

THE LURE OF DOMINIONISM

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Dominionism (or THEONOMY) in its extreme form seeks to establish a Christian theocracy in each nation of the world, beginning with America. Such 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. 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.¹ This misunderstanding is called *Chiliasm* or *Millennialism*. It's the core of Dispensationalism, pre-millennialism, and some forms of postmillennialism. I deal with those teachings on my website:

<http://www.onthewing.org/Eschatology.html>

<http://www.onthewing.org/Ethics.html>

To put it in perspective, let's look at some basic teachings. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" Joh 18:36. If we assume that the Church's role in the world is to cleanse it (but it is *not* ²), and we also believe that the theocracy of the OT is our model for government (but it is *not* ³), then DOMINIONISM is the result. It negates Christ's unambiguous statement that the kingdom is not physical with regard to the world. Many 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 (1Jn 2:15), including its style of governance (Mt 20:25-28).⁴

Such 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).⁵ 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 (Col 1:18), even though Christ is Head over all (Eph 1:20-22). Yet radical dominionists want to hold unbelievers accountable, as if they were believers. That's unrealistic, and it is also cruel and unmerciful. The

¹ 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).

² **Luk 4:18** "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed." The Church's role is to proclaim the Gospel in the name of Christ, drawing the elect into the Kingdom of the Son, so that *they* may be cleansed (Mat 28:18-20; Joh 15:3).

³ **1 Cor 10:6** Now these things occurred as examples [types] to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. *In other words, the Old Testament demonstrates our inescapable need for Christ, not for the Law.* **Col 2:16** So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,¹⁷ which are a *shadow* of things to come, but the *substance* is of Christ.

⁴ **Mat 20:25** But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. ²⁶ "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. ²⁷ "And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – ²⁸ "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

⁵ **1 Cor 5:12** What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?

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 13:20-21⁶); just as salt preserves (Mt 5:12-13); and just as light guides (Mt 5:14).⁷ 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).

Many of the beliefs of dominionists are in fact biblical. Please understand, my objection to the teachings of dominionism concerning a present earthly kingdom, or a future earthly kingdom prior to the Judgment, does not mean I am making a determination as to anyone's salvation. And despite wild accusations made by some atheists and pantheists, not all dominionists are rabid advocates for world domination. Yet every believer is called to be wise and discerning concerning teachings in the Church.⁸ Unfortunately, it is both possible and common to hold saving faith in Jesus Christ, while holding unsound (unhealthy) doctrine. Scripture must be our only authority. "May God be true and every man a liar." (Rom 3:4)

What about Politics and the Courts?

Please, I am *not* saying that we should ignore politics, that the men and women we elect or appoint to office are not important, that the laws of men are irrelevant, or that our sole focus is to be the church and the Gospel – as if we were isolationists and ghetto-dwellers. That would let evil wreak havoc in the world, unopposed. We are obliged by Scripture to *pursue* righteousness and justice in the world, to be peace-makers among all men, and not just in the church.

"Blessed *are* those who keep justice,
And he who does righteousness at all times!" Psa 106:3

How we do that, and *when* we do that, and *where* we do that, will make all the difference. Here's the principle governing the role and accountability of government:

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ⁴ For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil. (Rom 13:3-4 ^{NKJ})

⁶ **Luk 13:20** And again He said, "To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? ²¹ "It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

⁷ **Mat 5:13-16** "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. ¹⁶ "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

⁸ **Mat 15:9** And in vain they worship Me, Teaching *as* doctrines the commandments of men." **Gal 3:1** O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? **Gal 6:1** Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you *who are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.; **2Thes 2:15** Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. **1Tim 4:1** Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³ forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. **2Tim 4:3** For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. **Heb 13:9** Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For *it is* good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

So what happens when “the authority” – civil or military government – abuses or ignores its responsibilities as appointed to it by God? Do we overthrow that government? The Americans did that in 1776, justifying it in their Declaration of Independence this way:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers *from the consent of the governed*.

That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government.

We pursue justice, kindness, goodness, and gentleness through the laws of men, whenever the laws of men reflect the laws of God. We uphold those laws (Rom 3.31). We are not “lawless ones” and neither do we enable lawlessness. When the government and its laws favor and promote evil, and oppose the good – even if it costs us our life – we obey God rather than men (Act 5.29).

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Rev 2:10)

But where we can work within the law, and implement righteous and just laws through men, we are to do so. Even then, our faith is not in *men*; our faith is in *God*. We may live under the rule of men peaceably; but when that rule is actively opposed to God and the things of God, we stand our ground and let the laws have their consequences.

So I am not advocating *liberation theology*, another aberrant heresy that bears all the markings of dominionism. What I am advocating is the pursuit of justice through the law if available, and despite the law if it is not available.

One last thing: I label radical 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. It’s a form of ***legalism***, in its most literal sense; and yet its proponents well understand that salvation is by grace alone. Therefore they don’t confuse justification with sanctification; rather, they demand sanctification *without* justification. As I said at the beginning, that suggests a penchant to exercise *dominion* over others, to control others under the rule of Law; and thus a fleshly desire to *lord it over others*; “**Yet it shall not be so among you.**” (Mat 20:26) You are welcome to disagree with me, but please be aware of the potential dangers in such teaching.