

Intro:

The Religious Right's belief in the need to create God's kingdom on Earth is contradicted by the Bible itself. This article has been accepted for publication by Free Inquiry magazine.

Culture Wars: Why the Righteous Should Pick Up Their Marbles, Declare Victory, and Go Home

By Dr. Peter Lugten

Throughout history, young humans have endured careful moral instruction on the difference between “right” and “wrong”. Unfortunately, religions have introduced divergent opinions on the nature of correct and erroneous beliefs. As a result, humanity owns a spectacular history of violent conflict between holders of relatively minor differences in the interpretation of morality. Catholicism versus Protestantism, and Shi’ite versus Sunni Islam are just two of the wars over religion that have bloodied history’s pages. The term Culture War refers to the use of politics to establish religious superiority. It dates from the 1870’s and certain disputes between Chancellor Bismarck of Germany and the Pope in Rome. Fast forward. Towards the end of the 20th century, religious believers began to give serious consideration to the possibility of their meeting the Son of Man upon His Second Coming. In “The Late, Great Planet Earth”, Hal Lindsey in 1970 prophesied that the foundation of Israel in 1948 had set the scene for the emergence of the Antichrist, and the return of Jesus within one generation, i.e., during the 1980’s. Before long, the end-of-millennium anticipation that God would return led to a series of cultic mass suicides, but also to a general preparation for the End-Times. This was reflected in the popularity of the “Left Behind” series of 16 best-selling religious novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, dealing with the pre-tribulation, premillennial and Christian eschatological interpretation of the apocalypse. Premillennialists believe that Jesus will return before the 1,000 year reign of peace on Earth, either before (dispensational) or after the Great Tribulation that is foreseen in the Book of Revelation. The premillennial dispensationalist theology was challenged in 1987 by an article in *Christianity Today* that introduced Christian Reconstructionism, and the term Dominion theology.(1) It built on R.J. Rushdooney’s 1973 “Institutes of Biblical Law”(p 729), according to which, this “Great Commission” is claimed by Jesus in Matthew (28: 18). Here He says: “All power is given to me in heaven and in earth”. This, Rushdooney said, is a restatement of Genesis (1: 28)’s creation mandate to to be fruitful and multiply, “and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing”. This group of postmillennial evangelicals believed that Jesus would not return until the world had already become perfectly Christian, ruled by the faithful for 1,000 years.(1) According to the Wikipedia entry for “Postmillennialism”, (accessed July 31, 2022), they take this from Revelation, Chapter 20, which, they claim, predicts a Second Coming after the Golden Age. As Frederick Clarkson has pointed out, the premillennialists were little motivated to political activism, whereas the postmillennial Reconstructionist position required it in order to begin the 1,000 years.(1)

The idea that the United States was a Christian Nation began in the Second Great Awakening of the 19th century, despite the determination of the Founding Fathers to separate

Church and State. The ideology of Christian Nationalism was resurrected in the 1930's. Bob Sietana has explored the influence of Christian Nationalists at this time(2). The Reverend Gerald L.K. Smith, Disciples of Christ pastor and master fund raiser, spread fear that white Christians would lose their country to Jewish conspirators in his monthly magazine, "The Cross and the Flag". He founded a political party and ran for Senate. The anti semitic Catholic priest Charles Coughlin of Michigan used his popular radio program to broadcast Smith's ideas, and attacked Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1936 with a third party Presidential run. At a convention for Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice, he and Smith urged that the only patriotic way to save the country from Godless secularists was to not let the rules of democracy stand in the way of the will of transcendent God. Furthermore, as Professor Kevin Kruse has demonstrated, business leaders in search of a credible counter to President Roosevelt's New Deal adopted and promoted these ideas.(3) Partnering with Congregationalist minister James Fitfield Jr. of Los Angeles, they rolled back New Deal reforms in the name of a Spiritual Mobilization against socialism. Together with evangelist Billy Graham, these forces helped secure a landslide victory for Dwight D. Eisenhower, who, as President, attended the first National Prayer Breakfast, added "under God" to the Pledge, and declared "In God We Trust" to be the national motto. The cultural upheavals of the 1960's led to a surge in evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic movements, which morphed Christian Nationalism into the religious supremacy of Dominionism and the demand for the U.S. Constitution to dictate religious rule.

Clarkson recognises two main strains of dominionism.(1) R.J. Rushdooney founded Reconstructionism and began advocating for Christian, and home schooling in the 1950's, but did not so much figure on rushing the rule of the faithful. Then, in 1981, Francis Schaeffer's "A Christian Manifesto" inspired the anti-abortion movement, the rebranding of President Reagan's Republican Party, and the need for militant Christian resistance to "tyranny". Still later, Seven Mountains (7M) dominionism emerged from a movement called Latter Rain theology, in the 2000's. Its name is derived from Isaiah (2: 2) - "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on top of the mountains". Seven Mountains were identified with aspects of modern culture they were determined to dominate. 7M is advocated by the New Apostolic Reformation Pentecostals, who justify the offices of the apostle and prophet based on Ephesians (4: 11), such that Government officials must be purposed to establish the Kingdom of Jesus on Earth. In 2008, C. Peter Wagner argued that Revelation (1: 6) says He made us kings and priests for dominion, "so we are kings for dominion".

James Davidson Hunter published "Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America" in 1991; in 1992, Pat Buchanan's speech at the Republican National Convention was about "a religious war going on in our country... for the soul of America".(4) The movement incorporated fury directed at homosexuality, pornography, multiculturalism, immigration, and gun control, all aimed to unite conservatives against progressive values, to motivate electoral turn-out, and then to impose conservative values into legislation. They looked to turn back the clock, even as they looked forwards to the Kingdom of Heaven. Prominent politicians associated with the Dominionists today include Sarah Palin, Newt Gingrich, Michelle Bachman, Rick Perry, Mike Huckabee, Steve King, James Lankford, Sam Brownback, Roy Moore, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio and Mike Pence.(1) More recent Christian Nationalist headliners include Marjorie Taylor Greene, Lauren Boebert, Glenn Youngkin, Mark Meadows and Doug Mastriano.(5) Of course, the

current, at time of writing, Speaker of the House, Mike Johnson, is a devout Christian Nationalist who has called separation of Church and State “a misnomer”(6) They were and are all happy to support a deeply flawed Donald Trump as a means to challenge, as they see it, an increasingly hostile anti-Christian culture.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the Culture Wars and the well coordinated efforts to impose a narrow and intolerant Christian theocracy on the American people are not only closely intertwined, but backed by powerful politicians and vast resources, nevermind an electoral system which has been patiently undermined close to the point of representational failure. And while those infected with a lust for power will never listen to any debate, it is important to examine their reasoning from their own, Biblical, perspective. To begin, I'll review the origin myths of Dominionist Postmillennialism.

The Great Commission of Matthew (28:19-20) was the instruction by Jesus to his gathered followers, after His resurrection, to “Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you”. Here, Jesus urged His followers to teach, not to rule.

The Creation Mandate of Genesis (1: 28), to have “dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” does not imply that Adam, as prototypical human, should have dominion, or even a monopoly of Biblical interpretation, over human beings. It is clearly referring to other animals in his environment and not twenty-first century Reconstructionism.

Basing a religious ideology on the Book of Revelation is personally a very risky thing to do. Concluding Chapter 22: 18-19, the author, John of Patmos, warns that “If any man shall add to these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city”. Having said that, Chapters 19-21 clearly state that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords on a white horse with a sword in his mouth ends all the tribulations by smiting the nations and ruling them with a rod of iron (19: 11-16) Then, Satan was bound in a bottomless pit, and the souls that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years, but the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This was the first resurrection.(20: 1-5) Then, Satan will be released to go deceive all the nations and gather them for battle, after which a fire will come from God out of heaven to devour them (note that this is *not* a Second Coming of Jesus), and the devil will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone forever(20: 7-10). Then God judges the dead, small and great, standing before Him, everyman according to their works. Whoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire (the second death) (20: 11-15). Finally, there is a new heaven and a new earth as the holy city, new Jerusalem, decked out as the bride of Christ, comes down from God out of heaven, where God will dwell with men, except for the unbelievers and the abominable, etc., who will remain in the lake of fire and brimstone(21: 1-8). Verse 22: 3 “The thrones of God and the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants shall serve him.” is noteworthy in that in the Bible, “servants” was the word used to refer to slaves. It would seem that to witness the Golden Age millennium, one should join the movement “Beheaded for Jesus” now, otherwise, settle for second sitting as a servant in the new Jerusalem. On these technicalities, the Premillennialists clearly have the argument over the Postmillennialists. But

only if Revelation itself is credible. Its last two verses, and hence, the end of the Bible, state: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." Quickly means in a short time. For comparison, a millennium, at the time of writing roughly equivalent to half of history as recorded in the Bible, was a long time. The time elapsed that we have been waiting for Lord Jesus has also been, more or less, two millennia. Since the concluding verse seems to be plainly false, the rest must be of dubious credibility.

Now, let's take a look at the three Biblical verses cited in the paper by Frederick Clarkson.

Revelation (1: 6) says that Jesus Christ, who washed us of our sins, "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be the glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." John of Patmos, Revelation's author, wrote this in the past tense and was not, at the time, even King of the Island of Patmos, so unless he was delusional, he was writing metaphorically in a spiritual sense. Nor is the verse phrased as to be read as an aspiration.

Ephesians (4: 11) "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;" is part of a letter St. Paul allegedly wrote to promote unity between newly converted Jews and Gentiles. However, many Biblical scholars have long considered the letter to be Deutero-Pauline, or a pseudepigrapha forged in Paul's name by a later author.(7)

Isaiah (2: 2) "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on top of the mountains". According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, this book of 66 chapters was compiled over two centuries, from about 740-540 BCE, and is divided by scholars into First Isaiah, up to Chapter 39, and Deutero-Isaiah, the remainder.(8) The First Isaiah concerns the prophecies of Isaiah, a priest and statesman of the northern kingdom who served during the reigns of four kings of Judah. In Chapter 1, Isaiah laments that the Lord has nourished Israel but his children have rebelled against him, and He will no longer hear their prayers. After a brief description of the house on top of the mountains in Chapter 2, a place where swords are beaten into plowshares and spears into pruninghooks, there follows some dozen chapters of prophecies concerning the "day of the Lord" (2: 12) when He shall come and wreck destruction on his enemies throughout Egypt and the Middle East. However, only two verses predict what will precede his vengeance. In (7: 14), "Behold a woman (controversially translated as 'virgin' in the King James Bible) shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel". This verse, about Immanuel, meaning "God is with us", was supposed to persuade King Ahaz of a particular military strategy against the Assyrians. In Deutero-Isaiah, the broad theme of which is the redemption of Israel, verses (53: 3-8) describe a figure referred to only as "he", who is despised and rejected, stricken and afflicted, and brought as a lamb to the slaughter. While Jews consider "he" to be a personification of the nation of Israel, Christians consider both the above prophecies to presage the coming of Christ. In either case, nothing in Isaiah forecasts the events leading up to the Second Coming and the End-Times.

Trying to justify Dominionism using prophecies from the Old Testament rather than the New is rather like trying to predict the behavior of the Trump Administration based on pronouncements made by President Obama, for, in many ways, Jesus was a game changer. For instance, despite promising not to change the Laws of the Prophets by an iota or a jot,

(Matthew 5:17-20), Jesus abolished the ceremonial dietary and Sabbath laws, claiming to have “fulfilled” them. And, of course, He changed the entire concept of “Messiah” from a scourge of the Romans who would emerge victorious to a Savior of souls who would die on the Cross. Most importantly, he provided an ETA for the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth: that it would be before the death of some of those listening to him. Since all 3 Synoptic Gospels agree (Matthew 16: 27-28, as well as 24: 34; Mark 13: 26-30; and Luke 21: 27-32), it is one of His best authenticated sayings. It was also His only falsifiable one, and by the time the last Gospel was written, estimated to be 100 - 110 CE, it was clearly false. Of course, one could argue that in 70 CE, the stones of the Temple were overthrown, just as Jesus, in Matthew (24: 2), Mark (13: 1-2), and Luke (21: 5) said they would be. But in that case, the “Son of Man” was General, later to be Emperor Titus. Of course, Titus was the son of a man, and as Emperor, was worshiped as a God. So maybe we have had the wrong take on Roman Polytheism all these years.

Nonetheless, the Culture Warriors insist that Jesus will fulfill his promise of “Hasta la vista”. Their mission is to reform society, based on politics and legislation, to more resemble the Heavenly Kingdom, but it can only be founded on a deliberate misreading of the New Testament. The unmistakable Biblical message from Jesus was that his followers were to wait for his Second Coming. There is nothing in his teachings to suggest He wanted His followers to build their own Kingdom, or even an orderly society. His teachings aimed to prepare His contemporary audience so that they would have a correct belief in God in time for the coming Son of Man, which was, He said, imminent, so that they would be saved. So, when asked whether it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar (Luke 20: 22-23), He replied “render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s and unto God the things which are God’s”, meaning to let the Government do its work and concentrate on Salvation. His parables of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25: 31-46), the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13: 24-30), and of the merchant and the pearl, and the net cast into the sea (Matthew 13: 45-50) instructed His followers not to pursue resolution of grievances on Earth, as this would preempt the Final Judgment: “So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just. And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth”. As Thomas Mates pointed out in Free Inquiry in 2006, “There is not a single chapter in any of the New Testament’s books instructing young believers to marry or to have children... Nor are there any chapters encouraging believers to fight their Roman oppressors or become self-governing or capitalistic. There is nothing, in other words, for a modern “Christian conservative” to hold on to at all... The authorities in the New Testament are always “they”, never “we” - Christianity is nothing if not the ultimate outsiders’ faith. The devilish gift Jesus refused in the wilderness, remember, was earthly power”.(9)

On the contrary, the New Testament teaches Evangelical Christians who wish to bring forth the Second Coming to oppose laws fostering an orderly, peaceful society adhering to Christian values. Matthew (24: 5-31), Mark (13: 2-24) and Luke (21: 7-27) agree that the Second Coming must be preceded by nation rising up against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famines & pestilence, about 20 Biblical verses full of armies, desolation, vengeance, distress, wrath, fratricide and patricide, the sun darkening and the moon and the stars, men’s hearts failing for fear and the powers of the heavens shaken before the Son of Man comes in all His glory. In Revelations (6: 9-10), the Lamb, on opening the fifth seal, was greeted

by the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God that cried “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on Earth?” The sooner that the Evangelicals withdraw from the Culture Wars and let atheists and unbelievers go their own way, the sooner they can enjoy the end times that they anticipate with such awe.

In “The Second Coming: Not Before the Man of Lawlessness”,⁽¹⁰⁾ American theologian John Stephen Piper references 2 Thessalonians (2:1 - 3:15). Here, St. Paul addresses members of the church on the Second Coming, explaining that it isn’t as soon as they think, and what signs to expect. He advises them: “You need to get back to work, and stop meddling in others’ affairs”. And then he explains: “For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God....And then the lawless one shall be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with one breath of his mouth....The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all the power and false signs and wonders....Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness”.(2: 3-12)

It is worth mentioning that 2 Thessalonians is considered probably a pseudepigrapha, written after St. Paul’s death to cover for the fact that in 1 Thessalonians (4: 3-5), St. Paul held that Christ would return within the author’s lifetime (then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord...). Nonetheless, this is the message that the compilers of the New Testament wished to include.

“St. Paul” doesn’t tell Christ’s followers to busy themselves picketing abortion clinics, criminalizing homosexuality, or banning Muslims. (Of course, Muslims didn’t exist for another 6 centuries, but Mohammed considered Jesus to be a prophet. The emergence of Islam seems to have caught Jesus by His blind side). On the contrary, St. Paul urges the Thessalonians to keep busy at work, and to mind their own business. He did not expect the Second Coming to require that first, all citizens must be happily converted to fundamentalist Christianity. Rather, he expected that first there would be an epochal rebellion, inside and outside the church, as the man of lawlessness is revealed. This character may superficially resemble Donald Trump, but although Trump falsely aspired to a continuation of his Presidency, he remained safely with his enormous posterior unseated in any Temple, and never, at least so far, claimed to be God.

Pastor John Piper advocates what he calls Christian Hedonism as an antidote to End-Time deception. He argues that Christians should devote all their energies to maximizing the pleasure that they and others have in God, so that they might meet the man of lawlessness undeceived. For Christians hoping for the End-Times, or the coming of the Son of Man and the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, this is something they can do while they await the man of lawlessness. The Bible is clear that his rebellion must come first. But it might be a long wait! I suggest that the best way to bring this about speedily is to encourage the sinful behavior of the scientists, the climatologists and epidemiologists, the homosexuals, queers and the libertines, the pro-choice movement, the atheists, the librarians, the drag-queens and the Democrats. They should be left to do their damndest, to stoke God’s wrath upon the land. Instead of waging Culture Wars from Fox News and in the courtrooms, in the schools and on the sports fields, in the military and in the halls of Congress, they should seize the opportunity to win this war by quitting it. They should abandon their idea of building a Christian kingdom of their own,

as this a usurpation of God's prerogative, itself a sin. What they should do is to pick up their marbles and, declaring victory, go home.

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