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DOMINIONISM

By Frederick Clarkson | November 2022

Introduction

Dominionism is one of the most significant, yet little-known ideological forces in the U.S. and increasingly, globally. This theological idea has been gathering strength for a half century and is transforming conservative evangelical Christianity into political movements that are driving contemporary politics.

We currently see Dominionism-informed conservative Christian support for political candidates at all levels, from school boards to the presidency.

Here are the three main features of Dominionism:

1. Dominionism can be summarized as the **theocratic idea that Christians are called by God to exercise dominion over every aspect of society** by taking control of political and cultural institutions: for example, over the role of government, the form and content of public education, and eliminating rights related to bodily autonomy. It envisions a very different society than one defined by democratic aspirations and equality for all people.
2. Dominionism is the key element of contemporary notions of Christian nationalism—the belief that the U.S. once was, and should once again be, a Christian

nation. This narrative denies the Enlightenment roots of American constitutional democracy. **Dominionism is the underlying ideology that gives an agenda to Christian nationalism.**

3. Dominionism promotes religious supremacy, insofar as it does not respect the equality of other religions, or even other versions of Christianity. Dominionism also **promotes theocratic visions of governance**, insofar as it supports the idea that the Ten Commandments, or “biblical law,” should be the foundation of American law, and that the U.S. Constitution should be seen as a vehicle for implementing biblical principles.

It is not possible to have a thorough understanding of contemporary politics or the contemporary efforts to roll back reproductive and LGBTQ rights and democracy itself—let alone how to respond—without a basic understanding of the animating ideology behind these efforts. For Dominionism, there is no one single issue, or issue cluster, that is of particular focus because the ideology mandates the promulgation of a comprehensive “biblical worldview.”

As evidence of Dominionism’s significance, it is helpful to understand that over the course of about a half century, the Republican Party has become dominated by conservative evangelicals (a group that was previously far less politically organized and engaged) allied with conservative Catholics, and this block now constitutes a permanent feature of U.S. and global culture and politics.

Who

The Christian Right

Major organizations and the people who run them are influenced or motivated by Dominionist thought. These include, to name just a few, the **Family Research Council**; the national network of state policy groups called the Family Policy Alliance; and the legal organization, Alliance Defending Freedom. Dominionist thought and its agenda are also clear in the vision and work of the smaller Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation (CPCF) which publishes manuals containing model state legislation (originally carried out under the rubric of “Project Blitz.”) CPCF (a non-profit strategy center) and co-sponsoring groups, Wall Builders, and the National Legal Foundation, currently have a network of affiliates in approximately two dozen states. Dominionist thought and the politics are on vivid display at events hosted by the Truth and Liberty Coalition (and its related broadcast and seminary), which in 2021 began **training and fielding candidates for school boards in Colorado** and has a vision beyond. Dominionist thought on such matters as race, gender, sexual orientation, and revisionist approaches to history also informs the curriculum and texts in most Christian private schools and home schools.

Elected Officials and Candidates

There are many politicians at all levels who are clearly influenced by Dominionism or overtly supported by Dominionist leaders and their followers. The Dominionist influence is not always obvious or explicitly declared, but sometimes it is. Most politicians influenced by Dominionism are Republicans, notably former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin and 2022 Pennsylvania gubernatorial candidate Doug Mastriano, but there are also some Democrats influenced by Dominionism, such as Florida State Rep. Kimberly Daniels. Donald Trump owed his election to Dominionist-driven Christian Right leaders, whose agenda he championed during his presidency.

What

Since Dominionism is a comprehensive ideology, intended to inform and ultimately direct all areas of life, it manifests in all of the most contentious issues of the day. Here are a few brief examples:

- The legislation at issue in the Dobbs case that led to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, was originally conceived by a Dominionist activist, **Janet Porter**.
- At the Family Research Council's 2022 conference, "Pray, Vote, Stand," a common refrain was how a "biblical worldview" shapes and informs the organization's politics. "Biblical worldview" is another way of saying Dominionism.
- Seven Mountain strategist and promoter, Lance Wallnau, penned the popular theological justification for how morally conservative Christians could endorse Donald Trump, an openly immoral man whose Christian credentials were dubious at best. Wallnau has gone on to become a thought leader on the Christian Right and is a featured speaker at major right wing conferences (see below for an explanation of Seven Mountains).

The Two Main Versions of Dominionism

Christian Reconstructionism

Christian Reconstructionism is a theological movement centered on the work of 20th century American theologian R.J. Rushdoony. The simplest understanding might be that if America was to be a Christian nation—or if the world were to be organized according to Biblical principles, or Biblical Law—this body of work would provide a blueprint for what that America or world could look like. Rushdoony conceptualized this as the foundation, not the building. The Christian Reconstructionists have thus provided a comprehensive biblical justification for Christian

involvement in politics and an approach to government and law that expanded the breadth and depth of evangelical engagement in public life. Its influence in evangelical Christianity in the 1970s—and since—made the Christian Right possible.

The historic centers of Reconstructionist thought have included the **Chalcedon Foundation**, founded by R.J. Rushdoony, the **Institute for Christian Economics** founded by the late **Gary North**, and **American Vision**, led by Gary DeMar.

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR)

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) is also called “Charismatic Dominionism.” This stream of Dominionism uses a mobilization strategy called the “Seven Mountain Mandate” (also sometimes called 7M or 7MM for short), which is easy to understand because it divides the seven leading areas of society that must be dominated by the correct kind of Christians: religion, family, government, education, business, arts & entertainment, and media.

It springs from grafting the theocratic vision and politics of the Rushdoony camp with the strain of Domin-

ionism that emerged from some Pentecostal and Charismatic factions in the 1980s, with roots going back several decades. The New Apostolic Reformation was founded in 1999 by C. Peter Wagner, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Three centers of NAR thought and action are the **International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders** under the direction of Apostle John P. Kelly; the **U.S. Coalition of Apostolic Leaders** headed by Apostle Joseph Mattera and headquartered in Brooklyn, New York; and the **Truth and Liberty Coalition** led by Andrew Womack and based in Colorado.

Find Out More

To Read Right Now

- **Dominionism Takes Center Stage in America.** Janet Phelan. LA Progressive. 2015.
- **The Radical Theology That Could Make Religious Freedom a Thing of the Past.** David R. Brockman. The Texas Observer. 2016.
- **Baby We Were Born for War: To Dominionist Christian Groups, No Election is Too Small – and Colorado is Just the Beginning.** Frederick Clarkson. Religion Dispatches. 2021.
- **The Christian Dominionist War On Abortion, Part I.** Ashton Pittman. The Mississippi Free Press. 2022.
- **He’s on a mission from God: Pennsylvania GOP candidate Doug Mastriano’s war with the world.** Frederick Clarkson. Salon. 2022.
- **Christian Nationalists Are Excited About What Comes Next.** Katherine Stewart. The New York Times. 2022.

In Depth

- **Christian Reconstructionism: Theocratic Dominionism Gains Influence.** Frederick Clarkson. The Public Eye. 1994.
- **The Christian Right, Reborn: The New Apostolic Reformation Goes to War.** Rachel Tabachnick. The Public Eye. 2013.
- **Biblical Economics: The Divine Laissez-Faire Mandate.** Peter Montgomery. The Public Eye. 2015.
- **Dominionism Rising: A Theocratic Movement Hiding in Plain Sight.** Frederick Clarkson. The Public Eye. 2016.
- **Christian Right Denialism is More Dangerous Than Ever: A Reporter’s Guide to the New Apostolic Reformation.** Frederick Clarkson and André Gagné. Religion Dispatches. 2022.
- **When It Comes to Societal Dominion, the Details Matter: A Reporter’s Guide to the New Apostolic Reformation Part II.** Frederick Clarkson and André Gagné. Religion Dispatches. 2022.

- **The quiet rise of Christian dominionism.** Keri Ladner. The Christian Century. 2022.
- **Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation.** Kristin Kobes Du Mez. Liveright Publishing Corporation. 2020.
- **The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism.** Katherine Stewart. Bloomsbury, 2020.
- **Video series on Apostolic Centers.** André Gagné.
- **Resource Directory for the New Apostolic Reformation.** Rachel Tabachnick. Talk to Action. 2011 (150 blog posts published between 2008 and 2011).

Become an Expert

- **The New Apostolic Reformation: History of a Modern Charismatic Movement.** John Weaver. McFarland. 2016.
- **Building God's Kingdom: Inside the World of Christian Reconstructionism.** Julie Ingersoll. Oxford University Press. 2015.
- **Christian Reconstruction: R. J. Rushdoony and American Religious Conservatism.** Michael J. McVicar. University of North Carolina Press. 2015.

Dominionist Primary Source Material

- Gary North—a prolific Christian Reconstructionist author, now deceased. His many books are **available for download** for free. A good place to start is *Backward Christian Soldiers*.
- C. Peter Wagner—the late founder of the New Apostolic Reformation. A prolific author, his definitive book on Dominionism is *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World*, Chosen Books, 2008.
- Lance Wallnau's *God's Chaos Candidate: Donald J. Trump and the American Unraveling*. Killer Sheep Media. 2016.