their own grossly illiterate, deranged way:

what’s up man? Don’t you get it yet? America (ZION) belongs to JESUS!!!!!!!!!!!!!! so. . . . .  
if your not happy here, along with the rest of the rebels, I suggest you all leave Zion. It’s only gonna get better for Christ as time continues on. that is why they call it, “Jesus land.” I’m saying this with a big smile on my face. well, do what you want, but I promise you, it’s going the way father Yahweh has planned. LIKE IT OR NOT. . . . . whatever.  
from, the messiah

The writing and language skills of the flock could certainly use some work, but I guess that’s not part of their “biblical worldview.” Literacy was at an all time low in the Dark Ages when theocracy was the norm, and that’s the norm Sheldon *et al*/ want to reestablish. After all, you can’t run an effective theocracy if people are reading unapproved works or coherently writing and thinking for themselves.

Some messages were so ill-informed about history, science, social and cultural anthropology as to defy a reasoned response. This comment came from a man claiming to have an MBA and an MS degree:

Thank God freaks-of-nature like you don’t reproduce; a few more years and your kind will be extinct.

Here’s a brief sampling of other messages received and replies not sent to their writers during the barrage, but offered to them now, here:

Mr. Seeshits:

Your name certainly matches your outlook on life!

Yes. When I see “shit,” I try to alert others so they don’t fall victim to it.

The Bible condemns homosexuality and you know it. You can try and find fault with the Bible but there are no problems with the Bible. The problem is with rebellious sinners who love their sin and refuse to repent.

Yes. Leviticus 18:22 does state “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.” But if that is absolute truth, then Leviticus 24:10 is also. It calls for anyone who “hath cursed” to be stoned to death. Leviticus 20:14 calls for sinners to be burned to death, and Leviticus 15:19 commands a menstruating woman be “put apart seven days, and whosoever toucheth her shall be unclean.” Leviticus 24:11–16 that call for a community gathering in order to stone to death those who plant two different crops in the same field or wear garments made of two different kinds of threads. What different threads are your garments made of, madam? And if I’m not mistaken (and I’m not), wasn’t Jesus more than a bit “rebellious” against the self-righteous, politically motivated religious leaders of his time?

Supporting the homosexual agenda and the homosexual lifestyle is a direct support for the eventual destruction of American society. Take a step back and look at the big picture. Certainly you can see the destructive road that the homosexual agenda is leading America down.

Rep. Barney Frank succinctly expressed the so-called “homosexual agenda” in his address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention:

Specifically, we want all people in the United States to enjoy the same legal rights as everyone else, unless they have forfeited them by violating the rights of others. We believe this should include some things that are, apparently, very controversial.

They include the right to serve, fight, and even die on behalf of our country in the military; the right to earn a living by working hard and being judged wholly on the quality of our work; the right for teenagers to attend high school without being shoved, punched, or otherwise attacked; and, yes, the right to express not only love for another person but a willingness to be legally as well as morally responsible for his or her well-being.

Even taking twelve steps back, I just don’t see “the destructive road that the homosexual agenda is leading America down.” It seems to me more like the path to liberty, justice and equality for all.

Most telling was the fact that the vast majority of those criticizing my arguments admitted they hadn’t read them. Rather, like good attack dogs, they simply obeyed their master’s orders. Not surprisingly, the few who had read the articles said they didn’t see a “march toward theocracy” or anything resembling an attack on the independent judiciary. Some links were sent to them, including one to a recent LA Times [article](#) describing the efforts of evangelicals “to punish jurists they oppose” by stripping their courts of funding and one to Sen. Ken Salazar’s (D-Col.) [letter](#) to Focus on the Family’s [James Dobson](#), charging him and the Republican leadership with “hijacking Christianity” and trying to “set up a theocracy.” A link to Krugman’s New York Times April 5 [column](#) was also sent: “Today, even Republicans like Representative Chris Shays concede that it [the Republican party] has become the ‘party of theocracy.’” References to [The Constitutional Restoration Act](#) were sent as well:

Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, *the Supreme Court shall not have jurisdiction* to review, by appeal, writ of certiorari, or otherwise, any matter to the extent that relief is sought against an element of Federal, State, or local government, or against an officer of Federal, State, or local government (whether or not acting in official personal capacity), by reason of that element’s or officer’s acknowledgement of *God as the sovereign source of law, liberty, or government.* (italics mine)

Some messages expressed what many Americans feel as the leaders of the evangelical Christian Right and their pocketed politicians continue goose-stepping toward theocracy:

I'm sure you saw this bit of lunacy that I attached. I am sorry and disgusted that organizations like the Traditional Values Coalition even exist in our supposedly enlightened, modern world. I am very grateful for your reasoned commentary—a voice of sanity in an America (and administration) that I don't even recognize as my own any more.

More than a third of the e-mails I received offered support and encouragement:

I only know of you [through] the Traditional Values Coalition. I have been watching their messages—keeping my enemies close.

I support the few notions of yours that they reported. The main statement: *Traditional Values Coalition and other religious organizations as a major threat to freedom in the United States*—is sad and true in my judgment.

So this message is my support for your speaking out against such flaming bigotry.

Some did so with insight and humor:

I'm one of those “progressive is a leftist keyword for socialists” who is on the religio rightist email list to keep an eye on the loon wing of the Republican party.

You must be doing something right since Rev. Lou is in a tizzy over your ideas in today's TVC email. Looks like your root canal has started hitting some nerve. Keep drilling . . .

Good to know they are also all praying for you. The bible says the “prayers of a righteous man availeth much.” I don't think you have to worry about “Rev” Sheldon's prayers reaching God's ears :) . . .

Keep hammering the truth, dude.

Another message noted the hypocrisy of the TVC's attack:

If you want a taste of irony, note that one of the articles he [Louis Sheldon] sites as problematic is your offense to the religious right trying to “remake the judiciary in their own image,” followed almost immediately by his article <http://www.calltoconservatives.com/adpage.php?sid=2239> “Rev. Sheldon Speaks Out On War Against Bush Judges” where he complains that the judiciary is not being remade in their chosen way.

Other messages among the most meaningful were those from pastors, ministers and Christians fed up with Sheldon's hate-filled perversion of their religion and his brazen grab for political power.

The latest hate-mongering message from the TVC seems to be written to incite their subscribers to send messages filled with their vitriolic rhetoric against anything in which they cannot find themselves. As a practicing Christian who disagrees with their message and their politics, I wanted to send a note of thanks to you for standing up to them.

As a Christian, I understand that because of God's unconditional love for us, our response ought to be showing that same love toward all those who are not us (and incidentally as well as toward ourselves). I wish that religious leaders such as Lou Sheldon would read the Bible with a little more discernment toward finding their own actions and activities. Perhaps then, they might find some connections between themselves and those whom Christ came to change.

Another example:

I see that [Louis] Sheldon has his knickers in a twist over your telling it like it is about the Traditional Values Coalition and other right-wing religious groups. Hope you're not getting too much abusive or icky "we're praying for your soul" spam . . .

I'm an Episcopalian and often pray for these people to see through the haze of bigotry to what Jesus would actually be saying and doing if He were living in America today and for people like you to continue using your platforms well and wisely.

And yet another:

Lou Sheldon and his "Traditional" "Values" Coalition continually spam me with his hate speech, simply because I run the website for our church. In his latest screed, "Leftist Web Site Writer Blasts Traditional Values Coalition," he gives out your email address . . . so I thought I'd send you a thumbs-up. Hope it doesn't get lost among the dung thrown your way.

When I saw the title of the spam, I was hoping it was about me . . . It's important for people to get the word out about these groups working behind the scenes, and anyone who cheeses off Sheldon has to be OK. :-)

Good luck & God be with you in this fight!

These messages made me think: *true* Christians would have no part of the hate Sheldon and the TVC spew out in the name of "God." An Advocate.com "First Person" Commentary by Rob Hamm, posted on November 2, 2004, came to mind. The lead-in to the article read: "A church-going mom called her gay son last night to ask what he thinks about today's ballot initiative to ban same-sex marriage and civil unions in their native Oklahoma. The conversation didn't go as he expected."

What did Mrs. Hamm have to say? To begin with, she voted against the Oklahoma constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage and civil unions because, as she put it, "God meant for everyone to have choice in their lives. That is all about being human, and anyone that takes that choice away is acting like God. That is blasphemy, and I won't be a part of it. . . . I don't think it can be changed or should be changed that you are gay. I don't know if you were made that way or not, but as long as there is a possibility that it is internal and can't be changed, I cannot judge anyone based on that. Besides, the Bible says there is only one judge, and we should not be putting ourselves in his place."

Her son commented further: "She said that since my partner's family had disowned him when he came out to them, he was now her son with all the rights and privileges accorded to that position. . . . It took 12 years for my mom to get to this point, and I know the world's perceptions and many decades of discrimination will take a while to change. I have hope that I didn't have before this phone call that eventually the true Christians like my mom will win out, and eventually basic rights will apply to everyone equally, no matter what."

Unfortunately, Mr. Hamm's original Commentary is no longer available on Advocate.com. But a reader's [letter](#) about it is.

The time of liberty, justice and equality for all Americans *will* come, inevitably. And then Louis Sheldon and the Traditional Values Coalition will be exposed for what they are. Future generations will read about them in history books and—with knotted brows—ask "why?"