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Neal Show Notes

Dominionism Rising: A Theocratic Movement Hiding in Plain Sight

By [Frederick Clarkson](#), on [August 18, 2016](#)



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This article appears in the Summer 2016 edition of *The Public Eye* magazine.

In June 2016, Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) held a private meeting with conservative movement leaders to plot his political future. Attendees afterwards cast him in the role of Ronald Reagan, who'd lost the 1976 Republican presidential nomination to Gerald Ford but led a conservative comeback in 1980 that made Jimmy Carter a one-term president. The thinking was that Cruz did well enough in the 2016 Republican presidential primaries before losing to celebrity billionaire Donald Trump that he could plan to run again in 2020 or 2024. "He was with kindred spirits," said Brent Bozell, the conservative activist who hosted the meeting, "and I would say most people in that room see him as the leader of the conservative movement."¹

The rise of Ted Cruz is a singular event in American political history. The son of a Cuban refugee and evangelical pastor, Cruz was raised in the kind of evangelicalism-with-a-theocratic-bent that has come to epitomize a significant and growing trend in American public life. That is, dominionism: a dynamic ideology that arose from the swirls and eddies of American evangelicalism to animate the Christian Right, and become a defining feature of modern politics and culture.

Dominionism is the theocratic idea that regardless of theological camp, means, or timetable, God has called conservative Christians to exercise dominion over society by taking control of political and cultural institutions. The term describes a broad tendency across a wide swath of American Christianity. People who embrace this idea are referred to as dominionists. Although Chip Berlet, then of Political Research Associates, and I defined and

popularized the term for many in the 1990s², in fact it had (along with the term dominion theology) been in use by both evangelical proponents and critics for many years.³

Dominionism Defined (click to expand)

Dominionism is the theocratic idea that regardless of theological view, means, or timetable, Christians are called by God to exercise dominion over every aspect of society by taking control of political and cultural institutions.

Analyst Chip Berlet and I have suggested that there is a dominionist spectrum running from soft to hard as a way of making some broad distinctions among dominionists without getting mired in theological minutiae.¹⁰⁶ But we also agree that:

1. Dominionists celebrate Christian nationalism, in that they believe that the United States once was, and should once again be, a Christian nation. In this way, they deny the Enlightenment roots of American democracy.
2. Dominionists promote religious supremacy, insofar as they generally do not respect the equality of other religions, or even other versions of Christianity.
3. Dominionists endorse theocratic visions, insofar as they believe 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.¹⁰⁷

Of course, Christian nationalism takes a distinct form in the United States, but dominionism in all of its variants has a vision for all nations.

In many ways, Ted Cruz personifies the story of dominionism: how it became the ideological engine of the Christian Right, and how it illuminates the changes underway in American politics, culture and religion that have helped shape recent history.

Ted Cruz’s father, Rafael, who served as his son’s principal campaign surrogate during his senate and presidential campaigns, has been a profound and colorful influence. The elder Cruz was a member of the Texas board of the Religious Roundtable,⁴ a leading Christian Right organization of the late 1970s.⁵ “Our conversation around the dinner table centered around politics—as to why we had to get rid of this leftist progressive called Jimmy Carter,” Rafael Cruz told an interviewer. “Ted got a dose of conservative politics from a biblical worldview for a whole year when he was nine years old.”⁶ That was the year the Religious Roundtable hosted the historic National Affairs Briefing conference in Dallas. It was held in tandem with the 1980 Republican National Convention, and attended by some 17,000 conservative Christians. It was there that Ronald Reagan famously declared: “I know you can’t endorse me, but I endorse you and what you are doing.”⁷

Some see Ted Cruz as not only following in the footsteps of Reagan, but fulfilling a religious destiny. “Talk to me about your son and his rise. This must be a thing of God. It’s meteoric,” David Brody, chief political correspondent for the *Christian Broadcasting Network*, asked Rafael Cruz in an interview in 2013, during Ted’s first year as senator⁸. Evangelical historian John Fea explained⁹ why Cruz might be viewed this way. During a sermon at the New

Beginnings church in Bedford, Texas, in 2012, Rafael had described his son's Senate campaign as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy that "God would anoint Christian 'kings' to preside over an 'end-time transfer of wealth' from the wicked to the righteous."

"According to his father and [New Beginnings Pastor Larry] Huch, Ted Cruz is anointed by God to help Christians in their effort to "go to the marketplace and occupy the land ... and take dominion" over it, Fea continued. "This 'end-time transfer of wealth' will relieve Christians of all financial woes, allowing true believers to ascend to a position of political and cultural power in which they can build a Christian civilization. When this Christian nation is in place (or back in place), Jesus will return."⁹



Ted Cruz's religious political ambitions owe much to his father's belief in Seven Mountains dominionism. (Photo by CBN News)

Rafael Cruz and Huch have long embraced a strain of evangelical theology called Seven Mountains dominionism, which calls for believers to take control over seven leading aspects of culture: family, religion, education, media, entertainment, business, and government. The name is derived from the biblical book of Isaiah 2:2 (New King James Version): "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains."

Seven Mountains dominionism (popularly abbreviated as 7M) emerged in the 2000s through a campaign in the form of popular books, videos, sermons, and seminars.¹⁰ It has spread like wildfire across Pentecostalism ever since.

The Cruzes are close to Christian nationalist author and longtime Texas Republican leader David Barton, who headed a super PAC in support of Cruz's presidential bid. Barton embraces 7M¹¹ even while disingenuously¹² claiming the term dominionism is an invention of liberals intended to smear Christians. "It's like saying 'Oh, you're a Nazi, oh, you're an anti-Semite, you're a bigot, you're a racist, you're a Dominionist,'" he said in a 2011 radio broadcast.¹³

Ted Cruz has, perhaps shrewdly, neither publicly affirmed nor denied the dominionism that surrounds him. He is a longtime member of a prominent Houston Baptist congregation, but his embrace of the dominionist vision is evident

to those who are paying attention. When Cruz speaks of religious liberty, says John Fea, he means it as “a code word for defending the right of Christians to continue to hold cultural authority and privilege.” Cruz, according to Fea, is engaged in the “dominionist battle” of our time.¹⁴

When Cruz speaks of religious liberty, says John Fea, he means it as “a code word for defending the right of Christians to continue to hold cultural authority and privilege.”

All of this was pretty hot stuff and dominionism would no doubt have become more of an issue had Ted Cruz’s 2016 campaign lasted longer. But Cruz is 45 years old in 2016 and appears to have a bright—and perhaps historic—political future. He won statewide office on his first try and has benefited from being underestimated. Since arriving in the Senate in 2103, he has made a show of sticking to his principles, much to the chagrin of his colleagues. But following his presidential run, Cruz is now one of the best known politicians in the country and possible heir-apparent to the Reagan revolution. No small achievement for a freshman senator.

Meanwhile Cruz and other national pols comprise the tip of a very large, but hard to measure political iceberg. There are untold numbers of dominionist and dominionism-influenced politicians and public officials at all levels of government and who even after leaving office, shape our political discourse. Roy Moore, the elected Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, has been a rallying figure for dominionists of all stripes for the better part of two decades. Most recently, he has led efforts to exempt Alabama from federal court ordered compliance with marriage equality, citing his view of “God’s law.” Moore’s fellow Alabaman, Justice Tom Parker, has been on the court since 2004, and has employed theocratic legal theorist John Eidsmoe as his chief of staff.¹⁵ Others at the top of recent American political life have included Sarah Palin, Michele Bachmann, Rick Perry, Mike Huckabee,¹⁶ and Newt Gingrich.¹⁷ Other prominent elected officials in the dominionist camp include Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick (R-TX),¹⁸ Gov. Sam Brownback (R-KS),¹⁹ Sen. James Lankford (R-OK),²⁰ and Rep. Steve King (R-IA).²¹

Prominent politicians’ involvement in dominionism is certainly the most visible evidence of the movement’s advances over the past half-century, but it’s not the only result. Dominionism is a story not widely or well understood. Because this is so, it is important to know what dominionism is and where it came from, so we can see it more clearly and better understand its contemporary significance.

Two Streams into the Mainstream

There are two main expressions of dominionism, each influential far beyond their foundational thinkers. Briefly, Christian Reconstructionism, founded by the late theologian R.J. Rushdoony (1916-2001) advances the idea that Christians must not only dominate society, but institute and enforce Old Testament biblical law. Unlike the doctrines developed within specific denominations, Christian Reconstructionism has been a movement of ideas that transcends denominations and has influenced far more people than those who ever adopted the label. One of the movement’s main contributions has been to provide a biblical rationale for political action for the Christian Right and a theory of government and public policy development.

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Religion scholar Michael McVicar has found that Rushdoony's writings began to reflect an interest in dominion in the late 1950s.²² His vision of how to bring forth "dominion men," via advancement of a "Biblical worldview" helped lead conservative evangelicals towards aggressive political engagement since the 1970s. Rushdoony is also credited with laying the foundation for, among other things, the modern homeschooling movement and fighting for maximum latitude for private Christian schools on issues like accreditation—normally a matter of government oversight, but something Rushdoony compared to government tyranny.²³

The other main strain of contemporary dominionism (which in turn has also been deeply influenced by Reconstructionism) is 7M dominionism, advocated by Pentecostals of the New Apostolic Reformation.²⁴ 7M is rooted in a Pentecostal movement of the 1940s, according to an academic book by John Weaver published in 2015.²⁵ The Latter Rain movement taught that there would be an outpouring of supernatural powers in a coming generation, allowing them to subdue or take dominion over nations. The Latter Rain movement promised this would happen along with the restoration of "the neglected offices in the contemporary church of apostles and prophets."²⁶ Teachings about the supernatural authority of the apostles have provided key theological and structural elements of contemporary dominionism. These teachings, previously rejected as "deviant" by Pentecostal denominations are now so ubiquitous that they are more tolerated than opposed.²⁷

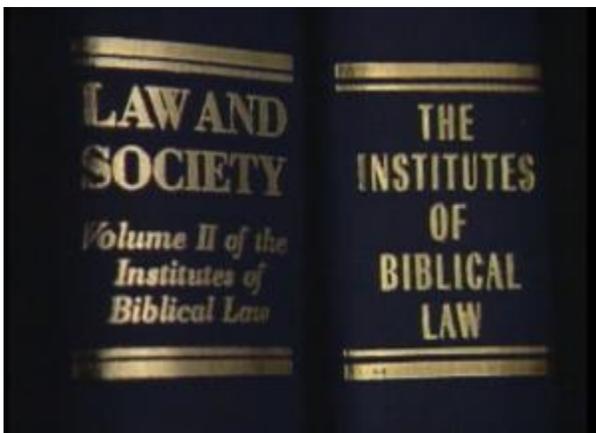
Latter Rain theology was revived under the under aegis of longtime Fuller Theological Seminary professor C. Peter Wagner, who organized a global network of hundreds of apostles. Many of these apostles lead groups of non-denominational churches and ministries called "apostolic networks," which sometimes comprise tens of thousands of members. Today, NAR theology and its apostles and prophets have assumed an increasingly high profile in religious and civic life in the U.S. They were well known in the past decade, for example, for mass rallies named TheCall, led by Lou Engle, who is also internationally known for his anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ activism.²⁸ They have also gained political influence. For example, several leading apostles were among the three-dozen "conveners" of a June 2016 meeting at which Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump courted the support of some 1,000 evangelical leaders.²⁹

Within the NAR, the justification for the offices of apostle and prophet is based on the biblical book of Ephesians (4:11). They are said to complement or complete the offices of minister, teacher and evangelist into what is called the "five-fold ministry." Apostles and prophets are top leaders, usually operating outside of denominations—which they are intent on dissolving in the name of Christian unity. They, respectively, lead these non-denominational networks, and offer guidance with prescient thoughts and sometimes direct revelations from God. Sometimes, the roles are combined.³⁰ This is a very different religious environment than any other sector of Christianity and underscores the way that doctrines among the dominion-minded can be rather fluid, even as they see themselves headed toward the same or similar goals.

Dominionism, even as it evolves, is not a passing fashion but an historic trend.

It is important to underscore that dominionism, even as it evolves, is not a passing fashion but an historic trend. This trend featured fierce theological battles in the 1980s that pitted the largely apolitical pre-millennial dispensationalism that characterized most of 20th century evangelicalism³¹ against a politicized, dominion-oriented postmillennialism.

The turning point in this theological struggle was the 1973 publication of Rushdoony's 800-page *Institutes of Biblical Law*, which offered what he believed was a "foundation" for a future biblically based society, and his vision of generations of "dominion men" advancing the "dominion mandate" described in the biblical book of Genesis.³² The *Institutes* sought to describe what a biblically-based Christian society would look like. It included a legal code based on the Ten Commandments, and the laws of Old Testament Israel. This included a long list of capital offences—mostly religious or sexual crimes.³³ But Rushdoony and other leading Reconstructionists did not believe that "Biblical Law" could be imposed in a top down fashion by a national theocracy. They thought the biblical kingdom would emerge from the gradual conversion of people who would embrace what they consider to be the whole word of God, and that this could take hundreds, thousands or even tens of thousands of years. Rushdoony and many Reconstructionists also believed strongly in a vastly decentralized form of government. Theorist Gary North writes, for example, that, "It isn't possible to ramrod God's blessings from the top down, unless you're God. Only humanists think that man is God."³⁴



The *Institutes of Biblical Law*, Vol 1 was published in 1973. (Photo by EXILED TV via Youtube)

Nevertheless, Reconstructionist thinkers could not prevent others from feeling a greater sense of urgency about moving up the time-table,³⁵ or from taking dramatic political action, or in the case of anti-abortion activists, even committing vigilante violence.³⁶ Indeed, the *Institutes* and the Reconstructionist works that followed provided a justification for political action that pulled many evangelicals from the political sidelines and into the fray. They also provided an optimistic theology of inevitable victory, suggesting therefore that political action was not only possible but necessary. In the longer term, it also established the often unacknowledged ideological framing for the Christian Right, the basis for 21st Century politics, and the possibility of a Ted Cruz as a major figure in public life.

The Battle for the Bible

One influential body of Reconstructionist thought was published by Gary North in the mid-1980s. A ten-volume series, called "Biblical Blueprints" and written by different authors, sought to flesh out and update the vision by engaging contemporary matters from education to economics and from politics to divorce. By the late 1980s, a dynamic conversation was well underway about the nature of conservative Christian political action—what it could reasonably expect to accomplish, on what timeframe, by what means, and whether it was necessary at all. These

and other Reconstructionist authors were discussed in evangelical leadership circles. But controversy broke out in 1987 following a major critical report in *Christianity Today* that detailed their theocratic agenda. This article introduced Christian Reconstructionism, and the terms dominion, dominion theology and dominionism to many evangelicals.³⁷ A still wider public learned about Reconstructionism the same year when *PBS* broadcast a series on the Religious Right by Bill Moyers.³⁸

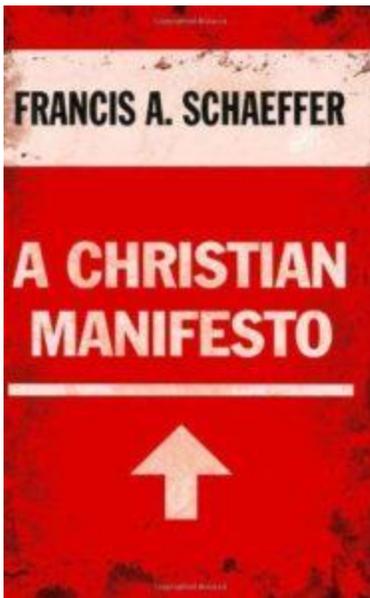


A still from Bill Moyers's documentary 'God and Politics – On Earth As It Is in Heaven'. Pictured from left to right: Bill Moyers, and Dr. R.J. Rushdoony. (Picture via <http://billmoyers.com/content/earth-heaven>)

Books by prominent evangelical authors and academics opposing dominion theology soon followed, including one by Hal Lindsey, the bestselling evangelical author of his time.³⁹ Evangelical religious historian Bruce Barron warned of a growing “dominionist impulse.”⁴⁰

This was perhaps the height of the battle over evangelical theology, in which the premillennial dispensationalist camp—which believed that in the End Times, true Christians would be “raptured” into the clouds, and Jesus would return to defeat the forces of Satan—was challenged by the post-millennialist Christian Reconstructionists—who argued that Jesus could not return until the world had become perfectly Christian and the faithful had ruled for 1,000 years. One of the longstanding consequences of this difference had been that premillennialists were disinclined to political action, while the postmillennial position required it in order to build nations based on biblical principles or even biblical laws. Christian Reconstructionist authors brought an additional and epochal piece to the puzzle, by outlining for the first time what Christian or biblical governance should look like.

An additional strain of dominionist thought has also been deeply influential in the wider evangelical community. The popular 20th century theologian Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) sold some three million books, some of which are still in print. Together with his son Frank, he also made a series of influential films. Schaeffer's 1981 book, *A Christian Manifesto*, published at the dawn of the Reagan era, famously served as a catalyst for the evangelical wing of the antiabortion movement, the broader Christian Right, and the creeping theocratization of the Republican Party.⁴¹



A Christian Manifesto was published by Crossway Books in 1982. (Photo: Crossway Books)

Schaeffer advocated massive resistance to what he saw as a looming anti-Christian society. His work inspired dominionist political action even though he claimed to support religious pluralism and oppose overt theocracy. One major difference between Schaeffer and the Reconstructionists is that while they agreed about the threat to Christianity, Schaeffer did not believe in the contemporary applicability of Old Testament laws and Rushdoony's slow motion approach to dominion. Instead, Schaeffer emphasized the need for militant Christian resistance to what he called "tyranny."

Schaeffer argued that "the common people had the right and duty to disobedience and rebellion if state officials ruled contrary to the Bible. To do otherwise would be rebellion against God."⁴²

According to historian John Fea, "Schaeffer played an important role in shaping the Christian Right's belief in a Christian America," drawing an ideological plumb line from the Bible to the Declaration of Independence, via the theologians of the Protestant Reformation.⁴³ Schaeffer said that the situations that justified revolution against tyranny in the past are "exactly what we are facing today." The whole structure of our society, Schaeffer concluded, "is being attacked and destroyed."⁴⁴

To fight that trend, Schaeffer advocated what he called "co-belligerency": strategic partnerships that set aside theological differences in order to cooperate on a shared political agenda. (Thirty years later, the best expression of co-belligerency may be the 2009 *Manhattan Declaration*, a three-part platform declaring "life, marriage and religious liberty" as conservative believers' defining concerns. This agenda is now shared by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, much of the evangelical Christian Right, and allied politicians in the Republican Party.⁴⁵)

But Schaeffer didn't articulate a political agenda much beyond the issues of what would later be called the culture war. He believed America was founded as a Christian nation, but he remained in the premillennialist camp and so effectively ceded the playing field of law and public policy to Rushdoony, who offered a standard by which all others would be measured.

Nevertheless, Schaeffer's work probably caused more people to turn to overt dominionism than any other thought leader before or since. For many, Schaeffer was the beginning of a theological journey from antiabortion activism to dominionism. Randall Terry, the founder of the antiabortion direct action group Operation Rescue, in the 1980s said, "You have to read Schaeffer's *Christian Manifesto* if you want to understand Operation Rescue."⁴⁶ But by the 90s, he was wondering what would come next. In his own 1995 book, *The Sword: The Blessing of Righteous Government and the Overthrow of Tyrants*, Terry seemed to supply the answer, demonstrating the influence of his conversations with Gary North.⁴⁷ "I gladly confess that I want to see civic law in America (and every nation) restored to and based on the Law given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai," Terry wrote. He considers it to be "flawless, infallible and unimprovable—the very best we could possibly build on."⁴⁸

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Although some writers have tended to lump all dominionists together, dominionists have differences and disagreements about means and ends, just like any other movement. (They also change over time.) For example, Rushdoony opposed the civil disobedience advocated by Schaeffer and left the board of the Rutherford Institute, the public interest law firm he had started with John Whitehead, because Whitehead and fellow director Gary North supported the tactic. And while North supported non-violent direct action, he disagreed with the vigilante murder of abortion providers as advocated (and ultimately committed) by fellow Christian Reconstructionist Paul Hill.⁴⁹

But it is the broad vision that dominionists share that should be of greatest interest and concern to those outside the movement. C. Peter Wagner traces the lineage of his version of dominion theology "through R.J. Rushdoony" and theologians of the Protestant Reformation in his 2008 book, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World*.⁵⁰ Wagner adopted an old concept: "sphere sovereignty," the idea that all areas of life must be brought under a comprehensive biblical worldview. While Rushdoony called this "theonomy," Wagner's 7M theology offered a contemporary version with a Pentecostal twist. (There is some metaphorical flexibility in this sector as the term "mountains" is sometimes used interchangeably with "spheres" or "gates.") Reflecting the trend away from premillennialism, Wagner emphasized the "primacy" of the cultural (or dominion) mandate, over evangelism.⁵¹

7M provides a popularized vision of the reconstructed society that does not require an advanced degree in theology to understand.

Part of the significance of the convergence of these strains of dominionism is that 7M provides a popularized vision of the reconstructed society that does not require an advanced degree in theology to understand. "[W]e have an assignment from God to take dominion and transform society,"⁵² Wagner simply declares. This break with the archaic and esoteric language of the Latter Rain and Christian Reconstructionist writers, and even Francis Schaeffer, has enabled the dominionist movement to broaden and deepen its reach. This synthesis and more palatable approach was decades in the making. There had been Pentecostal and Reconstructionist dialogues over the years that allowed Reconstructionist thought leaders to see that it was possible get wider swaths of Christianity to adopt their foundational ideas. After one such dialogue in Dallas in 1987,⁵³ Christian Reconstructionist pastor Joseph Morecraft exclaimed, "God is blending Presbyterian theology with Charismatic zeal into a force that cannot be stopped!"⁵⁴

Dominionism Reframed as Religious Liberty

The emergence of religious liberty as one of the central issues of our time stems from multiple sources.⁵⁵ But the issue is far from being just a disagreement about how to balance the religious freedom of some with civil and constitutional rights of others. In fact, religious freedom has long been seen by dominionist strategists as a weakness of constitutional democracy that they can exploit to advance their agendas.

The U.S. approach to religious freedom was largely an outgrowth of the thinking of Thomas Jefferson, whose Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom was drafted in 1777, and finally passed under the legislative leadership of James Madison in 1787. The bill, which helped inform the Constitution's and later the First Amendment's approach to religion, provided that one's religious identity "shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities."⁵⁶ Dominionist leaders generally recognize that Jeffersonian notions of religious freedom and the society they envision are almost entirely mutually exclusive ideas. So they have chosen to be smart about it.

"We must use the doctrine of religious liberty," Christian Reconstructionist theorist Gary North declared in 1982, "to gain independence for Christian schools until we train up a generation of people who know that there is no religious neutrality, no neutral law, no neutral education, and no neutral civil government. Then they will get busy in constructing a Bible-based social, political and religious order which finally denies the religious liberty of the enemies of God."⁵⁷

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North believes that the Constitution generally, and specifically the proscription against religious tests for public office included in Article 6, are "legal barrier[s] to Christian theocracy." But he envisions a day when biblically correct Christians gain enough political power to be able to amend the Constitution to limit access to the franchise and civil offices to "communicant members of Trinitarian churches."⁵⁸

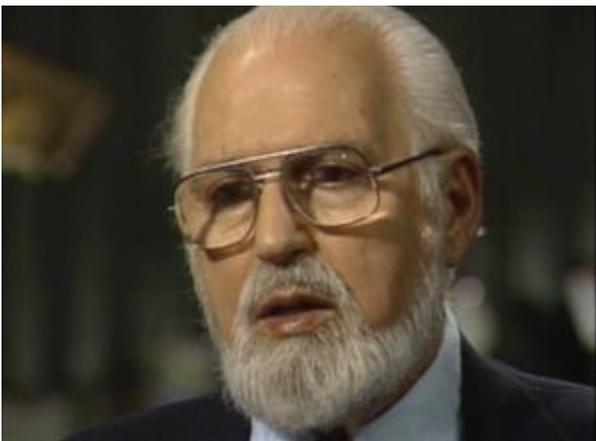
Rushdoony was not interested in religious freedom except insofar as it had implications for "Christian freedom." In 1980, after many years of legal advocacy for Christian homeschooling and private schools, Rushdoony asked a protégé, attorney John Whitehead, to create a public interest law firm, the "Christian Rights Foundation." The organization that emerged was ultimately named the Rutherford Institute, after the 17th century theologian Samuel Rutherford, who asserted that even the King of England must obey God's laws. The Institute was to be strategic and not parochial. It would represent any kind of Christian and even groups that were "heretical and non-Christian" (the Church of Scientology was mentioned as one example) in cases that would have precedential value for advancing their vision of Christianity.⁵⁹

Dominionist theorists view the Jeffersonian idea of religious equality under the law as inherently tyrannical. "There are two major stages in the attack on religious liberty," Rushdoony declared in 1965. "First is the state is secularized in the name of freedom and second, every prerogative of the church is attacked in an indirect manner so that ... its

right to exist is denied.”⁶⁰ This is the thinking that informs many contemporary claims of attacks on the religious liberty and fears of persecution by a secular totalitarian government.

Religious liberty arguments, which can at once cloak and advance a conservative religious agenda, are increasingly ubiquitous on the Christian Right, and are sometimes intended to baffle liberals. In 2011, C. Peter Wagner seemed to make a surprising case for religious tolerance to a National Public Radio audience. “I’m sorry that some radicals speak up strongly against having a mosque in their neighborhood,” he said, “and I don’t think that’s patriotism. I think America needs to make room for liberty.”⁶¹ But Wagner knows there is no actual room for religious liberty in a dominionist society, as he made clear when the NPR listeners weren’t tuned in:

“Dominion has to do with control. Dominion has to do with rulership,” Wagner declared at an NAR conference in 2008. “Dominion has to do with authority and subduing, and it relates to society. In other words, what the values are in Heaven need to be made manifest here on earth. Dominion means being the head and not the tail. Dominion means ruling as kings. It says in Revelation Chapter 1:6 that He has made us kings and priests—and check the rest of that verse; it says for dominion. So we are kings for dominion.”⁶²



Rushdoony’s stream of Dominionism holds that Christians must dominate society, and institute and enforce Old Testament biblical law. (Photo by EXILED TV via Youtube)

Significantly, Rushdoony and the late Howard Phillips, the Christian Reconstructionist founder of the Constitution Party, did considerable organizing around the Bob Jones University tax case—the *cause celebre* of the 1970s and early ‘80s that is widely credited with galvanizing the Christian Right as a political movement. In the landmark case of *Bob Jones University v. United States*, the Supreme Court ruled that the Greenville, South Carolina-based school was not entitled to federal tax exemption if it maintained its policy against interracial dating. The case epitomized the Reconstructionist and Schaefferite view of the perpetual showdown between a “biblical worldview” and “secular humanism.” The case is a forerunner to today’s efforts to gain exemption from the law based on religious liberty claims.⁶³

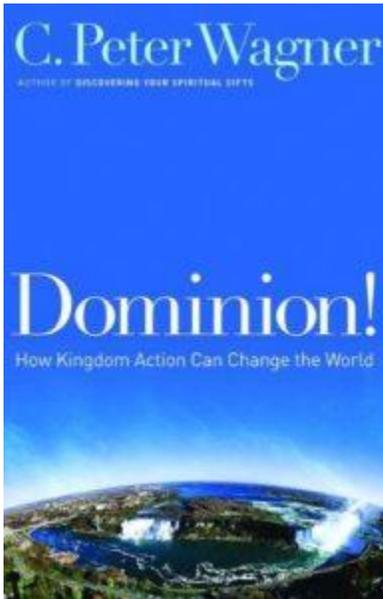
Today, the major issues of the culture war have been substantially reframed in terms of religious liberty, as the co-belligerents seek to declare their individual and institutional religious consciences are violated in various ways, and therefore are exempt from what jurists call the “generally applicable laws.” The results have been mixed.

The religious freedom argument deployed against contraception and abortion won a major victory in the Supreme Court case of *Hobby Lobby v. Sebelius*, where the court held that closely held corporations have a right to freedom of conscience sufficient for the evangelical family-owned Hobby Lobby chain not to have to include certain contraceptives in their employees' health insurance.

In the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, religious liberty arguments could not overcome the civil rights argument for marriage equality,⁶⁴ but similar arguments have informed state-level versions of the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which have sometimes sought for example, to exempt businesses from having to provide services related to same-sex marriages.

Dominion by Majority

Dominionist theorists and contemporary leaders know that they need to move carefully, lest they provoke powerful opposition. Some leading dominionists will go so far as to say that they do not seek a theocracy when that is clearly their goal. For example, C. Peter Wagner, in his book, *Dominion!*, says he wants to get his people “into positions of leadership” to reshape the country “from top to bottom.”⁶⁵



Dominion!: How Kingdom Action Can Change the World was published by Chosen Books in February 2008. (Photo: Chosen Books)

Wagner’s successor as the convener of the United States Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (USCAL), Joseph Mattera, takes the same approach.⁶⁶ USCAL is one of several NAR leadership groupings that teach that Christians of the right sort must hold governmental power and implement a biblical approach to the law.⁶⁷

Mattera, who pastors a church in Brooklyn, New York, adds that the historic evangelical goal of universal conversion is unnecessary to achieve dominion. One of the “keys to dominion,” he says, is prolific reproduction and indoctrination of Christian children. Christians, he believes, should seek to multiply faster than those who are limiting the size of their families, so their children would “have more influence... [and]...more votes than anybody else and we would have the most power on the earth.”⁶⁸ (Mattera’s gradualism is not limited to waiting for babies. His

regional Apostolic Leadership team includes Democratic New York City Councilman Fernando Cabrera,⁶⁹ who has also taught at Mattera's Leadership Institute on waging a "Kingdom Revolution" to advance a "biblical worldview."⁷⁰ They waged an unsuccessful Democratic primary effort in 2014 against five candidates in an apparent effort to make the Democratic-dominated Council more conservative.⁷¹ Cabrera himself ran an unsuccessful Democratic primary challenge to his incumbent state senator in 2014,⁷² and tried again in 2016 with backing from charter school development interests.⁷³)

Christian Reconstructionists involved in the natalist Quiverfull movement have a similar view. As Kathryn Joyce explained in *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement*, they envision themselves producing arrows in God's quiver in the war for dominion.⁷⁴ Although certainly not all homeschoolers are Christian dominionists, those who understand the concept of Quiverfull as a metaphor for their role in this epochal struggle. "The womb is such a powerful weapon," Nancy Campbell, who has six children and 35 grandchildren, told *National Public Radio*, "it's a weapon against the enemy." Families in her church have an average of 8.5 children. Campbell said, "My greatest impact is through my children. The more children I have, the more ability I have to impact the world for God."⁷⁵

Additionally, Quiverfull children are usually homeschooled, and as religion scholar Julie Ingersoll explained in her 2015 book on Reconstructionism, that's also part of Rushdoony's long-term plan. As Rushdoony wrote, "the explicit goal of Christian education is dominion."⁷⁶ The Reconstructionists, Ingersoll concludes, are building a "separate and distinct subculture in which they can raise their large families without the influence of 'humanism.'"⁷⁷

For the Apostles and Prophets who comprise Mattera's USCAL, 7M roads to dominion are just as clear. The government officials that emerge from their ranks must be informed by a "biblical worldview" and their "every purpose must be to establish or further the Kingdom of Jesus on earth."⁷⁸

This may be a less peaceful process than Wagner and some 7M readers would have us believe. Many dominionists of all stripes anticipate deepening political tensions, violence and even religious or secessionist war, especially in the wake of legal and social acceptance of marriage equality and permanent access to legal abortion.⁷⁹ Gary North thought this was likely. He predicted in 1989 that as the dominionist movement rose, the idea of constitutionally protected religious pluralism "*will be shot to pieces in an ideological (and perhaps even literal) crossfire*" as Christians and humanists continue to square off in "an escalating religious war."⁸⁰ [emphasis in the original]

One contemporary example will suffice. David Lane, a leading Christian Right electoral organizer, declared in a 2013 essay that religious war may be on the horizon.⁸¹ Meanwhile he has shifted the electoral emphasis of his Mississippi-based American Renewal Project. (The group hosts all-expenses paid policy briefings for clergy and their spouses, featuring top politicians like Gov. Mike Pence (R-IN), Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL), Gingrich, Huckabee, Cruz, and often David Barton. Republican presidential contender Donald Trump addressed one such event in August 2016.⁸²) They are currently recruiting and training clergy with a dominionist vision to run for office at all levels.⁸³ Lane's own pastor, Rob McCoy, won a city council seat in Thousand Oaks, California, in 2016.⁸⁴ Lane's vision is clear: "I don't think there's any such thing as a separation of church and state. This was not established as a secular nation, and anybody that says that it is, they're not reading American history. This was established by

Christians for the advancement of the Christian faith. My goal is to return—to restore a biblically based culture and a Judeo-Christian heritage.”⁸⁵



Ted and Rafael Cruz along with David Barton at the Pastor’s Conference, Iowa Renewal Project, Marriott Hotel, Des Moines, Iowa, July 19 & 20, 2013. (Photo by Bruce Wilson via Youtube)

Lane reprised the theme of his inflammatory essay in dog whistle fashion in 2015, invoking the names of two warriors of Old Testament Israel. “We just need a Gideon or Rahab the Harlot to stand,” he declared.⁸⁶ But one does not invoke these biblical figures to call for religious revival, elect candidates to city council, or to advance a legislative agenda. The biblical Gideon leads an Israelite army in an ethnic cleansing of the Midianites who were oppressors and worshiped false gods. (Lane’s piece was titled, “To Retake America, We Must Defeat Her False Religion.”) Rahab sheltered two Israelite spies in preparation for the sacking of the city of Jericho by Joshua’s army, resulting in the massacre of everyone but Rahab and her family.

It is worth noting that NAR events often begin with processions of young men marching to the military beat of drums and blowing Shofars—ram horns used for battle signals in ancient Israel.⁸⁷

The Smears of August

The election of 2008 saw the first major party candidate for national office who had been obviously influenced by dominionist thought. GOP vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin was a longtime member of an NAR-affiliated church, and had been mentored in politics by Alaskan Apostle Mary Glazier for two decades. The revelation of these ties when Palin came onto the national stage resulted in explosive, if short-lived, media attention.⁸⁸



Sarah Palin's vice presidential candidacy highlights Dominionism's influence on GOP thinking. (Photo by Gage Skidmore via Flickr. License: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>)

Controversy erupted again in the run up to the 2012 election primary season. Media reports about dominionist influences on GOP presidential contenders Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-MN) and Gov. Rick Perry (R-TX)⁸⁹ threatened to make dominionism a household word. It was reported that, among other things, Bachmann's law school mentor at Oral Roberts University was Christian Reconstructionist John Eidsmoe.⁹⁰ (Reconstructionist Herb Titus also served on the school's small law school faculty.) And leading NAR figures staged an unprecedented prayer rally of some 30,000 people in Houston to launch Gov. Perry's campaign, to which even C. Peter Wagner traveled from Colorado to attend.

The thought that dominionism might become an issue in the presidential campaign must have sent Republican-oriented PR shops into panic mode. Journalists, scholars and activists who had written about dominionism were soon subjected to a wide-ranging smear campaign that featured nationally syndicated columnists from *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*.⁹¹ This effort sought to discredit the idea that dominionism was a real thing or, even if real, that it was of much significance. The real purpose of those using the term, the columnists alleged, was to tar evangelicals. Lisa Miller of the *Post* wrote, "'Dominionism' is the paranoid *mot du jour*."⁹² Bachmann and Perry's campaigns ultimately lost traction for other reasons. And in spite of many vigorous responses to the columnists' pooh poohery,⁹³ media coverage of dominionism collapsed even as dominionist thought continued to animate and sustain the Christian Right.

Dominionism denial exists within a wider context of a culture of doubt and denial about the strength and resiliency of the Christian Right itself.⁹⁴ It can be difficult to take dominionism seriously if you think that the movement it drives is dead, dying, or deeply diminished. That said, it is also true that some writers have used the term dominionism as an all-purpose epithet and have thereby unfairly broad-brushed people who do not embrace the harsh theocratic future envisioned by some.

But these distracting outliers are not as significant as the writing about dominionism from a wide variety of points of view that has been published over more than four decades. For example, in 1996, Rice University sociologist William Martin published *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* as a companion volume to the PBS documentary series by the same title.⁹⁵ Authors of hundreds of books⁹⁶ and articles⁹⁷ have discussed dominionism before and since 2011. (Dominionism denial nevertheless resurfaced as Ted Cruz's presidential prospects rose in 2016 and the role of dominionism began to be discussed.⁹⁸)

In any case, ideas about dominion, dominionism, and dominion theology and the terms themselves, have been a central part of the discussion of evangelicalism and the development of the Christian Right for decades. This will continue, regardless of what politically motivated dominionism denialists may publish next.

Deliver us from Hillary

Dominionism now appears to be a permanent feature of politics at all levels. For three presidential elections in a row, dominionist politicians have played prominent roles. Following Mike Huckabee and Sarah Palin in 2008, Michele Bachmann and Rick Perry in 2012, and the remarkable run of Ted Cruz in 2016, dominionists are among

the most prominent politicians in the country and enjoy significant public support and acceptance as a legitimate part of the political mix.

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While Senator Cruz's campaign was supported by leading NAR figures and most other Christian Right leaders, there was always a Plan B as well. One NAR prophet said God had told him in July 2015 that he will use Donald Trump to "expose darkness and perversion."⁹⁹ Donald Trump also enjoyed significant support from other Christian Right figures, notably 7M theorist Lance Wallnau (who also sits on the board of an NAR political arm, the Oak Initiative¹⁰⁰).

Wallnau sought to explain the paradox of evangelical Christians supporting Trump from early on even though he didn't seem like a good fit. Trump, as has been much discussed, was a longtime supporter of abortion and LGBTQ rights, a thrice-married philanderer, a failed casino magnate with ties to organized crime,¹⁰¹ and someone whose Christian credentials were dubious at best. Nevertheless, Wallnau suggested that God could use Trump to achieve his purposes even though he was a flawed vessel. Wallnau recalled the story of Cyrus, the King of Persia in the biblical book of Isaiah who, as had been earlier prophesied, freed the Jews who had been captive in Babylon for 70 years, and helped to build the temple in Jerusalem. God used the pagan Cyrus, as Wallnau put it, as a "wrecking ball" for his purposes.¹⁰² Wallnau thought God would use Trump to challenge "an increasingly hostile anti-Christian culture"¹⁰³ and "deliver us from Hillary."¹⁰⁴



Some dominionists believe God will use Trump to deliver them from a liberal Clinton. (Photo by Gage Skidmore via Flickr. License <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>)

Wallnau's story makes clear that at least some 7Mers do not require moral or doctrinal conformity to accept someone as a co-belligerent, or even as a leader, as long as they can help get them part of the way down the road to dominion. It also underscores that while the various doctrines feeding into the dominionist movement are clear,

the degree to which they are adopted, and the means and timeline by which dominionists may seek to achieve their goals, will vary according to individual and factional interests.

Dominionism, like the Christian Right itself, has come a long way from obscure beginnings. What is remarkable today is that the nature of this driving ideology of the Christian Right remains obscure to most of society, most of the time. Dominionism's proponents and their allies know it takes time to infuse their ideas into the constituencies most likely to be receptive. They also know it is likely—and rightly—to alarm many others.

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Religion scholar Michael McVicar recounts an illuminating anecdote from that pivotal 1980 gathering of the Religious Roundtable addressed by Ronald Reagan. During the meeting, Robert Billings, one of the founders of the Moral Majority, privately observed to Gary North that, "If it weren't for his [Rushdoony's] books, none of us would be here." North replied, "No one in the audience understands that." Billings replied, "True. But we do."

"Insiders knew about Rushdoony's influence, even if the rank and file did not," McVicar concludes. That continues to be true. The role of dominionism is largely hidden in plain sight from those most affected, on all sides.¹⁰⁵

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