

## The Lure of Dominionism

**Dominionism** (or *theonomy*) in its extreme form seeks to establish a Christian theocracy in each nation of the world, beginning with America. Dominionists misperceive America as a Christian nation, and they believe it is God's ordained instrument to obtain worldly peace and justice. If that sounds hauntingly familiar, it is the battle-cry of the Christian Right. But it is not the battle-cry of the Church. I believe it is heresy. It brings Islamic beliefs about worldly rule into the Church. It also feeds a fleshly lust for power and control.

One of the troublesome things about heresies is that, from a simple error, they branch off and then multiply in both scope and severity. This is the slippery slope effect. If we can accept proposition-A as true, then surely proposition-B is true as well; and if B is true, well then, proposition-C is surely reasonable. Misappropriating the Church for worldly ends is made plausible by a simple misunderstanding of eschatology: by believing a physical reign of Christ precedes his return in Judgment.<sup>1</sup> This misunderstanding is called *Chiliasm* or *Millennialism*. It is the core of Dispensationalism, modern pre-millennialism, and even some forms of postmillennialism. I deal with those teachings elsewhere.

To put it in perspective, let's look at some basic teachings. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" Jn 18:36. If we assume that the Church's role in the world is to cleanse it (and it *is* – Lk 13:21), but we also believe that the theocracy of the OT is our model for government (but it is *not* – 1Co 10:6)<sup>2</sup>, then dominionism is the result. It negates Christ's unambiguous statement that the kingdom is not physical with regard to the world. Adherents of dominionism seek worldly means (politics, law, or government) to attain a spiritual end (Christ's physical reign on earth). That violates a clear commandment not to love the world or anything in the world, including its style of governance (1Jn 2:15; Mt 20:25-28).

Dominionism naively ignores the fact that man's corruption will pervert whatever temporal government is instituted (Rom 7:18). It places an undue burden on those who do not belong to Christ (1Co 5:12).<sup>3</sup> Non-believers don't have the Spirit to combat the flesh (Rom 8:6-7), and so they remain in bondage (Rom 7:14). They are not under the headship of Christ. Yet dominionism wants to hold them accountable as if they were believers. That's unrealistic, and it is cruel and unmerciful. The Church, like any believer, is in the world, but not of it (Jn 17:11,16) It does not wage war as the world does (2Cor 10:3). The function of the Church is *not* to transform the world, but to equip believers (Eph 4:11-13). Why? So that *believers* may be transformed (Rom 12:2). And when they are transformed, they will uplift the world, just as leaven causes the loaf to rise (Lk 13:21); just as salt preserves (Mt 5:12-13); and just as light guides (Mt 5:14). The Church, unlike an individual believer, is to be inwardly directed, not outwardly directed. The Church must *never* pick up the sword lest it die by the sword (Mt 26:52). *Whatever influence we have on the world is achieved by exemplary persuasion, not by physical coercion* (Mt 5:16; 1Pe 2:12; Rom 13:4).

One last thing before you read the article: I choose to label dominionism a heresy because it contradicts the testimony of the Church (i.e. our orthodoxy), and because it leads to abuses in Scriptural interpretation and practice. And so I believe it is error, even if it is not damnable error. You are welcome to disagree with me, but please be aware of the dangers inherent in this teaching. By the way, I do *not* endorse all the conclusions and characterizations in the following article. Many of the beliefs of dominionists are in fact biblical. But the article creates a stark contrast between some aspects of dominionism and sound biblical teaching. As students of Scripture, you'll be forced to discern those differences...

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<sup>1</sup> Christ's reign extends to the whole earth, but only the elect of the kingdom submit to it; the non-elect of the world cannot. Coercion is not the biblical way to bridge the gap between the two (Mt 20:25-28). The *Gospel* is God's designated means for doing that (Jn 8:31-32; Rom 8:1-4).

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor 10:6 Now these things occurred as examples [types] to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor 5:12 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?

## DOMINIONISM

(a.k.a. Christian Reconstructionism, Dominion Theology, and Theonomy)

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### History:

**Dominionism, Dominion Theology, Christian Reconstructionism, Theocratic Dominionism, and Theonomy** are not denominations or faith groups. Rather, they are interrelated beliefs which are followed by members of a wide range of Christian denominations. They have no connection at all to [Reconstructionist Judaism](#), which is a liberal group within Judaism.

Generally speaking:

- **Dominionism & Dominion Theology** are derived from Genesis 1:26 of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament):  
*“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’”* (NIV)  
 Most Christians interpret this verse as meaning that God gave mankind dominion over the animal kingdom. Dominion theologians believe that that this verse commands Christians to bring all societies, around the world, under the rule of the Word of God.
- **Theonomy** (Greek for “God’s Law”) includes the concept that *“God’s revealed standing laws are a reflection of His immutable moral character and, as such, are absolute in the sense of being nonarbitrary, objective, universal, and established in advance of particular circumstances (thus applicable to general types of moral situations).”*<sup>6,7</sup> Thus, each of the 613 laws given to Moses and recorded in the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Hebrew Scriptures) are binding on people of all nations, cultures, and religions forever, except for those laws which have been specifically rescinded or modified by further revelation.
- **Christian Reconstructionism** arose out of conservative Presbyterianism in the early 1970’s. Followers believe *“that every area dominated by sin must be ‘reconstructed’ in terms of the Bible.”*<sup>1</sup>

The term *Reconstructionism* has been used to refer to various combinations of the preceding three terms. This type of confusion is common in the field of religion. Many theological terms such as *Christian, Fundamentalist, Occult, New Age, Reconstructionism, Unitarian etc.* have been assigned so many different interpretations by different groups in different eras that they are almost meaningless.

Its most common form, **Dominionism**, represents one of the most extreme forms of Fundamentalist Christianity thought. Its followers, called Dominionists, are attempting to peacefully convert the laws of United States so that they match those of the Hebrew Scriptures. They intend to achieve this by using the freedom of religion in the US to train a generation of children in private Christian religious schools. Later, their graduates will be charged with the responsibility of creating a new Bible-based political, religious and social order. One of the first tasks of this order will be to eliminate religious choice and freedom. Their eventual goal is to achieve the *“Kingdom of God”* in which much of the world is converted to Christianity. They feel that the power of God’s word will bring about this conversion. No armed force or insurrection will be needed; in fact, they believe that there will be little opposition to their plan. People will willingly accept it. All that needs to be done is to properly explain it to them.

All religious organizations, congregations etc. other than strictly Fundamentalist Christianity would be suppressed. Nonconforming Evangelical, main line and liberal Christian religious institutions would no longer be allowed to hold services, organize, proselytize, etc. Society would revert to the laws and punishments of the Hebrew Scriptures. Any person who advocated or practiced other religious beliefs

outside of their home would be tried for idolatry and executed. Blasphemy, adultery and homosexual behavior would be criminalized; those found guilty would also be executed. At that time that this essay was originally written, this was the only religious movement in North America of which we were aware which advocates genocide for followers of minority religions and non-conforming members of their own religion. Since then, we have learned of two conservative Christian pastors in Texas who have advocated the execution of all [Wiccans](#). Ralph Reed, the executive director of the conservative public policy group the *Christian Coalition* has criticized Reconstructionism as “*an authoritarian ideology that threatens the most basic civil liberties of a free and democratic society.*”

*Leading writers in the movement are:*

**Greg L. Bahnsen** of the Southern California Center for Christian Studies.

**David Chilton.** He adopted hyper-preterism, (a.k.a. full or complete preterism) a particular belief about end time events. He was basically ostracized from the Christian Reconstruction camp afterwards.

**Gary DeMar.**

**Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.**

**Gary North** of the Institute for Christian Economics. He is a prolific author.

**Larry Pratt:** head of the Gun Owners of America and English First, a group opposed to non-English speaking immigrants and bilingual education. Author of “Armed People Victorious” which documents Guatemalan and Philippine militias and para-military death squads. He was campaign co-chair of the Buchanan presidential campaign in 1996.

**John Quade.**

**Rousas John Rushdoony** of the Chalcedon Foundation is often considered the founder of *Christian Reconstructionism*. Author of *Institutes of Biblical Law*.

**Rev. Andrew Sandlin.**

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### Beliefs:

According to Gary DeMar, a popular Reconstructionist author, the foundation of Reconstructionism is a unique combination of three Biblical doctrines:

- Regeneration of the individual, through an intimate relationship with Christ
- Individuals guiding their lives closely by following a specified subset of Biblical laws
- Promoting of the world-wide Kingdom of God. <sup>2</sup>

*Specific beliefs include:*

- A rejection of **Antinomianism**: the belief that salvation is obtained totally through faith and not through performing good works and living a moral life [*thus Christians need not obey biblical law*].
- **Presuppositionalism**: the acceptance on faith that the Bible is true. They do not attempt to prove that God exists or that the Bible is true.
- **Inerrancy**: the belief that the Bible, as originally written, is totally free of error.
- **Postmillennialism**: the belief that Christ will not return to earth until much of the world has converted to Christianity. This will not take place for some considerable time; it will not be a painless transition. Most Fundamentalists and other Evangelists hold to a different view. They are Premillennialists and believe that all (or almost all) of the preconditions of Christ’s return have been met. They expect Jesus’ second coming to occur very soon [*to begin a thousand year literal reign*].
- The 613 laws contained in the Hebrew Scriptures’ Mosaic Code can be divided into two classes: moral and ceremonial. Christians are not required to follow the ceremonial laws, because Jesus has liberated them from that responsibility. However, all persons must follow those moral laws which

were not specifically modified or cancelled by further revelation --generally in the Christian Scriptures (New Testament). In contrast:

- Non-reconstructionist Christians generally divide these laws into three classes: moral, civil and ceremonial law, and generally believe that most Old Testament laws are no longer binding on Christians.
- Jews generally believe that the Mosaic Code is binding only on Jews.
- The moral laws given by God to the ancient Israelites reflect of God’s character, which is unchangeable. Most of the laws are intended for all nations, cultures, societies, religions and all eras, including the present time. However, there are a few laws, in such areas as personal safety and sanitation, which are no longer applicable because of changes in architecture and sewage disposal. These do not need to be obeyed.
- The primacy of the Hebrew Scriptures, relative to the Christian Scriptures (New Testament). All of the Hebrew Scriptures’ non-ceremonial laws are still in force, unless they have been specifically rescinded or modified by verses in the Christian Scriptures. *“Only if we find an explicit abandonment of an Old Testament law in the New Testament, because of the historic fulfillment of the Old Testament shadow, can we legitimately abandon a detail of the Mosaic law.”*<sup>3</sup> This is largely supported by their interpretation of Matthew 5:17:
 

*“Do you think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (NIV)*
- Civil laws must be changed to match the Bible’s moral rules. That is, anything that is immoral (by their standards) is also to be criminalized.
- The only valid legislation, social theory, spiritual beliefs, economic theory are those derived from the Bible
- In every aspect of life, there are only two options: God-centered or man-centered; Theonomy or autonomy. Their political goal is to ban the latter, everywhere. Each individual, family, church, government and society must be reconstructed to eliminate sin. Each Christian has the responsibility to contribute to this conversion.

They oppose inter-faith, inter-racial, and same-sex marriages. R.J. Rushdoony wrote about opposition to: *“inter-religious, inter-racial, and inter-cultural marriages, in that they normally go against the very community which marriage is designed to establish.”*<sup>4</sup> Rushdoony’s condemnation of inter-racial marriage appears to have been his own and unrelated to the biblical text. It was not shared by other Reconstructionists.

Reconstructionists regard the Gods and Goddesses of all other religions to be *“the devil,”* and their teachings to be false. They would attempt to replace all religions with their version of Christianity. For example, David Chilton wrote about Judaism:

*“The god of Judaism is the devil. The Jew will not be recognized by God as one of His chosen people until he abandons his demonic religion and returns to the faith of his fathers--the faith which embraces Jesus Christ and His Gospel.”*<sup>5</sup>

Of course, there exists diversity of opinion within the Reconstructionist movement. Not all followers will necessarily agree with all the above statements of the movement’s leaders

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**Practices:**

If they gained control of the US or Canadian federal government, there would be many changes:

- The use of the [death penalty](#) would be greatly expanded, when the Hebrew Scriptures’ laws are reapplied. People will be executed for adultery, blasphemy, heresy, [homosexual behavior](#), idolatry,

prostitution, evil sorcery (some translations say [Witchcraft](#)), etc. The Bible requires those found guilty of these “crimes” to be either stoned to death or burned alive. Reconstructionists are divided on the execution method to be used.

- A church or congregation which does not accept the Mosaic Law has another god before them, and is thus guilty of idolatry. That would be punishable by death. That would include all non-Christian religious organizations. At the present time, non-Christians total two-thirds of the human race.
- The status of women would be reduced to almost that of a slave as [described in the Hebrew Scriptures](#). A woman would initially be considered the property of her father; after marriage, she would be considered the property of her husband.
- It would be logical to assume that the institution of slavery would be reintroduced, and regulated according to Biblical laws. Fathers could sell their daughters into [slavery](#). Female slaves would retain that status for life. Slave owners would be allowed to physically abuse them, as long as the slaves lived for at least a day before dying of the beating. 9
- Polygyny and the keeping of concubines were permitted in the Old Testament. However, Reconstructionists generally believe in marriage between one man and one woman only. Any other sexual expression would be a capital crime. Those found guilty of engaging in same-sex, pre-marital or extra-marital sex would be executed.
- The Old Testament “Jubilee Year” system would be celebrated once more. Every 50 years, the control of all land reverted to its original owners. In theory, this would require every part of North American land to be returned to the original Aboriginal owners (or perhaps to those persons of Aboriginal descent who are now Christians). Hawaii would be given back to the native Hawaiians.
- Governments would all have balanced budgets.
- Income taxes would be eliminated.
- The prison system would be eliminated. A system of just restitution would be established for some crimes. The death penalty would be practiced for many other crimes. There would be little need for warehousing of convicted criminals.
- Legal abortions would be banished; those found to be responsible for abortions would be charged with murder and executed.

The reinstatement of slavery appears to be a hot button item among Reconstructionists. We have received a few negative E-mails which complained that the movement does not recommend the resumption of human slavery. But we have received many more Emails from Reconstructionists claiming that legalizing slavery would be good for North America.

Joseph Busche and Bill Curry have written a *Tennessee Law Book*. Their intent was to show that laws to implement various Old Testament laws would sound extremely intrusive today.

See: <http://www.sullivan-county.com/>.

### **Interface with other Fundamentalist Christian groups:**

Dominionism differs from more common forms of Fundamentalism in a number of key areas.

Dominionists:

- Emphasize the importance of the Hebrew Scriptures vs. the Christian Scriptures.
- Believe that all Christians must attempt to reconstruct society along Biblical lines.
- Believe that, once they attain power, they will suppress other religions through genocide and mass murder, rather than through proselytizing.
- Would require all religious groups to strictly follow the Mosaic law.
- Believe that Jesus’ second coming is in the far future.

Dominionism thought is finding considerable support among [Pentecostal](#) and Charismatic denominations and churches. According to the Public Eye Magazine: “Gary North claims that ‘the ideas of the Reconstructionists have penetrated into Protestant circles that for the most part are unaware of the original source of the theological ideas that are beginning to transform them.’ North describes the ‘three major legs of the Reconstructionist movement [as] the Presbyterian oriented educators, the Baptist school headmasters and pastors, and the charismatic telecommunications system’.”<sup>8</sup>

#### References used for the above essay:

1. Rev. Andrew Saldlin, “*The Creed of Christian Reconstruction*,” at: <http://www.chalcedon.edu/creed.html>
2. J. Ligon Duncan, III, “*Moses’ Law for Modern Government: The Intellectual and Sociological Origins of the Christian Reconstructionist Movement*”, *Premise*, Vol II, No. 5, 1995-MAY-27. See: <http://capo.org/premise/95/may/ssha2.html>
3. Gary North, “*The Sinai Strategy: Economics and the Ten Commandments*,” Institute for Christian Economics (1986)
4. R.J. Rushdoony, “*The Institutes of Biblical Law*”, Craig Press, Nutley, NJ (1973), P. 257.
5. David Chilton, “*The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*”, Dominion Press, Ft. Worth, TX (1984), P. 127.
6. Rev. Andrew Saldlin, “*The Creed of Christian Reconstruction*,” at: <http://www.chalcedon.edu/creed.html>
7. Greg Bahnsen, “*By This Standard*,” Pages 345-347. Available free at <http://www.freebooks.com>
8. Frederick Clarkson, “*Theocratic Dominionism gains influence*,” *The Public Eye Magazine*, Volume 8, #1 and 2, 1994-MAR/JUN. Online at: <http://www.publiceye.org/>
9. See Exodus 21:21

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#### Additional resources:

- An essay on *Dominionism* with many links is at: <http://abacus.oxy.edu/>
- The **Chalcedon Foundation** of Dr. R.J. Rushdoony is at: <http://www.chalcedon.edu>
- The **Southern California Center for Christian Studies** (founded by the late Dr. G.L. Bahnsen) is at: <http://www.cleaf.com/>
- The **Institute for Christian Economics**, (ICE) founded by Dr. Gary North, has many Christian books free for downloading. See: <http://www.freebooks.com/>
- An essay on *Christian Reconstructionism* with many links is at: <http://abacus.oxy.edu/>
- The **Chalcedon Foundation** of Dr. R.J. Rushdoony is at: <http://www.chalcedon.edu>
- Joseph Conn, “*Christians Stoning Teens*,” at: <http://members.aol.com/>

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#### Books:

- G.L. Bahnsen “*Theonomy in Christian Ethics*”
- G.L. Bahnsen “*By This Standard*”
- G.L. Bahnsen “*No Other Standard*”
- David Chilton’s “*Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt Manipulators*”
- Gary DeMar, “*Christian Reconstruction: What it Is, What it Isn’t*”
- George Grant and Mark Horne, “*Legislating Immorality: The Homosexual Movement Comes Out Of The Closet*.” (This book advocates the death penalty for homosexual behavior.)
- R.J. Rushdoony “*Institutes of Biblical Law*”

Source: <http://www.religioustolerance.org/reconstr.htm>