

Facts about Dominionism examined

October 6, 2011

WASHINGTON (RNS)—In recent weeks, an arcane and scary-sounding religious term has crept into the lexicon of the 2012 campaign, tripping from the tongue of everyone from MSNBC broadcaster Rachel Maddow to conservative Christian leader Ralph Reed.

Lou Engle, seen here leading The Call rally in Nashville, is a leading proponent of the New Apostolic Reformation, which urges Christians to reclaim dominion over culture.(RNS PHOTO/Courtesy of Eden Frangipane)

Depending on whom you ask, "Dominionism" either signifies a Christian plot for world domination, or the latest liberal bugaboo.

What is "Dominionism"?

Scholars and journalists popularized the term "dominionism" in the 1990s to refer to conservative Christians seeking political power. It derives from the Book of Genesis, in which God tells Adam and Eve to have "dominion" over the Earth and its animals. Dominionism generally describes the belief that Christians are mandated biblically to control all earthly institutions until the second coming of Jesus.

Experts identify two main schools of Dominionism—Christian Reconstructionists, who believe biblical law, including stoning as punishment for adultery and other transgressions, should replace secular law; and the New Apostolic Reformation, which advocates for Christians to

"reclaim the seven mountains of culture"—government, religion, media, family, business, education, and arts and entertainment.

Who are Dominionists?

Very few Christians identify themselves as "Dominionists." Experts say the New Apostolic Reformation has gained traction among charismatic Christians and Pentecostals under the influence of [C. Peter Wagner](#), a church-growth guru and prolific author. Prominent "apostles" in the New Apostolic Reformation include [Lou Engle](#), co-founder of The Call assemblies and Mike Bickle, director of the [International House of Prayer](#) in Kansas City, Mo.

Where are Dominionists?

Experts say the New Apostolic Reformation has chapters of "prayer warriors" in all 50 states and in foreign countries where Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity are popular. Membership numbers are difficult to ascertain, however, since adherents are not required to officially join any church, seminary or ministry.

Some experts say Dominionism is more a school of thought than a social group. Its influence can be seen in textbooks that portray the Founding Fathers as devout evangelicals, in an anti-gay bill in Uganda and in the home-schooling movement, they say.

Evangelical experts, however, say they see no evidence of Dominionists thought among conservative Christian elites.

When did Dominionism arise?

Christian Reconstructionism is the brainchild of the [R.J. Rushdoony](#), a Calvinist theologian who died in 2001, leaving behind several dense tomes and a small band of followers. The New Apostolic Reformation traces its

roots to several Pentecostal movements that proliferated in the second half of the 20th century.

Why are people talking about Dominionism now?

The topic has bobbed up almost every four years since evangelical broadcaster Pat Robertson, who has espoused Dominionist ideas, ran for president in 1988. During the 2008 election, for instance, a video surfaced of a pastor active in the New Apostolic Reformation praying over Sarah Palin, raising questions about her involvement with the group.

In August, several pastors affiliated with New Apostolic Reformation helped organize and delivered speeches at Texas Gov. Rick Perry's [prayer rally](#) in Houston.

Perry is expected to need strong support from conservative Christians in his run for the presidency, as is Minnesota Congresswoman Michele Bachmann, who has expressed admiration for writers accused of espousing Dominionist ideas.

Many conservative Christians dismiss the attention on Dominionism as liberal fear-mongering. They wish to participate in American culture, they say, not dominate it.