

The quiet rise of Christian dominionism

Jerry Falwell wanted to prepare America for the end of the world. Ted Cruz's evangelical backers want to take America over.

by [Keri Ladner](#) in the [November 2022](#) issue



US Senator Ted Cruz at the 2021 AmericaFest at the Phoenix Convention Center in Phoenix, Arizona. (Photo by Gage Skidmore / Creative Commons)

In 2015, Ted Cruz went to Liberty University to announce his run for president. Liberty had long been a bastion of dispensationalism, an evangelical worldview with a premillennial eschatology and a separatist attitude toward society. But the senator from Texas stayed away from such topics in his speech. Instead he focused on government deregulation as essential to protecting the God-given rights of

individuals. Against the failures of supposed socialist policies like Obamacare, Cruz asked his audience to

imagine abolishing the IRS. . . . Imagine a federal government that stands for the First Amendment rights of every American. . . . From the dawn of this country, at every stage, America has enjoyed God's providential blessing. Over and over again, when we faced impossible odds, the American people rose to the challenge. You know, compared to that, repealing Obamacare and abolishing the IRS ain't all that tough!

This message was well-received at Liberty—in part because the school's founder, Jerry Falwell Sr., had made some important changes to the dispensationalism he inherited. Falwell believed that, although the world would soon face the Rapture and the wrath of God, Christians should still try to influence their society and so perhaps avoid the worst of what was to come. These more public-facing dispensationalists got involved in political arenas; they attempted to reform American society rather than avoid it. Their goals came to include severe reductions in government regulations, as Cruz proposed.

Cruz, who has suggested he might run again in 2024, represents a more recently ascendant evangelical worldview quite different from dispensationalism: Christian dominionism. Dominionism is the belief that Christians should take moral, spiritual, and ecclesiastical control over society. It has risen rather quietly in American society, and it has had no major public battles with dispensationalism. Instead, the two have come to overlap in interesting ways, as indicated by Cruz's warm reception at Liberty. Individual evangelicals do not necessarily ascribe to one or the other.

So it is difficult to gauge how many Americans today are specifically dominionist in their belief or practice. We can see, however, that dominionism has made significant inroads in American evangelicalism over the last two decades—and shaped the political engagement of the religious right.

Christian dominionism shares with Falwell's public-facing dispensationalism the idea of America's divine favor. But the two depart on the key question of the fate of the world. Unlike dispensationalism's message of social deterioration that precedes Christ's return, Christian dominionism is postmillennial rather than premillennial. It argues that Christians can and must reform society so that it becomes progressively better. Only then will Christ return.

In the United States, Protestantism has historically been underpinned by such postmillennial beliefs. Christians, acting as God's agents in history, are called to improve the state of society. Laws to protect workers' rights and strict regulations on child labor, the push for the abolition of slavery, the civil rights movement—these are all fruits of postmillennial beliefs. The postmillennial reforms envisioned by Christian dominionism, however, are considerably different from this trajectory and are much more aligned politically with Falwell's version of dispensationalism.

The roots of dominionism are found in the mid-20th century, when Rousas John Rushdoony developed a hermeneutic called Christian reconstructionism. Rushdoony was the son of refugees who fled the Armenian genocide; he became a Presbyterian minister whose views frequently led to conflicts in his own congregation and denomination. Rushdoony went on to found the Chalcedon Foundation to develop and propagate his views on how Christians should live in the world.

The central tenet of Rushdoony's teaching is that God has tasked Christians with taking dominion over society, beginning in Genesis 1:28, in which God commands humans to take dominion over the earth. While many Christians have applied this verse in the context of stewardship, Rushdoony taught that this creation mandate is really a dominion mandate, commanding humans to bring every sphere of society—as well as nature itself—into subjugation under Christ. In his view, Christ's sacrificial death nullified the Fall and subsequent curse of Genesis 3 and enabled Christians to perfectly follow God's law. Reconstructionism is a guidebook for Christians to reconstruct society according to Rushdoony's understanding of Mosaic law. (Notably, his understanding differs dramatically from historical Jewish interpretations and includes stoning LGBTQ individuals.)

What would the perfectly reconstructed society look like? Rushdoony taught that it would provide man—specifically the male gender—with the greatest possible freedom, due to the absence of a government that currently limits that freedom. A federal government would no longer be responsible for laws that govern public safety, social programs (including public schools and welfare), or just about anything else.

Instead, society would be reconstructed so that the male-headed family and local church fulfill the roles that currently belong to the government, which would have the authority only to protect private property and punish capital offenses. Families and churches, as the cornerstones of the reconstructed society, would implement

Mosaic law, with Christ as king over what would have become a Christian nation. Without government welfare, churches would carry the responsibility of aid to the poor, and without public schools, families would be responsible for their own children's education. The economy would operate without any government regulation, meaning present laws requiring the integrity of consumer goods, protecting workers' rights, and disallowing exploitative financial practices would no longer be in effect. Because in a reconstructed America Christians would have brought God's kingdom to earth through the implementation of Mosaic law, these protections would not be necessary.

Dispensationalists and dominionists share many political goals. Their differences present themselves in eschatological terms. The public-facing dispensationalists who formed the religious right were preparing America for the end of the world. (President Reagan, the darling of the religious right, was a firm believer in the battle of Armageddon). Dominionists, on the other hand, seek to take over the world. In the words of George Grant, a dominionist who wrote *The Changing of the Guard: Biblical Principles for Political Action*:

It is dominion we are after. Not just a voice. It is dominion we are after. Not just influence. It is dominion we are after. Not just equal time. It is dominion we are after. World conquest. That's what Christ has commissioned us to accomplish.

Although Mosaic law has not been implemented in America, Christian reconstructionism has made significant inroads in government. Gary North, Rushdoony's son-in-law, studied economics and has devoted immeasurable hours and financial resources to turning Rushdoony's thought into a blueprint for Christian economics. When the Tea Party burst onto the scene in 2009, the economist that its adherents most frequently referenced was North, who wanted to see government programs and the taxes that fund them eliminated. While the Tea Party itself was not necessarily dominionist, the group espoused a political agenda that dovetails with Rushdoony's vision of the reconstructed society; additionally, many Tea Party leaders, such as former Alaska governor Sarah Palin, had clear dominionist leanings. Cruz was elected to the Senate in 2012 as part of the Tea Party movement.

Following Rushdoony, a hyper-charismatic movement known as the New Apostolic Reformation picked up on dominionist theology while jettisoning reconstructionism's

goal of Mosaic law. The NAR teaches that prophets and apostles are essential to church governance. In the NAR, apostles and prophets can receive new revelation from God and give that revelation to their followers.

One of those revelations, which was initially promoted by the NAR prophet Lance Wallnau and has gained prominence within the movement, is known as the Seven Mountain Mandate. This is the NAR form of dominionism. The 7MM suggests that there are seven mountains of culture: religion and church, family, education, government, media, arts and entertainment, and business and economics. Historically, Wallnau said, Christians have focused on only the first mountain by building churches, to the neglect of the others. The new revelation for today is that they are to hold positions of leadership over all mountains of culture so that they can attain dominion over every aspect of society.

No longer a fringe theology, the NAR is a fast-growing movement that, especially through the highly influential Bethel Church in Redding, California, and the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri, has gone mainstream in American evangelicalism. While the leaders of Bethel Church and IHOPKC disavow direct connection with the NAR, they are highly influential in the movement that researchers, especially Holly Pivec and Doug Geivett, have identified as the NAR.

Because the emphasis in the NAR is on divine revelation that prophets receive directly from God, many of its leaders have little or no formal theological training. While some are adamantly postmillennial, others, such as Mike Bickle at IHOPKC, teach a hybrid of dispensationalism and dominionism. NAR leaders often merge a premillennial hermeneutic of impending doom with a postmillennial one of attaining dominion over society without noting any contradiction.

The direct influence of this movement on Cruz begins with his father, Rafael, who is a leader in the NAR. In August 2012, father and son stood next to NAR pastor Larry Huch, who made a bold declaration about the man who would soon become the junior senator from Texas. Huch said that God had anointed the younger Cruz and claimed that the year 2012

will begin what we call the end-times transfer of wealth. And that when these Gentiles begin to receive this blessing, they will never go back financially through the valley again. They will grow and grow and grow. It's said this way: that God is looking at the church and everyone in it and

deciding in the next three and a half years who will be his bankers. And the ones that say here I am Lord, you can trust me, we will become so blessed that we will usher in the coming of the Messiah.

Rafael Cruz followed Huch's speech by saying that God needs both priests and kings: the priests bless the kings, who go into battle and then bring back the spoils of war for the temple and expansion of the kingdom of God. According to him, many Christians believe that their calling is to be a priest and serve in the church, but Ted Cruz is a king meant to serve God in the halls of government.

The end-times transfer of wealth is an NAR teaching that emerges from the 7MM. It asserts that in the end times, wealth will pass from the unrighteous to the righteous so that they can take dominion and establish the kingdom of God on earth. In order for Christians to fulfill the 7MM, they will need tremendous resources, which God will supply. Though he has not explicitly connected his goal of abolishing the IRS to the end-times transfer of wealth, Cruz advocates that wealth leave the government and go to private organizations, including churches. This aligns with the NAR teaching.

Caution is in order, however, when analyzing Cruz's relationship with the NAR. His father worked on his presidential campaign, and his campaign logo was a flame of fire colored with red, white, and blue—a merger of the charismatic symbolism of NAR churches and Christian nationalism. He has had a long-standing relationship with dominionist public figures, including Texas governor Greg Abbott and far-right physician and conspiracy theorist Steve Hotze. David Barton, the leader of the reconstructionist organization WallBuilders, is one of Cruz's closest advisers. Yet Cruz gives no indication of personally adhering to the NAR, and his church in Houston does not have the specific markers of an NAR church.

The policies that Cruz has advocated for throughout his career share territory with the dominionist cause, albeit in a manner less explicit than that of his father. He advocated for the deregulation of Texas's power grid for years before the 2021 winter storm, which caused massive blackouts that left homes so cold that water froze indoors. In 2019, Cruz [claimed](#) that the state's deregulation—particularly with regard to energy—had led to unprecedented economic success. Deregulation was the key to prosperity, and he urged other states to follow Texas's model, as deregulation is critical to preserving the God-given freedom that Christians in America enjoy.

By moving the burden of preserving public safety from the government to the companies running the power grid, alongside wanting to abolish the IRS, Cruz does seem to be fulfilling the role of facilitating the end-times transfer of wealth. He is moving wealth and power from the government and to the liberty-loving Christians who will use them to further the kingdom of God on earth. His worldview allowed him to abdicate responsibility for his state during a crisis. During the 2021 storm, he left the state for a resort in Mexico while people in Texas were dying of extreme cold and carbon monoxide poisoning.

Whether or not Cruz believes he is on a mission from God to serve as a king in the halls of government, to fulfill the end-times transfer of wealth, or to help bring about a reconstructed society, his political positions come from a similar mold. And he is far from the only politician being influenced by dominionist theology. Donald Trump, like Cruz, may not be a NAR devotee, but he has deep ties to the movement; indeed, his personal pastor, Paula White, is an NAR apostle. Rick Perry, the former governor of Texas who served in Trump's cabinet, has been featured at NAR events, most notably when he was championed at Lou Engle's The Response rally just days before formally announcing his 2012 presidential campaign. Senator Josh Hawley and conservative media host Eric Metaxas have both been featured at rallies held by Sean Feucht, a worship leader from the epicenter of the NAR movement, Bethel Church. Whether or not these and other right-wing figures personally hold dominionist beliefs, they are clearly influenced by dominionism.

These Christians are hard at work attempting to create their version of a Christian government. If we are concerned about those who stand to lose the most from the excesses and abuses of a deregulated public sphere, we need to pay attention to the development of Christian dominionism.