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## Dominionist Policy Goals

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**Abstract:**

I argue that, while no major politician is openly acknowledging affiliation with or adoption of Dominionist political beliefs, that these beliefs are influencing the tenor of the Republican party and that the influence of these beliefs is reflected in many of the policies and platforms of prominent members. Further, there are Dominionist adjacent organizations actively driving the Overton window and the public policy agenda towards a more Dominionist centered political arena. Specifically, this paper examines the 1776 Report as a reflection of Dominionist themes and the culmination of efforts by the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation and its Project Blitz to bring Dominionist Christian viewpoints into the public discourse. Thus, this paper argues that the Dominionist mindset has successfully reached the highest levels of power in the US government.

**Keywords:** Dominionism, Christian, Policy, Theonomy, Libertarian, Bill Mill

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## **1. Introduction**

Over the last five decades, their bona fides and their credentials in academia, politics, policy and related industries, have only grown, as has the ability of Dominionist adherents to effectively and skillfully navigate the labyrinthine US political system. This paper will examine the policy goals of Dominionists, how their ideas are affecting public discourse and how they are manifesting in political realities using textual analysis of selected texts related to Dominionist affiliated and or funded organizations. Specifically, the 2018 SOGI Measures and Report Analysis; Report and Analysis on Religious Freedom Measures Impacting Prayer and Faith in America, 2020-2021; and The 1776 Report and the larger implications re: policy and political ideology will be explored.

The headlines are full of Ron DeSantis, governor of Florida, and his war with Disney, his legislative agenda which includes banning any discussion of gender in elementary school- this includes explaining how periods work to fifth graders entering puberty and the proper use of pronouns in grammar lessons- as well as book bannings and criminalizing librarians. But why? What is he trying to accomplish? And where did these ideas come from? What does this mean for Florida, the rest of the US and the future of democracy? Why are similar laws and protests against Critical Race Theory, gender identity, Drag Queens and LGBTQA+ individuals cropping up all over the US? Is it something in the water, or is it, as I posit, a reflection of the growing influence of Dominionist thought on the political discourse of the US.

This paper examines the history of Dominionist thought, a religio-political philosophy with strong libertarian undertones which seeks to restore America to its “true mission” as a divinely inspired, divinely created, Christian nation. (Clarkson 2016) The policy goals of Dominionists are analyzed using the three faces of power (Aho 2021) and within a textual analysis framework. (McKee 2003) The specific case studies examined are the 2018 SOGI Measures and Report Analysis; Report and Analysis on Religious Freedom Measures Impacting Prayer and Faith in America, 2020-2021 both issued by the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation and The 1776 Report issued

The President's Advisory Commission on 1776 under the Trump Administration. These documents show how people with Dominionist religio-political ideology hope to shape the national discourse and are using the second face of power (agenda setting) to affect the third face of power (thought control) in the context of public policy and the policy cycle.

### **1.0.1 Relevance**

Ron DeSantis is attempting to show his bona fides to the party faithful who understand the end goal is to create "heaven on earth" in his quest to become President of the United States. DeSantis is competing against the other Republican Party front runner, former President Donald Trump. Trump already has 4 years of history showing GOP voters who adhere to Dominionist beliefs that he can deliver on their policy goals. However, this paper does not intend to analyze DeSantis versus Trump, rather to explain the worldview and the religious and political beliefs underlying that worldview, which are motivating both candidates and profoundly affecting the platform, candidate slates and voting patterns of the Republican Party. (Clarkson 2016)

## **1.1 State of the Art**

Despite the movement's deep roots in the tradition of conservative Christians trying to add religious overtones to the US government, its branches, laws and judicial rulings, as well as its origin stemming from a long tradition of Calvinist theosophy regarding the proper relationship between religion and the state and lastly, the more than 50 years that the theology, or perhaps more appropriately labeled, religio-political philosophy, has enjoyed in the US, there has been very little academic research into the topic. There are the seminal works of academics Sara Diamond (Roads to dominion : right-wing movements and political power in the United States, 1995 and Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right, 1999) and of D. James Kennedy (What If America Were a Christian Nation Again?, 2005), but beyond those three books, which in many ways were more geared towards a popular audience, there has been little scholarly research.

The following articles represent the sum total of academic publications that this researcher could find on the topic. While each provides relevant background to the subject of Dominionism, its origins, branches, alignments and influence, the growing political importance of these beliefs on the mainstream political discourse highlights the shocking gap in the academic record with regards to this topic. Below, I briefly discuss the 9 articles published since 2005 on this topic. I begin with Michael McVicar, arguably the current leading academic expert on Dominionism after Sara Diamond.

In “The Libertarian Theocrats: The Long, Strange History of R.J. Rushdoony and Christian Reconstructionism (2007) Michael McVicar provides historical context to the emergence of Christian Reconstructionism, which has now become one facet of Dominionism and how, even from its earliest days, the movement was married to libertarian ideals and philosophy. In his 2013 article “‘Let them have Dominion’: ‘Dominion Theology’ and the Construction of Religious Extremism in the US Media”, McVicar discusses how Dominionism, evangelicism, the NAR and other related groups are depicted in the popular press especially in regards to the level of political influence these groups do or do not have.

Molly Worthen provides context on the deep Calvinist roots of Dominionism and how it aligns with and furthers beliefs going back to the earliest days of the Reformation and John Calvin’s divergent thinking from that of Martin Luther. Worthen’s 2008 “The Chalcedon Problem: Rousas John Rushdoony and the Origins of Christian Reconstructionism”, firmly places Dominionism in context with regards to the larger picture of Christian thought, theology and Protestantism providing a detailed history of how the theology developed and the historical underpinnings of the movement. Like Worthen, John Pottenger discusses how Calvinism imagined the relationship between church and state with preferential treatment and protection for Christianity and tolerance towards other religions and differences in philosophical thought in his 2007 book, *Reaping the Whirlwind : Liberal Democracy and the Religious Axis*.

Pottenger explains how religious tolerance differs from religious liberalism and demonstrates how Dominionism is inline with the very earliest forms of Calvinist doctrine and that it is not surprising that dominionism is a theology that emerged from Calvinism.

Joseph Conn, in his 2011 “Dominionism And Democracy: Religious Right Radicals' Growing Role In The Presidential Election Sparks A Debate Over What Kind Of America They Want”, discusses the ways in which Dominisionst thought influences Republican party platforms and candidates' political beliefs with a specific look at US Representative Michele Bachmann (Minnesota 2007-2015) and Governor Rick Perry (Texas 2000-2015), and the people advising them, as well as how these beliefs are shaping their policy aims.

In “Christian Heroism and the Reconstruction of America” (2012), James Aho provides a detailed analysis of the types of Dominionists, their origins and their melding in both reality and in the popular mindset. The author goes on to analyze the policy implications of Dominisionst beliefs, including details of their key policy goals. as well, he discusses theories as to why such right wing authoritarian strains of religious and political thought emerge within the American context.

More recently, in his 2019 “How public theologies can better address fascism, nationalism, and our impatience with God's reign”, Duane Larson argues for a public theology to counter the emptiness on the Left and the Christo-facism Dominisionist beliefs of the Right. In 2020, David Brockman proposes calling Dominionists “Christian Americanists” in his analysis of Dominionist political influence in the state of Texas from 2008 to 2020. His article for Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy, goes on to examine the ways in which Dominionist thought and policy goals have impacted the Lone Star State.

The most recent publication is Hanne Trangerud’s 2022 “The Trump Prophecies and the Mobilization of Evangelical Voters”, which explores the ways in which religious

rhetoric was married to political expediency to get Trump elected president. Of especial importance with regards to this paper, the author examines writings that use Biblical imagery and deep knowledge of the cultural touchstones of Evangelical adherents in general and believers from NAR aligned churches specifically to argue for the election of Trump in line with promoting the aims of the Seven Mountains Principles.

## **1.2 Research Aim**

While dominionism has separated into two streams, one less radical than the other, they both can agree that they share the ideal of radically and fundamentally altering the American political landscape and profoundly changing the cultural paradigm. While Seven Mountains Dominionism hopes to heavily influence the US political arena and to see the adoption of Christian ideals as the basis of all aspects of society and to see Christian morality hold sway in the legal system with jurisprudence reflecting Biblical teachings; the Christian Reconstructionist branch of Dominionism wants to completely deconstruct the US Constitution and existing government and replace it with a theonomy that mirrors their religious, moral and libertarian ideals. Both groups imagine that their ideals will bring the US closer to the “True” intentions not only of God, but of the Founding Fathers for America in 1776.

This researcher is arguing that, at present, Dominionist political actors are:

1. trying to set the political agenda to suit their political goals
2. trying to create a bounded discourse within their closely defined political goal
3. foster adoption of their political goals by one (or both) mainstream political parties and elected officials
4. foster adoption of their political goals by large segments of the American populace
5. encourage government policies that meet their political goals
6. encourage policy agendas that match their political goals
7. encourage buy in by government actors in implementing their political goals.

And, that Dominionists are hoping to achieve these goals by focusing on the three faces of power to shift the Overton Window in US politics and shift public discourse, public policy, judicial rulings and legislation to more adequately reflect their view of a “correct” social and political order.



### **1.2.1 Research Gap**

As the State of the Art discussion in section 1.1 shows, ongoing academic research into Dominionism and its spread into and influence on US politics is minimal with only four articles being written on this topic in the last 10 years. Given the increasing and outsized influence this movement is having on US politics and the concerted efforts being made by adherents to win elections at the local, state and federal level, to enact incremental legislative change favoring their policy goals and to seek to be in position to appoint favorable judges, lack of examination of this religio-political belief is rather shocking. This paper is a bold attempt to start bridging that gap and begin showing the subtle, and not so subtle, ways that Dominionism is influencing the Republic Party and its agenda by examining how policy documents are being crafted that promote Dominionist aims.

### **1.3 Background**

The terms “dominionist” and “dominionism” originate in Genesis when God gives man “dominion over the earth” and is meant to encompass the idea that Christians have been uniquely placed to have “dominion” over the United States. (Conn 2011) In some ways, Dominionism is an extension of the 19th Century belief in Manifest Destiny, where Americans believed that they were destined to expand across the continent and claim all of the territory of what is now the continental United States. (McVicar 2007) This proved true then, perhaps, this unfailing belief will also prove true and the US will live up to its “God given destiny” to become a “truly Christian nation”. (Clarkson 2016)

It is perhaps not surprising that Dominionism, a distinctly religious and political ideology emerged in the US. Similar to the belief in Manifest Destiny, it speaks to the religious traditions of the founding settlers of the nation, and reflects the uniquely Calvinist strain of thought that the US has inherited and that still informs the body politic and cultural zeitgeist in myriads of ways into the present. (Worthen 2008) The Puritans believed in holding dominion over the land, they believed they could create a Christian utopian society whose traditions, customs, laws and social practices would

please God and reflect the true intentions of the Bible. (Worthen 2008) Further, they believed in the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, that everything was not just divinely inspired, but also pre-ordained by God to occur. Echos of that confidence can be seen in Dominionist belief and their attempts to reshape America into their image of the “perfect, divinely inspired, Christian nation”. (Worthen 2008)

### **1.3.1 A Brief History of Dominionism**

Precursors to Dominionist thought date back to the 19th century, but the through line is not always clear and it has not been a necessarily straight progression from the Christian revivalism that emerged from the Second Great Awakening to the Christian essentialism that emerged with the Third Great Awakening and which fostered modern Evangelism in the US. (Worthen 2008) What it does show is that there have been waves of similarly focused religio-political belief in the US with varying levels of success and influence over the body politic. (Clarkson 2016)

The current strain of religio-political belief emerged in the 1950s as a response to the New Deal and the secularism of the 1930s, as well as the threat of Communism following World War II. (McVicar 2007) In that context, emerging libertarian organizations such as the John Birch Society, started attracting greater attention and it was an easy way to counterbalance the collectivism of not only communism and socialism, but of the policies of the New Deal. (McVicar 2007) Further, the rugged individualism espoused by more libertarian organizations spoke to both the American mythos of the independent and truly liberated individual and the solitariness of Calvinist doctrines of predestination where the individual “stands alone upon a hill” before Christ as opposed to earlier, collectivist religious ideals where people were “in a city on hill” before God. (Worthen 2008)

### **1.3.2 Dominionism vs Dominism**

There are two primary strains of Dominionist belief generally classified as soft and hard Dominionism. (Aho 2021) Understanding the distinction is important in

understanding the movement overall and in teasing out the motivations behind policy goals; however, as this paper will show, most politicians following Dominionist policy goals, whether legislatively, judicially or administratively, only overtly espouse “soft” Dominionist goals. (Aho 2021)

Soft Dominionism has the goal of slowly replacing all people in positions of power and most, if not all, government, social and economic institutions with Christians and Christian institutions. (Aho 2021) Also called Seven Mountain Dominionists, they argue that there are “seven mountains” of influence over which they must gain dominion to guide the nation in the “correct” direction. (Aho 2021) These “Seven Mountains are “the cultural domains of religion, family, education, media, entertainment, business, and government.” (Clarkson 2016) Whoever controls the summits of these mountains, the theory goes, commands society. (Dickinson 2022) While many of their ultimate goals are no less extreme than those of the “hard” Dominionists, they seek to work within the system using and subverting existing structures to gain power. (Clarkson 2016)

Hard Dominionism believes that the current political structure is venal and should be replaced. Unlike the soft Dominionists who acknowledge the validity of the government, or at the very least of the US Constitution, hard Dominionists think that the Bible and only the Bible and biblically informed law are legitimate political structures. (Aho 2021) Thus, while soft Dominionists aim to alter the US from within by using existing structures to meet their political, social, economic and other religiously motivated policy goals, the hard Dominionists want to either overthrow or abet the collapse of the American state. (Aho 2021)

For practical purposes and understanding Dominionism for this research paper, it is essential to know that there is, in general, no hard and fast line between soft and hard beliefs, and that, in the interest of political expediency, Dominionism has become an amalgamation of both strands of beliefs with the influence model espoused by the “Soft” Dominionists found in the Seven Mountains principles becoming the guiding

force of the movement. (Clarkson 2016) However, by understanding that many Dominionists really do want to see the collapse of the US government, or at a minimum the failure of non-Christian government institutions, it does help one understand many of the seemingly senseless political decisions being made by adherents. For example, the frequent games of political chicken over the debt ceiling make more sense when you understand the goals of Dominionism believing Republican Congressional Members who want to see the budget balanced or the government defunded and collapsed. (Clarkson 2016)

### **1.3.3 Millennialism**

Historically, there has been a belief in Christianity that the second coming of Christ will bring about a millennium of God's peace on earth and heavenly rule here. This theological belief is known as premillennialism and it has been the dominant strain of Christian belief for most of the world for most of the history of Christianity. However, there is a growing body of the church that is postmillennialism. Postmillennialists believe that the earth must be prepared along Biblical principles with Christians controlling all levers of power in political, economic and cultural institutions to create a thousand year dominion which will then allow for the second coming of Christ.

While both groups want the return of Christ and the end times, their views about how that is to be accomplished are vastly different. (Aho 2021) From a practical standpoint, and with an understanding of both Christian doctrine and the conclusions that follow from this belief set, postmillennialism is the more dangerous mindset. For example, postmillennialists believe that Jews must come to have control over the whole of the territory of Israel as defined in the Old Testament, this belief means that they back the most hawkish and conservative Israelis and settlers in expanding the Jewish state into Palestinian areas. This belief is also behind President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, rather than Tel Aviv, and the decision to move the US embassy there. Post-millennial conservative Christians believe that this is Biblically required to bring about Armageddon, the Rapture, and the return of Jesus Christ. This means that they are ultimately not worried about the negative long

term repercussions of their actions and other geopolitical ramifications, but, that instead, they embrace whatever negative impacts may result because their goals is the destruction of the status quo in favor of a more “Biblically inspired” world as they believe it will bring them closer to the desired end days and the return of Jesus. Postmillennialist beliefs also have profound implications for responses to climate change as many holding these views embrace the phenomenon as bringing about the end times more quickly. (Clarkson 2016)

### **1.3.4 Deconstructing the Enlightenment**

One of the fundamental keys to understanding the Dominionist mindset is that it is not just a reaction against, but a secondary aim of the movement to undo the rationalism and secularism brought in by the Enlightenment. To this end, Dominionists have favored both homeschooling and/or private and charter schools with religious affiliations. (McVicar 2007) They believe that education should be firmly rooted in a religious worldview, preferably a Christian one, and that religious belief and theology should influence all aspects of education and the individual’s worldview. (McVicar 2007) While they perhaps do not want to return to a more religiously based, medieval worldview, their goal is close. (McVicar 2007) This is also reflected in their views on schooling and what materials, curricula and viewpoints should be fostered. (McVicar 2007) For example, under President Trump, Betsey DeVos was Secretary of Education, her appointment was inline with Dominionist theosophy goals as she firmly believes in the dismantling of the public education system and the redirection of government funds to private religious and religiously affiliated charter schools. This return to earlier modes of thinking and worldview conceptualizations explains the growing “truth” gap between the political Left and Right in the US. If you are politically Right leaning and starting to adopt a more pre-Enlightenment, religiously based worldview, then the veracity of facts is understood more relationally and within the bounds of how they relate to religious belief and theological norms. (Larson 2019) Many actions on the political Right that are baffling to moderates and those on the other side of the political spectrum can be explained by this changing worldview. (McVicar 2013)

### **1.3.5 Marriage of Dominionism with Libertarianism**

Understanding the connection between Libertarianism and Dominionism is essential to understanding the growth of Dominionism and its acceptance into the mainstream political discourse of the Republican Party. The two entered hand in hand with the Tea Party Republicans elected to Congress in 2009. (McVicar 2013) Many of them were already spouting a mix of Dominionist and Libertarian ideals that have come to define much of the current platform of the Republican Party. (McVicar 2013)

While Libertarianism at its heart is defined as holding

“individual freedom as the paramount political value and understand coercion to be the antithesis of that freedom. While people can justifiably be forced to do certain things—most obviously, to refrain from infringing the liberty of others—they cannot be coerced to serve the good of other members of society, nor even their own personal good.” (van der Vossen & Christmas 2023)

This is of course the purest definition of libertarianism. For the purposes of this paper it is important to understand that by and large Libertarianism is, as both a political party and as a set of political beliefs, largely confined to the conservative right wing of politics in the US. (McVicar 2013) Further, they have closely defined goals: protection of private property which includes ending “unfair takings” (by this taxes are meant, any and all taxes), defunding and deconstructing big government (basically anything the Federal government does beyond providing for the general peace and international treaties), firm belief in the rational economic man and the hand of the free market and that there should be nothing that limits and/or regulates business and trade. (McVicar 2013)

The impacts of these beliefs on Dominionist policy goals will be more fully discussed in section 1.4, for now it is enough for the reader to understand that there is often extensive overlap between adherents of Libertarianism and Dominionism, especially when looking at elected officials, but from an analytical perspective, it is important to understand that Libertarian beliefs can exist apart from Dominionist beliefs, but that Dominionist belief cannot necessarily exist apart from Libertarian belief as many of

the policy goals Dominionists hold are based on political economy arguments from Libertarians (to be more fully discussed in section 1.4, 1.4.1 and 4.1).

### **1.3.6 Prosperity Gospel**

The Prosperity Gospel is an Evangelical Christian worldview wherein the life circumstances of the individual reflect their “Godliness” and their “deserving-ness”. (Pottenger 2007) Per Prosperity Gospel beliefs, economic success in this life reflects God’s blessings on the individual and their worthiness before God, the more worthy the individual the more blessings they have and the more money, power and prestige they benefit from in the world. This belief mirrors earlier beliefs held in the Calvinist tradition around predestination and the “Select”. Therefore, poverty, misery, pain and suffering are not reflections of sin in the world, but of sin in the individual and their lack of worthiness before God. Under Prosperity Gospel beliefs, poverty is a reflection not only of a person’s economic position, but also of the “goodness” of their soul.

While not overtly espoused by Dominionists or Libertarians, the ongoing effects of Calvinist predestination beliefs and the benefits the “Select” have on the earthly plane is continued in the Prosperity Gospel narrative and has profound implications for how both groups view social welfare programs and government interventions. As a modern incarnation of previous Calvinist predestination beliefs, Prosperity Gospel has great influence on how Dominionists, Libertarians and the other Christian Right adherents view poverty and the poor and their understanding of how these people should be treated. This equation of economic success with Godliness and worthiness, also helps explain the seeming hostility towards the poor in American politics. Under this belief system, those less fortunate quite literally deserve their misfortune because it is a reflection of their worth in God’s eyes, the status of their souls and their future position in the afterlife. When outsiders look at the US and wonder why Americans do not “fix things”, they are missing out on a key point, for a large segment of the population, they firmly believe there is “nothing” to fix because poverty is merited and part of the “natural order” of things.

#### **1.4 Dominionist Policy Goals**

As previously discussed in section 1.3.2 there are two branches of Dominionism, which means there are two slightly different policy agendas; however, they share some overarching goals between them despite their differences. While on the more extreme end, there are Dominionists who want to see the US government completely collapse and replaced with a theonomy (a blend of religious dictated law and restricted or limited democracy to those who are “just” and comply with Biblically defined notions of citizenship, essentially restricting the vote to Christian paterfamilias), more moderated Domininoists, want to see their interpretation of the “true” Constitution and Biblically inspired US come to fruition. (Pottenger 2007)

For those who do not follow the agenda of these groups, some actions from the outside seem counterintuitive. For example, the constant debt ceiling battles. For Republican members of Congress who hold Domininiost beliefs, each debt ceiling fight is an opportunity. There are two outcomes and either advances their position and political goals. Either, the debt ceiling is extended, but only after getting concessions from moderate Republicans and Democrats that more fully match their goals (incrementalism) or no compromise is reached, the government defaults on its debts, and per Dominionist belief and Libertarian economic arguments, the US government collapses. Therefore, within this context, fights over the budget have a twofold goal of (a) moving the Overton Window of US politics by refusing to pass budget and/or debt ceiling extension legislation and by acting as “roadblocks” in this legislative process, forcing Democrats and moderate Republicans to accede to their policy and/or legislative demands to get the needed votes, thereby pushing the political discourse and/or public policy and legislation further towards their aims; or of (b) pushing moderate Republicans and Democrats too far on these issues and failing to get the desired concessions, resulting in no compromise, and no passing of a budget or debt ceiling, and in the case of the latter, the belief that a defaulted US government would lead to a complete collapse of the current political system (See section 1.3.5 for a discussion of Libertarian theory’s impact on Dominionism).



### **1.4.1 The Seven Mountain Platform**

The espoused policy goals of the Seven Mountain Dominionist Platform are:

1. Pass a Balanced Budget Amendment to the Constitution. This will forbid deficit spending by the federal government.
2. “Starve the Beast” by eradicating the graduated income tax and putting in its place a tax system that “God prefers,”
3. Use the forecasted revenue crunch as an excuse to “exterminate” (a Dominionist verb) all so-called non-biblical federal agencies, departments, and programs that constrain the free play of “nature and nature’s God.”
4. Privatize those government services deemed essential for the functioning of society by farming them out to either for-profit corporations or nonprofit nongovernmental organizations. A handful of Dominionists have gone so far as to argue that even national defense can safely be put in the hands of “private contractors” (read: “mercenary soldiers”). (Aho 2021)

This list of goals is very Libertarian in nature and many even match platform goals of the Libertarian party. As discussed in section 1.3.5, Libertarian thought has greatly influenced Dominionist policy goals. However, while the means may be similar, the ends are not. While Libertarians are looking to create a more perfect society guided by the mythical rational economic man and the hand of the market, restoring full, free market capitalism and therefore, “ensuring” the greatest possible personal freedom, Dominionists believe that these policies will collapse the Federal government, or at the very least significantly defund it, allowing for the creation of a social, economic and political structure that more closely fits their beliefs. (Clarkson 2016) Just how these policy goals interact with each other, the US government system, the policy cycle and Dominionist use of power will be analyzed in section 4.1.

### **1.5 The Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation**

The Congressional Prayer Caucus was founded in 2005 by then Rep. Randy Forbes, R-VA (Singer 2015) and expanded beyond a voting and legislative agenda setting bloc to the creation of non-profit foundation, the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation briefly thereafter. (Singer 2015) The Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation (CPCF) works to develop legislation and public policy initiatives with the “aim[s] to extend the reach of [Christian] faith and prayer in public life. (Singer 2015) The CPCF asserts that “[t]here is a concerted effort to remove God from our culture, and negate the influence that the Christian faith had on establishing the principles upon which our

liberties are secured” (Singer 2015) which “has created an environment where the facts regarding the role Judeo-Christian principles play in establishing and maintaining a free Republic are being eliminated.” (Singer 2015) The stated goal of the CPCF is to “reverse this trend [of secularism].” (Singer 2015)

While the Congressional Prayer Caucus is nominally bi-partisan, the composition remains almost entirely Republican in political affiliation and the associated CPCF is unashamedly partisan in its stances (further discussion of specific policies, documents and legislative outcomes continues in coming sections and in the Analysis) and is “pushing to merge church and state.” (Singer 2015)

### **1.5.1 What is a Bill Mill?**

Initially spearheaded by ALEC, a conservative think tank funded by the Koch brothers and meant to bring together industry and legislators, bill mills are ideologically motivated organizations that write model legislation. (Pilkington 2019) The purpose is to create ready-made legislation for legislators at all levels of government that can be readily cut and paste into proposed bills in the legislator’s elected body. By reducing the “friction” in the bill writing process- eg reducing costs, time, and even differing version, by providing a single, unified version of a bill that can be replicated and adopted anywhere in the country with the need for little to no revision, those running bill mills hope to see their proposed legislation have greater adoption rates and greater impact on government, politics and society. The bill mill model is meant to be fast, easy, and replicable, much like the uniform meals in a fast food restaurant. (Pilkington 2019)

As well, bill mills provide legislators not only with ready-made, ready to submit to committee legislation, but they also provide background information, supporting documents, talking points and other related tools needed to introduce legislation to a legislative body, to the general public, to other legislators and to the press. Bill mills provide a comprehensive, easy to use, legislative package to legislators and their staffs

that reduce the need to research, review, write, edit and do the myriad other tasks involved in creating appropriate legislation. (Pilkington 2019)

### **1.5.2 Project Blitz**

Project Blitz is the brainchild of the CPCF and is a bill mill (see section 1.51. above) that aims to provide religiously focused legislation for legislators at all levels of government (federal, state and local). (Clarkson 2021) Like all bill mills, Project Blitz provides full legislative text, talking points, curated academic sources, and even press releases. (Clarkson 2021) The primary focus of the legislation provided by Project Blitz is on symbolic representations of Christian influence in public spaces (10 Commandments placards/monuments before government buildings, religious sayings in schools, adoptions of observances like National Prayer Day and Religious Freedom Day), more overt religious favoritism in the education system with a restoration of school prayer and Bible studies, and attempts at removing LGBTQA+ person from civic life and the public discourse. (Clarkson 2021)

Per “Dr. David R. Brockman, a Nonresident Scholar at Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy... sees Project Blitz ‘as a covert campaign for conservative Christian dominion over law and public policy,’” (Clarkson 2018) and “the authors of the Project Blitz playbook are quite open about the sectarian source of their vision, candidly describing the resolutions as seeking to ‘define public policies of the state in favor of biblical values concerning marriage and sexuality.’” (Clarkson 2018)

## **2. Theory: The Three Faces of Power**

In his seminal work, *The Third Face of Power*, John Lukkes expands upon Foucault’s earlier work to assert that power has three facets. These aspects, or faces are (1) coercion, (2) agenda setting and (3) thought control (Nye 2011 p14)

Coercion in the context of power is often used synonymously with violence. While violence can be one factor of coercion, there are other ways to impose will on others without the threat or use of violence. Coercion is not limited to violence, it can include

economic, social, cultural and other normative factors that encourage and/or discourage specific behavior. (Nye 2011 p14) For example, the threat of social isolation could be used as a form of coercive control. Humans are social creatures, so even something as mild as the silent treatment on an interpersonal level, could be a tool of coercive control to encourage/discourage specific behaviors or actions. When these less overt forms of coercive control are employed, some academics and activists, consider it a form of institutional violence because the power of the state and state actors over the individual or marginalized groups is already disproportionately overwhelmingly in favor against those groups that additional use of coercive controls are aggravating an already biased system.

Agenda setting is the power to determine what is and is not important. (Nye 2011 p16) Further, agenda setting also involves implicit bias and power dynamics with regards to how the topic is discussed. Agenda setting is not only a reflection of public discourse (e.g. what is considered topical and important), but also of the specialized interests of those with either enough power to dictate what is considered on the agenda. By this, those in positions of power- whether through force (coercion) through economic weight or through elected or appointment- are in the position to say what is important enough to make it onto the agenda. By agenda, here meaning not just the agenda of government bodies (legislative, executive, judicial, administrative, etc), but also onto the agenda of key social actors within civil society (corporate boards, intergovernmental agencies, religious and community organizations, etc). As well, agenda setting involves defining what is important and “serious” within the public discourse.

Thought control is the power to influence peoples’ thinking and perceptions.(Nye 2011 p14) Further, it is the ability to direct the ways in which things are discussed and to control not only the narrative, but also the very use of language. Lukes describes this third face of power as “ideas and beliefs [which] help shape others’ initial preference” (Nye 2011 p14) and it can be likened in many ways to the theory of internalized oppression. Thought control is a hidden form of power because it is part

of the acculturation and education of the individual. Further it can be a subtle form of messaging found in media and in the ways a given society discusses an issue. Similar to agenda setting, thought control functions by defining the ways the individual is allowed to think and express themselves appropriately within the context of a given society. Thought control also involves ideas about what is factual, how facts are determined, who has the ability to verify and/or alter facts, and who has authority to be or act as an expert.

While discussed as discrete aspects, the three faces of power do not function independently, but rather function as an interconnected web of socio-political factors that shape both private and public life, the individual and the larger society and political, social and cultural institutions. However, by understanding the different facets of power, and how they interact, the way in which this power is wielded and the different strategies to best influence and/or control events becomes more evident.

## **2.1 The Use of Theory**

The three faces of power seems especially apt in the context of this topic as the focus is on the “soft” Dominionism of Seven Mountain Dominionists where each mountain reflects a different locus of power/control/influence within society. Whether intentional or not, the aims of Seven Mountain Dominionists show a profound understanding of the faces of power. To recap, as discussed in section 1.3.2, the spheres of influence that Seven Mountain Dominionists are seeking to control are the “domains of religion, family, education, media, entertainment, business, and government.” (Clarkson 2016) With a focus on affecting these cultural realms, Seven Mountains Dominionists are, as previously discussed in sections 1.4 and 1.4.1, intending to change the direction of US culture and government by altering the agenda (agenda setting), framing (thought control) and implementation/enactment (coercion) of laws and policies.

### **3. Method**

This paper analyzes the policy goals of Seven Mountain Dominionists, and key texts produced at the national level that aim to direct the Republican Party platform and agenda (the 2018 SOGI Measures and Report Analysis; Report and Analysis on Religious Freedom Measures Impacting Prayer and Faith in America, 2020-2021; and The 1776 Report), given the choice of texts being analyzed, and the use of the three faces of power as theory, the quantitative method of textual analysis is considered appropriate. Textual analysis allows for an examination of the relevant texts within the cultural context in which they were produced and allows for exploring the intent behind these documents. (Arya 2020 p173) Further, as textual analysis “focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of a text” (Arya 2020 p173) it allows for deeper exploration of how those who have adopted a Dominionist worldview “see” the world and the interaction between their beliefs and their political goals.

#### **3.1 Textual Analysis**

Textual analysis is an analytical tool that allows for the qualitative analysis of texts (books, newspapers, film, tv, etc). Similarly to critical discourse analysis (CDA), textual analysis allows for in depth exploration of the embedded meaning of a text; however, unlike CDA, textual analysis does not have an aim of changing society or social discourse, rather it aims to understand how discourse is created and re-created in replicable and retransmissionable means.

As a method, textual analysis is meant to allow the researcher “to describe the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in texts” (Frey, Botan & Kreps 1999) with “four major approaches to textual analysis: rhetorical criticism, content analysis, interaction analysis, and performance studies.” (Frey, Botan & Kreps 1999)

For the purposes of this paper, focus is placed on content analysis within the updated framework provided by Alan McKee in his 2003 book, *Textual Analysis : A Beginners Guide*. McKee’s approach “is a way...to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world” (McKee 2003) and “the ways in which members of

various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and of how they fit into the world in which they live.” (McKee 2003) The emphasis of McKee’s approach on understanding the worldview of those creating and of the primary intended audience of the text is especially apt when looking at Dominionist texts as the language is coded and only those with the “key” to the subtext of the supplied language and a deep understanding of the socio-political religious context of the creator and intended audience is able to understand the true implications of the texts being examined. Content focused textual analysis “always involves extra-textual knowledge, some of it being general cultural knowledge, and some of it being derived from secondary sources” (Arya 2020) hence the extensive background given on Dominionism, Prosperity Gospel, Postmillennialism, Libertarianism, etc as given in sections 1.3.1 to 1.5.2 to establish the worldview paradigm as understood by the creators of the examined texts and their intended audience. Further, this background information serves as a basis of the “secondary source” aspect of the textual analysis.

### **3.2 Selection of Texts**

The texts selected are the 2018 SOGI Measures and Report Analysis; Report and Analysis on Religious Freedom Measures Impacting Prayer and Faith in America, 2020-2021; and The 1776 Report. As well, the analysis section (see section 4.1) opens with a review of Dominionist policy goals within the context of the three faces of power. Texts were chosen with an eye to understanding just what Dominionists are trying to accomplish (e.g. the policy platform and two policy guides) and with the aim of examining what that policy looks like when actually implemented (e.g. The 1776 Report).

## **4. Analysis**

### **4.1 The Seven Mountain Policy Strategy**

As previously discussed in section 1.4.1, the espoused policy goals of Dominionists are to:

1. Amend the US Constitution so it matches many state constitutions that require a balanced budget
2. End federal income tax and radically alter or eliminate other taxes (sales, inheritance,

corporate earnings, payroll, property, etc)

3. “Starve” the federal government of funds and close most, if not all, government agencies

4. Privatize essential government services that cannot be carried out at the state level. (Aho 2021)

First, this policy platform reflects the marriage of Dominionism with Libertarian beliefs and closely mirrors the arguments of the Libertarian Party and the Libertarian Right (the Libertarian Left is nearly non-existent in the US and for the purposes of this paper irrelevant) that was discussed in section 1.3.5. (Aho 2012) This policy platform reflects Libertarian political economic beliefs about how to peacefully dismantle the federal government without resorting to violent means. The thinking is that by removing the funds that make government expansion possible and that fund the various “unnecessary” and “illegitimate” activities of the federal government, the government will be forced to shut down agencies. Further, many Libertarians, as small government advocates, argue that government agencies become self-perpetuating and even agencies and programs that should have long since been disbanded continue to exist. Dominionists have adopted these views because they disagree with federal government interventions into daily life; however, unlike pure Libertarians who want to see a restoration of what they view as “true” capitalism, Dominionists see it as a tool to bring about a more “Biblically” correct government system. (Aho 2012)

By following these Libertarian originating policy goals, Dominionists believe this will bring about a nation-state that more closely reflects not only the original intentions of the framers of the Constitution, but also a more “Biblically” centered government and society. As discussed in section 1.3.3, Dominionists hold a premillennial theology and are hoping to effect government and social changes that bring about God’s Dominion on the earth and hasten the Second Coming of Christ. This means that, while the tactics listed above come from Libertarian political philosophy arguments about how to remake the US federal government, the ultimate goals of Dominionists are not fully in alignment with secular Libertarians.

Second, as discussed in section 2 on Theory, agenda setting is the second face of power, but problem framing is a facet of the third face of power (thought control) as a



solution is readily provided in the framing of the agenda item. The first agenda item, is to amend the US constitution to add the requirement of a balanced budget. As stated above, this is a common inclusion in state constitution and largely functions well; however, it ignores two realities of state government financing. The first is that states receive top up funds from the federal government that help them meet budgetary goals when there is a deficit in the budget and second, it ignores the fact that many states sell bonds or are able to raise property taxes to meet budgetary shortfalls for that fiscal year. (Aho 2012) The second, is that, unlike the argument made by many conservatives, the US government's budget is not like that of an individual household's and it can create money to make up any shortfalls. Further, the government can sell bonds and roll over bonds to continue meeting its financial obligations. However, the strength of this argument is why, as briefly discussed in sections 1.3.2 and 1.4, the US periodically faces debt ceiling crises, those who hold to the above agenda are willing to extend the debt ceiling if their policy demands are met and are truly prepared to have the government default and shutdown if they are not. Either result is a "win" from their perspective.

Libertarians consider taxation as an unlawful "taking" or even as theft of private property and believe that in a purely capitalist system there should be no taxation as the market will organize itself to meet the needs and functions of existing government. While most Dominionists do not hold such pure Libertarian views, they are against federal income tax as it was not included in the original text of the Constitution and only emerged in the 1930s during the New Deal after a series of legislative actions and Supreme Court rulings. (McVicar 2007) Further, they think that most social services provided by federal, state and local governments should be solely provided by religious charities and in line with Christian (Conservative Evangelical) teachings. (Aho 2012) And yes, this extends to education. At a minimum, Dominionists want to see education completely funded and controlled at the local level (Seven Mountain/soft Dominionists) while on the more extreme end (Reconstructionist/hard Dominionists) what to see schooling become a purely private endeavor with families either paying for it, families adhering to religious norms and receiving free education

for their children from religious charities or families homeschooling. As well, many Dominionists (and Libertarians), believe that children whose families cannot afford to privately educate them or home educate them should not be educated and that child labor as a practice should be re-legalized. (Aho 2012) This stance on education access for the children of the poor reflects Dominionists views on worthiness as integrated from both the modern Prosperity Gospel and from the Calvinist tradition. (McVicar 2007)

#### **4.2 The Project Blitz Policy Strategy**

As briefly discussed in sections 1.5, 1.5.1 and 1.5.2, Project Blitz is a bill mill funded by the CPCF with the aim of providing model legislation for enactment at all levels of government that slowly shifts the public discourse and public policy towards conservative Christian goals. While not overtly Christian Dominionist in nature, the affiliated organizations that help fund and support Project Blitz and CPCF are, and for those organizations, academics and journalists, like Blitz Watch, that monitor the conservative Christian political sphere in general and Christian Dominionism specifically, the relationship between CPCF, Project Blitz and Christian Dominionist ideologues is clear. (Political Research Associates, Blitz Watch)

There are three types of bills among the 20 model pieces of legislation in the Project Blitz arsenal:

1. Legislation Regarding Our Country's Religious Heritage
2. Resolutions and Proclamations Recognizing the Importance of Religious History
3. Religious Liberty Protection Legislation (Clarkson 2018)

These laws are also ranked according to the “difficulty” of enacting them, with the proposed legislation becoming increasingly contentious the further down the list one reads. (Clarkson 2018) This strategy is intentional, it is meant to build the confidence of legislators and embolden them to propose and enact increasingly restrictive and religiously motivated legislation. (Clarkson 2018) As well, Project Blitz contributors are aware that category 1 legislation is difficult for opponents to rebut and that “winning” against such legislation is often a pyrrhic victory as it expends energy and political will. (Clarkson 2018) This exhaustion of political energy and will is also part

of the Project Blitz strategy, that of exhausting, overwhelming and ultimately negating the influence of opposing legislators and political groups. (Clarkson 2018)

Goal 1, Legislation Regarding Our Country's Religious Heritage, these are laws regarding public displays of a religious nature, like signage in schools saying "In God We Trust". (Clarkson 2018) While arguably merely symbolic in nature, they are clearly designed to foster the breakdown of the separation between church and state and end the secular nature of public schools. To that end, these laws reflect attempts at reframing the role of religion, especially Christianity, in the public discourse and in public spaces. This goal and related implementation tactics involve agenda setting and framing, thereby invoking the second face of power (agenda setting) and a third face of power (thought control) by directly influencing the educational environment.

Goal 2, Resolutions and Proclamations Recognizing the Importance of Religious History, most commonly, this involves resolutions recognizing "Religious Freedom Day" which coincides with Reformation Day and reflects a not so covert attempt to create a religious holiday. While yes, the US official holiday calendar includes religiously originating dates (Christmas Eve and Christmas Day), the remainder of the nation's official holidays are not religious in nature and it can be strongly argued that Christmas Day and Eve have largely become secular holidays or at the very least do not favor one sect of Christianity over another. Whereas, Religious Freedom Day, while ostensibly open to all faiths, is understood to be promoting Protestantism specifically. (Clarkson 2018) Religious Freedom Day falls is meant to be celebrated on 1 November, also known among Protestant Christians as Reformation Day, and is a holiday celebrated in the US by more conservative Christians, especially those holding Calvinist and predestination views, as an "alternative" to and culture counterweight against Halloween (31 October). Therefore, this holiday is not only meant to extend the calendar of official religiously motivated federal holidays, but is understood to implicitly favor one specific religious denomination (as opposed to even just one religion) and their worldview.

The third category of legislation proposed by Project Blitz is Religious Liberty Protection Legislation which generally focuses on anti-LGBTQA+ laws like religious “freedom” laws that allow businesses to discriminate against LGTQA+ individuals on the basis of religious belief and laws favoring married heterosexual couples like those that make adoption by heteronormative couples easier than for other forms of family formation. (Clarkson 2018) This class of legislation is clearly more contentious and is more overtly menacing, as the goal is not just to agenda set and reframe policy stances, but is to actively change public policy regulations and implementation. Therefore, category 3 legislation represents an escalation of action as it moves from more symbolic gestures to actions that have implementable, measurable real world impacts on the individual, government agencies and society. These acts move beyond merely attempts to use the second and third faces of power (agenda setting and thought control) into attempts to use the first face of power (coercive control) by using the political weight of the government to enforce religiously motivated social and political norms.

#### **4.3 2018 SOGI Measures and Report Analysis**

A simple 14 slide powerpoint, the SOGI Measures and Report Analysis provides legislators with a guide as to how to effect policy change in favor of religiously and socially conservative mores while still being within the bounds of present (2018) social and political norms. While not overtly Dominionist, the targets of this project and the recommendations of the report are strongly inline with Dominionist political and societal goals and are a prime example of the ways in which Seven Mountains Dominionists are using increasing political savvy to influence the political discourse.

Beginning with the Foreword, the presentation asserts that:

“The purpose of this report is to give you, as legislators, the benefit of good work done by others and model legislation on various related topics for your consideration and potential use.” (CPCF 2018)

Being mindful of the “stealth” nature of their policy approach, the Foreword continues with the following advice:

“The following principles apply to all of the measures and should be considered early on:

1. Nothing is more important than learning to tell a story that shows why the legislation is needed. Although the text of legislation is critical, it can become sterile without painting a picture of “why” it is necessary. When you have limited time, tell the story and let the legislation speak for itself.
2. Never forget that you often communicate more with your actions than your words. Tone and temperament are vital.
3. Give special care to the name of the bill, making sure it will capture the essence of the enactment and will be easy to grasp in a positive light.
4. Do not let the perfect be the enemy of the good.” (CPCF 2018)

And lastly, the Foreword closes with, “Thank you for serving your country. May God bless you richly”. (CPCF 2018) While short, the Foreword provides insight into how Project Blitz is seeking to change the political landscape and reflects the fact that the drafters of the report, and those working on various aspects of Project Blitz on behalf of the CPCF, are aware of the power of language and its more subtle uses to shift the public discourse and reframe issues. The advice given shows a thorough understanding of both the second and third faces of power (agenda setting and thought control).

The remaining slides cover the following topics and there are embedded links to examples of successful legislation, which following the bill mill model, allows legislators to largely cut and paste the text into their own proposed legislation allowing them to save time and money. As discussed in section 1.5.1 What is a Bill Mill?, this is part of the mass production replication strategy being employed that is explicitly meant to overwhelm opposition by flooding the legislative agenda with fast, ready-made, difficult to object to bills. (Clarkson 2018)

The categories are:

1. Religious Liberty Protection Legislation – Public Policy Resolutions
  - a. Resolution Establishing Public Policy Favoring Intimate Sexual Relations Only Between Married, Heterosexual Couples
  - b. Resolution Establishing Public Policy Favoring Reliance on and Maintenance of Birth Gender
  - c. Resolution Establishing Public Policy Favoring Adoption by Intact Heterosexual, Marriage-based Families
2. Talking Points to Counter Anti-Religious Freedom Legislation
  - a. Countering Adding “Sexual Orientation” as a Civil Rights Category
  - b. Countering Adding “Gender Identity” as a Civil Rights Category
  - c. Countering Conversion Therapy Prohibitions (CPCF 2018)

The first category, Religious Liberty Protection Legislation – Public Policy Resolutions, consists of a series of resolutions to re-establish the preference of “Biblical” family structures by the government. While none-binding, resolutions are meant to influence and direct the tenor of public discourse in a legislative body and in the related judicial system and to exemplify the type of language and considerations to be used in both writing new legislation and in making court rulings. The faces of power reflected with these points are the second (agenda setting) and third (thought control) faces of power.

The second category, Talking Points to Counter Anti-Religious Freedom Legislation, uses framing to recategorize extending civil liberties and protections to LGBTQA+ persons as “attacks” on religious freedom. What follows are a series of links to information to rebut and/or reframe the claims of those seeking to extend civil liberties and protections to LGBTQA+ persons that focus more on “facts” from academic sources (the fields of sociology, psychology, medicine, biology, etc) and reflects the familiar conservative tactic of undermining expertise and knowledge (as discussed in 1.3.4 Deconstructing the Enlightenment). Of special import is rhetoric about “protecting children” and the implied threat that LGBTQA+ pose to children. The writers are using coded language that speaks to common fears and threats to the “natural order” that conservative Christians see in society and is a rallying cry to action. In the real world, this has manifested in attempts to repeal LGBTQA+ protections and to laws like Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill or bathroom safety laws. For those trying to move the Dominionist agenda forward, this type of rhetoric serves multiple functions it provides a “threat” around which conservative Christians can rally, it provides a “reasonable” rationale for reversing legislative trends and re-limiting civil liberties for these individuals, it helps reinforce the validity of the heteronormative, patriarchal worldview preferred by Dominionists.

#### **4.4 Report and Analysis on Religious Freedom Measures Impacting Prayer and Faith in America, 2020-2021**

At 51 pages, CPCF's Report and Analysis on Religious Freedom Measures Impacting Prayer and Faith in America, 2020-2021 is more ambitious and more polished than its 2018 counterpart. Now, instead of being an anonymous document with an obscure title and no attribution, this document is not only copyrighted, but lists sponsors/contributing organizations like the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation, the National Strategic Center, the National Legal Foundation and the WallBuilders/ProFamily Legislative Network. (CPCF 2020 p 3)

Reflecting the more professional and polished nature of this document, the contents are extended and the sections are:

1. Foreword
2. Stylistic Notes
3. Overview of Religious Liberty Measures for States
4. Category 1: Legislation Regarding Our Country's Religious Heritage
5. Category 2: Resolutions and Proclamations Recognizing the Importance of Religious History
6. Category 3: Religious Liberty Protection Legislation – Public Policy Resolutions
7. Category 4: Talking Points to Counter Anti-Religious Freedom Legislation
8. Category 5: Model Policies on Public Prayer
9. Contact Us (CPCF 2020 p 2)

The Foreword offers encouraging words to legislators and assures the reader that the intent of the project is not to change the US government into a “theocracy”. (CPCF 2020 p 4) The section “Stylistic Notes” includes an explanation on the use of language in the remainder of the document and clarifies that much of language is pulled directly from proposed legislation and is therefore reflective of the type of specific language required in legal writing (legalese). (CPCF 2020 p 5)

Sections 4 through 6 are policy points previously discussed in section 4.2 The Project Blitz Policy Strategy, and consists of:

Category 1: Legislation Regarding Our Country's Religious Heritage

Category 2: Resolutions and Proclamations Recognizing the Importance of Religious History

Category 3: Religious Liberty Protection Legislation – Public Policy Resolutions (CPCF 2020 p 2)

which were previously explained and analyzed above. However, the 2020 playbook, at nearly 4x times the length of the previous one, provides more examples of the types of legislation covered under each category, more links to talking points, press releases, background information and carefully curated rebuttals. This extension and expansion of available resources provides not only encouragement to legislators as they can see some of the successful enactments of these bills, but also shows the growing sophistication of those contributing to Project Blitz. Further, the specific aims under each category have expanded as earlier success makes way for increased areas to exert influence.

For example, under Legislation Regarding Our Country's Religious Heritage, suggested legislation has moved from mandating signage in schools and before government buildings with the 10 Commandments or the phrase "In God We Trust" to more active initiatives like a "Civic Literacy Act" which purports to encourage government and civics education in schools, but actually encourages civics education more inline with Dominionist interpretations of the Constitution (for further discussion on this type of interpretation see section 4.5 The 1776 Report). (CPCF 2020 p 14) This class of legislation also includes a "Religion in Legal History Act", which like the previous "Civic Literacy Act" proposes increased civics and government education, but is an even less thinly veiled attempt to insert Christian morality into education and the individual's understanding of the roles of laws, government and religion. Lastly, a "Bible Literacy Act" is included under this category, and proposes the inclusion of an elective on the Old and New Testaments as both history and literature in public high schools. (CPCF 2020 p16) These laws reflect attempts to encourage teaching religiously focused viewpoints in public schools and a breakdown in secularism both in government, but also in the public school system. More strongly than other bills discussed in section 4.2, these bills are



meant to overtly influence thought and reflect a flexing of the third face of power (thought control).

Similar to the expansion of category 1 legislation, category 2 legislation concerning “Resolutions and Proclamations Recognizing the Importance of Religious History” goes beyond the previously proposed Religious Freedom Day to add a “Christian Heritage Week” (CPCF 2020 p 21), recognition of the importance of the Bible in history, (CPCF 2020 p 22), and a proclamation for a national day of prayer. (CPCF 2020 p23) These new legislative proposals concern not only reframing, but also implementation in the policy cycle, as well they again move beyond the second and third face of power towards the first face of power by invoking more coercive forms of power as state sanctioned events and not just state sanctioned ideas.

Like the previous two categories, category 3 legislation has grown under the umbrella of Religious Liberty Protection Legislation – Public Policy Resolutions. Additions include:

1. Marriage Diversity Act (First Amendment Defense Act)
2. Preserving Religious Freedom Act (Religious Freedom Restoration Act or “State RFRA”)
3. Child Welfare Maximization Act
4. Clergy Protection Act
5. Licensed Professional Civil Rights Act
6. Student Prayer Certification Act
7. Public K-12 School Personnel Protection Act
8. Preserving Religious Freedom in School Act
9. Campus Free Speech Act
10. Public Libraries Parental Review Act
11. Public Libraries Parental Review Act (CPCF 2020)

These laws reflect a distinct escalation from the previous playbook. Many involve protection against claims of discrimination or failure to provide professional services when there is a religious objection to providing the service (eg social workers refusing to consider gay parents for adoptions, medical staff refusing to provide birth control, teachers refusing to teach according to the curriculum as it violates their beliefs, etc) or allowing overt religious acts and opinions in public schools (prayer, Bible study, religious bigotry). Lastly, these laws allow for censorship on the one hand, but ironically religiously protected hate speech on the other. More than any other aspect of

the CPCF Project Blitz legislative agenda, this category of laws reflect the true ambitions of Christian Domininoists to change the face of American politics and society. Individually, these laws are upsetting, as a totality of laws comprising an overarching political agenda, they are frightening and have the ability to completely reshape most aspects of the policy landscape, but also moves beyond the second and third faces of power (agenda setting and thought control) into the first face of power (coercive control) as the emerging legislation allows for structural violence via discrimination and denial of access and services against the individual and groups trying to engage in both public and private services.

The document closes with Category 4: Talking Points to Counter Anti-Religious Freedom Legislation and Category 5: Model Policies on Public Prayer. Category 4 provides primarily links to relevant background information, academic articles and other resources for those working to implement the legislation discussed above. Many of these resources are anti-intellectual and involve religious doublespeak. Category 5 provides examples of how to pray “secularly” in government settings in line with a recent US Supreme Court decision regarding prayer in public schools and other government sponsored spaces (school sporting events, schools clubs, school board meetings, other government meetings, etc). Category 5, public prayer, is highly reflective of the second and third faces of power (agenda setting and thought control) as they make prayer a “natural” part of government activities (agenda setting), but also an acceptable part of government activities (thought control). Once again, this category begins to evoke the first face of power (coercive control) by creating an environment where individuals who fail to comply with emerging group norms face social and structural violence via threats of social exclusion and discrimination for not adhering to increasing societal norms favoring public displays of religiosity.

#### 4.5 The 1776 Report<sup>1</sup>

The 1776 Report is a Presidential Report released during the Trump Administration, its title is in response to the 1619 Project, as are its contents and assertions. To begin with,

[t]he 1619 Project is an ongoing initiative from The New York Times Magazine that began in August 2019, the 400th anniversary of the beginning of American slavery. It aims to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative. (The New York Times Magazine, 2019)

Rather than seeing the 1619 Project as an opportunity for reflection and national healing on the 400th anniversary of the start of African chattel slavery in the Americas, conservative Americans took it as an attack on the nation and a mis-reinterpretation of history. The resulting response from the political right is the 1776 Report which lacks scholarly vigor and was widely panned in both journalist and academic circles. (Flaherty 2021) The below analysis looks at three things in the context of this paper (1) how this report is meant to shape public discourse (agenda setting and thought control), (2) how this report is meant to shape policy (agenda setting, framing, and thought control), and (3) the influence of Dominionist worldview on the contents and framing of the report.

The 1776 Report is 45 pages long and contains the following sections and appendices:

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<sup>1</sup> In the interest of space and length, the author is choosing to ignore the standard citation of using: "President's Advisory 1776 Commision, The 2021" when citing the report.

I. Introduction	The Role of the Family
II. The Meaning of the Declaration	Teaching America
III. A Constitution of Principles	A Scholarship of Freedom
IV. Challenges to America's Principles	The American Mind
Slavery	Reverence for the Laws
Progressivism	VI. CONCLUSION
Fascism	Appendix I: The Declaration of Independence
Communism	Appendix II: Faith and America's Principles
Racism and Identity Politics	Appendix III: Created Equal or Identity Politics?
V. The Task of National Renewal	Appendix IV: Teaching Americans About Their Country (The 1776 Report 2021)

To begin with, the report does not just address the US's founding story, but it seeks to utilize heavily coded language that only those cognizant of religious terms and of Dominionist goals will understand. While not true dog whistles, the use of this language is meant to address the reader on two levels, the obvious overt level available to all readers and the subtextual level to those "in the know" who understand the deeper meaning. Language like "city on the hill", references to the US as being unique in history with the implication that it is divinely inspired. (The 1776 Report 2021 p 1) The idea that the US and its founding are moral and just with an appeal to religious language and religious sentiment. (The 1776 Report 2021 p 1) The framing of US history mirrors the marriage of religion and politics as espoused by Dominionists. (The 1776 Report 2021 p 2) The report asserts that the US founding documents like the Declaration of Independence are universal and eternal, making them akin to the "universality" and "eternalism" of the Bible. (The 1776 Report 2021 p 1) There is also an attempt in this introductory section to tie the Declaration of Independence to earlier thinkers, most specifically religious writers, and to tie it to religious teachings therefore reinforcing the "divinity" of the Declaration. (The 1776 Report 2021 p 2)

The report goes on to discuss the writing of the Constitution and its Bill of Rights. (The 1776 Report 2021 p 6) The tone of this section changes, and there is less overtly religious language used. Instead, this section more thoroughly discusses the relationship between the states, the individual and the state and the state and religion. The only obvious religious perspective is that "freedom of religion" is clearly being as interpreted as freedom "for" religion and not freedom "from" religion. The Constitution is discussed as

“enshrining” (The 1776 Report 2021 p 14) the principles of the Declaration of Independence and as an extension of the Declaration. However, the emphasis on the relationship between the federal government and the states, as well as the enumerated powers of the federal government is a key facet of the arguments of Dominionists and is one of their policy goals to change not only how the US government functions, but the ways in which it functions. By eschewing overtly religious language and messianic undertones used in the section on the Declaration of Independence, the writers are able to make their implied argument in this section seem more “right” and “natural”.

The 1776 Report then examines several “threats” to the US and its democracy, these are slavery, progressivism, facism, communism and identity politics. The report equates progressivism with facism and communism and considers these all on par with slavery and identity politics. Each of these subjects is argued to be a threat to the stability of the US Government. In the subsection on progressivism, the writers specifically focus on the use of judicial review and the changeable nature of the US Constitution to claim that a radical progressive agenda was pushed through starting with the New Deal that threatens the stability of government and goes against the original intent of the framers of the Constitution. (The 1776 Report 2021 p 13) The choice to use such language to demonize progressivism and modernity is striking when taken in conjunction with just such language used the prior section on the framing of the US Constitution praising the genius of the Founding Fathers of creating flexibility in the Constitution and the ability to amend it as needed to make is a living document that can adjust with the changing needs of society. (The 1776 Report 2021 p 9) Yet, in this section the writers decry that very ability and claim that progressive changes to the legal system and the Constitution are illegitimate and destabilizing and that the focus must be on original intent. This argument closely mirrors arguments by Dominionists that the original Constitution was a “pure” document and that the Founding Fathers were knowingly establishing a Christian nation.

The bugbear of Trump, the “shadow government” is mentioned. (The 1776 Report 2021 p 13) While historically, the term “shadow government” has had two widely accepted

meanings (1) the “government” of the opposition party in a parliamentary system, for example the UK is famous for its shadow cabinet; (2) a secret cabal that is really running things and the true lever of power, for example popular claims about the Illuminati or a secret network of international Jewry that is directing national governments. However, in the current context of US politics, the “shadow government” is a reference to the administrative or bureaucratic part of government. As Dominionism is heavily influenced by Libertarian thinking, understanding that this is an indictment on the validity of government functioning that goes beyond what they see as the “limited” role of federal government which should be restricted to defense, international treaties, and fostering interstate trade, any function that has emerged beyond that is considered by many Libertarians, and by extension many Dominionists, as illegitimate (see section 1.3.5 for further discussion). This illegitimacy extends to include the creation of a standing army (only militias, which are temporary and managed and funded at the state level are mentioned), the Treasury and the issuance of a national currency, and federal taxes, all other actions undertaken by the federal government are therefore also largely considered as beyond the original “true” scope of the constitution, things like the FDA, the EPA and of course the IRS. (The 1776 Report 2021 p 13)

The 1776 Report denigrates experts, something that is a key facet of the anti-intellectualism running through Dominionism. (The 1776 Report 2021 p 18) Not only are Dominionists trying to, at a minimum, massively alter the face of public education in the US, but, in an effort to downplay the importance of education, especially higher education, critical thinking and expertise are demonized. The final “threat” listed in the report is Identity Politics and then the report moves on to the “Task of National Renewal”. This section uses a lot of language that is coded language that matches the coded language used in more mainstream discussion of Dominionist policy goals. It is no mistake that the phrase “renewal” is used as it has often been used in conjunction with and as synonymous with revival and has understood religious connotations in the American context. (The 1776 Report 2021 p 13)

The first subsection of part IV. The “Task of National Renewal”, is “The Role of the Family” and details both highly Libertarian and strongly Dominionist views. (The 1776 Report 2021 p 17) From a Libertarian viewpoint, as previously discussed in section 1.3.5, education should not be provided for free by the state using taxpayer dollars. First, this is, again as previously discussed, because Libertarians believe that (a) most if not all taxes should be abolished, (b) education should be managed at the local level with communities organizing to form, fund and run their own schools, the free market providing schooling (aka private and/or religious schools), families homeschooling or charities providing educations for children whose communities and families are unable to provide the previous options. (van der Vossen & Christmas 2023) The latter part of the Libertarian goals, that of charities providing educations for children whose communities and families are unable to provide the previous options fits strongly with Dominionist views, and among Dominionists who generally believe in the Prosperity Gospel and hold Calvinist predestination views, many believe that children whose families cannot afford either a private education or to homeschool, should not actually be educated and should return to work as children of the poor have historically labored (note that many Libertarians and Dominionists think child labor laws should be revoked).

The section, Teaching America, lays out the Dominionist vision for education within the current structure and reflects a Seven Mountains or “soft” Dominionist policy goal rather than a “hard” Dominionist policy goal. (The 1776 Report 2021 p 17) To that end, the document asserts that “State and local governments—not the federal government—are responsible for adopting curricula”, for Libertarians, this is that education, as discussed above, should be handled at the local government as part of “small” government, while for Dominionists, this has a second implication. (The 1776 Report 2021 p 17) If education is strictly at the local level, Federal laws and Supreme Court decisions that affect education management will become moot, to wit Title IX which forces schools to offer equal and/or equivalent athletics opportunities to female students and Brown v. Board of Education which ended school segregation would both become invalid under this model. This result, a complete removal of the federal government from education is

in line with Dominionist goals and reflects their belief that the most proper way to educate children is in the home.

While ultimately Dominionists want to affect how children are educated and which children even are educated, they content themselves with trying to affect what and how subjects and topics are taught in schools (the way this plays out with curriculum, textbooks and school board elections to be discussed in other sections). To that end, the 1776 Report boldly asserts that:

“States and school districts should reject any curriculum that promotes one-sided partisan opinions, activist propaganda, or factional ideologies that demean America’s heritage, dishonor our heroes, or deny our principles. Any time teachers or administrators promote political agendas in the classroom, they abuse their platform and dishonor every family who trusts them with their children’s education and moral development. (p 17)

The section, A Scholarship of Freedom, directly attacks academia and critical thinking and shows how Dominionists understand the power of education to influence society and politics.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper has shown the origins of Dominionism in US politics and its growing influence on not only the Republican Party, but also on the public discourse. Using textual analysis and the three faces of power, this paper examined how the Dominionist policy strategy is seeking to change the body politic, shift the political Overton Window and remake the face of American in their image and within the goals of Seven Mountains Dominionists.

Section 1 laid out the relevance and research aims of this study citing the outsize influence that this small, rather obscure, religio-political philosophy is exerting on US politics. Further, this section provided essential background information related to the history of the Dominionist movement, related philosophies and important religious, cultural, political and historical influences that inform the movement today and the beliefs of those adhering to Dominionism. As well, this background information provided key secondary sources for the use of content focused textual analysis and placing the source material in its proper social, religious, political and historical context for



understanding the intentions of the writer and the message(s) being conveyed both explicitly and implicitly to their intended audience.

Section 2 introduce the theoretical basis for this paper with a brief explanation of Lukes's "three faces of power" and the argument that this is particularly relevant given the stated goals of "soft" Seven Mountain Dominionists to control the key "mountains" of American society and thereby control all, or almost all, aspects of religious, economic, social, civil and political life. Whether intentional or not, the goals of Seven Mountain Dominionism demonstrate a profound understanding of the three faces of power and fall in line with Lukes's assertion that the "best" face of power is the third face- thought control.

Section 3 then introduced the qualitative method used- textual analysis with a content analysis focus. This proved an especially apt method in light of the coded nature of the texts reviewed and allowed for elaboration on the ways that documents that were not overtly Dominionist were still able to have Dominionist goals, worldview and/or language. In this section, the selection of relevant texts was also briefly discussed with emphasis being put on materials created by national organizations for dissemination either at the federal level or nationwide.

Section 4 is the analysis section, starting with 4.1 where The Seven Mountain Policy Strategy is analyzed. In this section, the ways in which adherents to the religious-political philosophy of Dominionism view power, influence and their relationship to the larger society is explored. Elaborating on other implementation tactics being used by Dominionists, section 4.2 analyzed the Project Blitz Policy Strategy and the ways in which it is seeking to influence US politics and shift the Overton Window towards Dominionist political views. This paper then went on to examine the three selected texts: (1) 2018 SOGI Measures and Report Analysis; (2) Report and Analysis on Religious Freedom Measures Impacting Prayer and Faith in America, 2020-2021, and (3) The 1776 Report in the context of Dominionist influence on the Trump Administration specifically and the US political culture in general.

In section 4 Analysis, the discussion shows how Christian Dominionists are using the policy cycle, especially agenda setting and framing, and the second and third faces of power (agenda setting and thought control) to covertly influence politics. While no major political figures are directly affiliated with Christian Dominionism, many Republican legislators are indirectly affiliated through groups like the Congressional Prayer Caucus and related organizations. This allows for politicians who hold Dominionist views to have plausible deniability about the relationship, while still benefiting from the resources provided by these organizations (model bills, talking points, background research, etc).

Careful analysis of the Dominionist Seven Mountains policy platform showed how Dominionists leverage the second and third faces of power (agenda setting and thought control respectively) to affect the public discourse and ultimately meet their policy goals. The role of the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation and its targeted Project Blitz with its active bill mill and aggressive nationwide legislative agenda was examined in the context of the Dominionist Seven Mountains policy platform and with the understanding that while not explicitly a Dominionist organization, the aims of the CPCF are to shift the Overton window and the nature of public discourse in the US towards Dominionist goals. Thus, the review of the three source materials involved not only examining it under that paradigm, as an example of Dominionist thought in relation to the three faces of power, but also in the context of what Dominionist policy outcomes manifest when Dominionist adherents are put in real positions of power. The resulting government report, The 1776 Report and the two legislative playbooks shows the clear understanding that Dominionists have of the power of agenda setting, framing and directing the public discourse (thought control).

In closing, this paper has looked at the ways in which the “soft” Seven Mountains Dominionists are using the three faces of power, especially faces two and three (agenda setting and thought control) to shift the Overton Window regarding political, cultural and religious discourse in the US and attempt slow adoption and implementation of their policy goals. Content analysis of the selected texts explored the ways this intention is

manifesting in key texts and how Dominionist ideas are slowly being disseminated into the larger culture and adopted by the Republican Party.

### **5.1 Future Research**

Further research avenues open to academics on this topic include the extent to which model legislation proposed by the Blitz Project and similarly aligned organizations is actually enacted at the local, state and federal level. The influence on judicial decisions of Dominionist political ideology is also another area of possible review. The adoption of anti-trans, don't say gay and other legislation at the state level which is arguably Dominionist inspired, or at the very least Dominionist adjacent, legislation is also ripe for examination. Lastly, the upcoming 2024 election cycle and Presidential election will likely offer many examples of Republican politicians signaling to religiously motivated voters their adherence to Dominionist policy goals.

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