

Religious fundamentalists railroad democracy

By Brian Morris

30 May 2021



Electing candidates from churches like Scott Morrison's Pentecostal Church and packing them into parliament is damaging to a viable democracy, writes [Brian Morris](#).

WITH THE rise of [Pentecostal](#) and charismatic megachurches there's a rational concern that a "literal" belief in the Bible has led to [anti-science trolls](#), [climate change denial](#) and an anti-vax movement. But the endgame will be more serious if the trend continues to morph into a full USA-style of [Christian dominionism](#).

Most people will roll their eyes when overzealous Christians say their life's mission is to convert us all to be ["Disciples of Christ"](#). But it's more difficult to tolerate those who firmly believe all positions of power and authority – in government, the judiciary, media and corporations – can only be held by those spiritually committed to the "literal truth" of the Christian Bible. That includes [Genesis](#) and the

whole [Old Testament](#).

Biblical literalism underpins the growing belief in creationism – that God created everything – and it's this belief which drives [dominionism](#); that only Christians can govern a nation. [Australasian Science](#) in 2011 [reported](#) 31% of Australians believes in creationism. With the [rise of evangelism](#) since 2011, the figure is likely much higher.

This is the basis for dominionism, an American [export](#) from the 1990s that [gave birth](#) to the American [Tea Party movement](#) in 2010 and the same Christian conservatives who elected Donald Trump in 2016. The Republican Party is now fully [enmeshed](#) with dominion theology which has been exported to many countries — including Australia.

As early as 2005, [Marion Maddox](#), a professor of politics at Macquarie University – and a [Uniting Church](#) Christian – published ["God Under Howard: The Rise of The Religious Right In Australia"](#). It flags the rise of dominionism here.

Genesis is God's rule book, for biblical literalists. They take literally that God said "subdue the earth" and "take dominion over it". The influx of U.S. evangelism includes [Hillsong](#) and a plethora of Pentecostal churches such as [Horizon Church](#) in Sutherland NSW, whose congregation [includes](#) Prime Minister Scott Morrison and family. Hillsong pastor [Brian Houston](#) is also Scott Morrison's [mentor](#) and the Prime Minister [runs](#) a recognised Christian

government.

Democracy is [in retreat](#) around the world — a trend over the past 13 years, according to [Freedom House](#), which monitors the rise of authoritarian governments.

Professor of Psychology [Paul Wink](#), College of Liberal Arts University of New Hampshire Dean [Michele Dillon](#) and Associate Professor of Philosophy at Bryn Mawr College [Adrienne Prettyman](#) write that far-Right [authoritarianism](#):

'...is positively associated with a religion that is conventional, unquestioned and unreflective.'

That's Christian dominionism.

Their ultimate goal is to gain control – or at least to have influence – over the “[7 Mountains](#)” of any society. The "mountains" are education, media, government, churches, business, family and the arts. Christians who work in these areas are required to fulfil [the Seven Mountains Mandate](#) — to take control and execute God's plan.

It is anything but conspiratorial to reflect on the growing influence of these fundamentalist brands of religion over the past 30 years. Islamic extremism gains international headlines with its ruthless aggression, but Christian evangelism (now morphing into dominionism) increases its political influence by flying under the media radar.

The bizarre aspect of fundamentalism is its anti-science foundations. Human evolution is seen as a hoax and the earth as 6,000 years old — based on the alleged lifespans of biblical characters since [Adam and Eve](#). Australian Christian fundamentalist [Ken Ham](#) built a giant [Noah's Ark](#) in Kentucky, complete with life-size displays of humans living with dinosaurs.

In Australia, evangelical Christians are being groomed by a host of religious lobbies to run for election in federal, state and local governments, according to the [Sydney Morning Herald](#). America is the [most Christianised nation](#) on Earth; Australia is not far behind — with one of the highest ratios of fundamentalist MPs in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ([OECD](#)).

That is not surprising when we consider recruiting drives by the religious Right, as seen in February from the [Church and State crusade](#) – its annual Australian summit – "arming Christians for the Kingdom to come". Again, pure dominionism. The aim of fundamentalist churches is to wind back secular policy to make [abortion](#) and voluntary assisted dying ([VAD](#)) illegal, and to [ban LGBT+](#) people from working in church businesses.

The public is largely oblivious to all this and there is no mainstream media [analysis](#) of Right-wing Christian agendas. But many "moderate" Christians are concerned by the anti-democratic objectives of fundamentalist Christianity.

One Baptist Church minister, [Reverend Dr Craig de Vos](#), says groups like the Australian Christian Lobby ([ACL](#)) are [pursuing](#) an agenda "*straight out of the Dominionist theology playbook*". In 2011, the ABC ran an [article](#) titled, '*Is the Australian Christian Lobby dominionist?*' — when ACL was then linked to the [7 Mountains website](#).

Reverend de Vos [said](#) in one of his sermons at North Adelaide Baptist Church:

"The Religious Right in this country want to take over the government either by stealthy insurrection...or by more aggressive means because they feel slighted, even persecuted, because all of us godless heathens don't

share their anti-science and conspiracy-laden ideas, their selective Biblical literalism, their Taliban-like morality and their prehistoric values.”

Dominion ethos is no different to Islamic theocracies that impose [Sharia Law](#) — countries such as Syria, Libya, [Egypt](#), Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Algeria, to name a few. The only Christian [theocracy](#) is [Vatican City](#), which is an exclusive Catholic state, but fundamentalists want a return to the [Christian controlled states](#) of the middle ages.

Dominionism is unlikely to prevail — at least in the short term. But Australia is already a “[soft theocracy](#)”, with heavily Christianised governments at all three tiers. That is despite [78% of citizens](#) who want “to separate personal religious beliefs from the business of government”. MPs have a religious ratio far higher than the public.

The question is whether we want Australia to become increasingly secular. That means working to elect federal, state and local governments which take a strong position on the nation’s future and advancing a progressive secular worldview. Or, if we simply don’t care, the public can acquiesce to fundamentalist Christian groups who actively recruit young Pentecostals, [Creationists](#) and evangelicals in order to establish a [Christian theocracy](#).

The world has been plunged into crisis with the coronavirus pandemic and a [rise in fundamentalism](#). According to [Demo Finland](#) – the Finish democracy-watch organisation – almost 70% of the world’s population now [live in non-democratic states](#). That is a rise of 20% in just the last ten years.

We need to stress again that authoritarianism is [underpinned by religion](#). Australians need to decide whether they prefer a progressive secular future or a continuation of our trend to [elect](#) fundamentalist MPs and further

Christianise our three tiers of government.

Both the Liberal National Party ([LNP](#)) and Australian Labor Party ([ALP](#)) leadership remain obsessed with pandering to the illusory “Christian vote”. This alone perpetuates our status as a “soft theocracy”.

But [taking political candidates](#) from Pentecostal and evangelical churches and packing more Christians into parliament puts a distinct strain on a viable democracy.

Religious freedom is indeed a civil right for all — including the true public majority who do not practice a particular religion and who do not want any form of religion forced upon them. The problem with overzealous people of faith is they claim spiritual superiority to “know God’s plan.” Really? How?

We need to avoid religion becoming [weaponised](#) to assert Christian dominionism — with its ultimate aim to kill democracy and enthrone Jesus.

[Brian Morris](#) is a former journalist and founder of the [National Secular Lobby \(NSL\)](#) and [Plain Reason](#).