



Truthout

Christian Dominionists Meet at Trump's Washington Hotel to Answer the "Divine Call to War"

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Last month, while NRA CEO Wayne LaPierre was regaling culture warriors at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference with tales of socialists trying to take away their guns, Christian Dominionists were holding an event called "The Turnaround: An Appeal to Heaven National Gathering," at Washington's Trump International Hotel. It featured some of the most prominent Christian Dominionists in the country. Although there are various iterations of Dominionism, Dominionists are united in their belief that conservative Christians should take complete control of all the political, secular and cultural institutions in the country.

Though they are not nearly as well known as Christian Right leaders, such as Jerry Falwell Jr., Franklin Graham and Robert Jeffress Jr., top Dominionist leaders like Dutch Sheets, Chuck Pierce, Cindy Jacobs and Lou Engle are a force worth paying attention to.

Those leaders, according to People for the American Way's Right Wing Watch, "are associated with the New Apostolic Reformation, which believes a triumphant, dominion-taking church will help bring about the return of Christ, and many are part of POTUS Shield, a network of self-described apostles and prophets who believe President Trump was anointed by God to help bring that all about."

Dutch Sheets, the go-to guy for the event, claimed that it would "play a prophetic role in getting the church to function as Christ's Ekklesia, the representatives of His Kingdom government on earth; as such, we will expose the enemies of God, disrupt their plans, enforce Heaven's rule, and reform America." In 2015, Right Wing Watch pointed out, Sheets said, "We must realize that we are God's governing force on the earth, which have been given keys of authority from Him to legislate from the spiritual realm."

Sheets has also maintained that both the Department of Justice and the FBI are trying to destroy Trump's presidency, a belief also recently espoused by the Rev. Franklin Graham. "We will operate in our kingdom authority while there, breaking the back of this attempt to render President Trump ineffective," Sheets wrote in early February on his blog at dutchsheets.org. "We will decree the exposing and failure of all attempts to sabotage his presidency. We will release favor over him, enabling him to accomplish everything for which God sent him to the White House — including the turning of the Supreme Court! President Trump will fulfill all of God's purposes for him."

Right Wing Watch pointed out that Lou Engle, "who has called on Christians to pray that God would 'sweep' the Supreme Court and other federal courts of justices and judges who uphold

Roe v. Wade,” operates through a group called The Call. In early February, the organization sent supporters an “email about the prophetic nature of the event and the choice of February 22 for its opening. The email asked readers to ‘take up our rod of authority’ and urged people to pray for President Trump.”

Evidently, as Right Wing Watch reported, officials at Trump International were so taken with the event’s concept that the hotel lowered its prices to accommodate the Dominionists.

I asked two long-time movement watchers — Americans United for Separation of Church and State’s Communications Director Rob Boston and Political Research Associates’ Frederick Clarkson — to help us understand why the Dominionist movement matters. Are its leaders effective politically in and of themselves? How does their connection to the Trump White House empower them? How does the New Apostolic Reformation fit within the broader Christian Right?

“Dominionists are the most extreme faction of the Religious Right — they’re people who literally embrace the concept of theocratic government,” Rob Boston told me in an email. “They’re latter-day Puritans with modern-day technology, and they would make this country an officially ‘Christian’ one by force if necessary. Of course, their definition of Christianity is so extreme that it would exclude millions of Americans who attend mainline churches.”

What unites the “religious right,” under Boston’s definition, is its theocratic mission.

“The people who belong to this movement go by different names — Reconstructionists, Theonomists, Dominionists — but they all share a common belief: Our republican form of government should be replaced with a Christian fundamentalist theocracy,” Boston explained. “They may disagree on what constitutes a proper form of Christianity, but their goal is to ‘reconstruct’ society from the ground up, along ‘biblical’ lines.”

While Christian Reconstructionism has always been a small movement, “the writings of people like Rousas John Rushdoony laid the philosophical groundwork for the rise of the religious right in [the US], by providing a biblically sound justification for intervention in politics, a position that for many years was seen as anathema to the goals of the church’s mission of personal salvation,” Boston noted.

According to Boston, the religious right has tried to distance itself from Reconstructionists, labeling them “as a fringe,” but “that’s only because the former finds the latter’s overt enthusiasm for mixing fundamentalism with fascism embarrassing.”

Nevertheless, “these two factions share much in common,” said Boston. “They are at war with much of modern life. They refuse to accept things like women’s liberation, LGBTQ rights, secular public schools, religious pluralism, democracy, modern science, higher education, biblical criticism, liberal Christianity, non-theistic belief systems, and so on. To Reconstructionists, the 6th century Byzantine Empire is a model society — except, of course, that they would install a fundamentalist Christian emperor and not an Orthodox Catholic one. They’re not likely to get us back that far, but if current trends continue and Trump keeps

placating them, especially by putting far-right jurists on the courts, they could move the country a lot closer to 1950 than many of us would like.”

Frederick Clarkson, senior political analyst at Political Research Associates, has witnessed Sheets and others in action. In an email, Clarkson told me that his understanding, after reading the promotional material for the event, was “that they intend to fill the atmosphere in Washington with ‘biblical decrees’ and that this is part of what organizer Sheets calls his answer to the ‘divine call to war.’”

“And when Sheets and other apostles leading this event say a divine call, they mean it,” Clarkson added. “I have seen Chuck Pierce stop the proceedings at an event to say he was receiving a word from God, and people gasp and hang on his every nuance. This may seem strange to those outside of these networks, but for many of their followers, this is their experience of the living God. Thus, it is no small thing when the living God, speaking through his apostles and prophets is calling for ‘enforcing kingdom rule’ and raising up an ‘Army of Special Forces.’”

According to Clarkson, “Pentecostalism is the only growth sector in Christianity in the US and the New Apostolic Reformation is the most politically dynamic element of the Christian Right.” However, the movement has not received much media attention. “They adhere to an urgent and animating vision of dominion, such that they are able to believe that God has chosen an ungodly man to accomplish his purposes,” Clarkson added.

So why are dominionists so taken with Trump? “The great irony of this movement,” Boston explained, “is that, like other Religious Right groups, it has hitched itself to Donald Trump, perhaps the most amoral, un-Christlike man ever to occupy the White House. Dominionists tend to interpret the most mundane events through the lens of what they consider to be biblical prophecy, and in a desperate ploy to cover their actions, some of them argue that God is using Trump as his instrument.”

“Many believers would be offended by that notion, and others recognize it for what it is: a convenient excuse. The fact is, Trump is giving this crowd what it wants, so they are willing to overlook his many moral flaws and reckless behavior. It’s a typical political bargain, and whether this crowd cares to acknowledge it or not, it definitely involved the selling of many souls and the shredding of mounds of moral credibility.”

“One does not have to take their hyperbolic utterances seriously, but no one should have any doubt that their followers do,” Clarkson pointed out. “Holding the event in the five-star Trump hotel a few blocks from the White House is plenty of proof of the truth that they are carrying out the will of God and must stand up to Trump’s opponents, who must also be seen as the opponents of God.”

While the media focused its attention on CPAC, The Turnaround, went relatively unreported. “For decades, the broad theocratic movement we call Dominionism has been rising in plain sight, and now is a close ally of the president of the United States, enjoying access to power that ostensibly more moderate evangelicals can only dream of,” Clarkson declared.

In a recent speech at a luncheon in Nashville, hosted by the Susan B. Anthony List and Life Issues Institute, an anti-abortion organization, Vice President Mike Pence told the enthralled audience that abortion will be outlawed “in our time.”

“I just know in my heart of hearts this will be the generation that restores life in America,” Pence said. “I truly do believe [i]f all of us do all that we can, then we will once again, in our time, restore the sanctity of life to the center of American law.”

Whether Pence is right about that is yet to be determined. However, there is no question that the broader Christian Right, which includes the New Apostolic Reformation, is serious about pushing conservative judicial appointments, which could lead to making abortion illegal again, and not just the halting of the expansion of LGBTQ rights, but even the reversal of marriage equality.

“Many of these rights are hanging by one vote on the Supreme Court, Americans United’s Boston pointed out. “If Trump gets another appointment, it could tip the balance and empower Religious Right legal groups to reopen issues we thought were long-settled. Even under its current makeup, there’s no guarantee that the court [will not] adopt a theory of ‘religious freedom’ that allows entire classes of people to be discriminated against, denied medical treatment or treated like second-class citizens because of someone else’s religion.”

“The danger,” said Boston, is not that we will wake up tomorrow living in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, but rather that we will see a gradual erosion of our rights as the wall of separation between church and state is lowered by the courts. Whether a theocratically-tinged government comes due to baby steps or a giant leap is irrelevant at the end of the day to those forced to live under it.