

Concordia professor André Gagné analyzes the 2024 U.S. presidential race

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In the wake of the U.S. presidential election campaign, we spoke with professor and chair of the [Department of Theological Studies](#) [André Gagné](#), about his recently translated book *American Evangelicals for Trump: Dominion, Spiritual Warfare, and the End Times* (Routledge).

What is your new book about?

I have written a book that explores the role of American evangelicals who support Trump in U.S. politics. Specifically, the book focuses on a group of evangelicals known as Neocharismatic-Pentecostals (NCPs), their key leaders, beliefs, and political strategies. The book is organized around three main ideas that inspired NCP leaders to support Trump in 2016 and 2020: Dominion, Spiritual Warfare, and Eschatology (the End Times). I examine how these ideas have sustained evangelicals in positions of power during the Trump era. Given the possibility of Trump's return to power in 2024, my work serves as a warning of what may happen if he renews his alliance with his former NCP supporters.

In what way does this book differ to the first French edition published in 2020?

The book has been updated since the 2020 elections, with some important changes. It includes a significant Preface that explains issues related to methodology and definitions. One important feature concerns a more thorough contextualization of one of the Christian Right movements I study in the book, namely the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR). Moreover, an Epilogue has been added which discusses Trump's political legacy after the electoral loss. Another feature of this new book are three indexes, including Topics, Scripture References, and Names.

Why was it important to have this book translated into English?

In 2020, some Americans read a book in French and strongly felt that it needed to be translated for English-speaking readers. They believed that this was particularly crucial given the upcoming 2024 elections and the fact that Trump was eager to regain the White House with the support of some of his loyal evangelical followers.

In your book, you discuss these Evangelical Trump-supporters. Who are they exactly, and why do they support Donald Trump?

81% of white evangelicals supported Trump in 2020. In the 2020 election, despite Trump's loss, between 76% and 81% of white evangelicals voted for him again. The individuals studied in my book are NCP leaders who are part of the Christian Right, a religious coalition with a political agenda centred around issues like anti-abortion activism, opposition to LGBTQ+ rights, and protection of their religious freedom.

Some of the evangelicals who support Trump believe that he was chosen by God to restore America to its Christian roots. This idea gained popularity through the work of a Christian entrepreneur, who compared Trump to Cyrus the Great, the King of Persia. Six months before the election, he predicted Trump's victory, claiming that God had revealed a connection between the biblical text from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 45, and Donald Trump's role as the 45th President of the United States. Isaiah 45 in the Hebrew Bible tells the story of King Cyrus as a savior (a messiah) of the Jewish people. The rise of Cyrus, a pagan king, is compared to Trump's ascension to power. Trump is

seen as a modern-day Cyrus figure who is on a mission to protect the American people and restore the nation to its former glory.

What is this movement called the New Apostolic Reformation (Nouvelle Réforme Apostolique) discussed in your book, and how does it currently play out in US politics?

The New Apostolic Reformation is first and foremost an ecclesiology (a way of understanding the Church). C. Peter Wagner (1930-2016), who was a missiologist and professor of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary for 30 years, coined the term “New Apostolic Reformation” to describe what he understood to be the emergence of a new mode of church governance which focused on apostolic leadership and networks. Wagner never saw himself as the founder of the NAR, but rather explained how his research lead him to believe that the NAR began around 1900 and that in North America the Second Apostolic Age began in 2001. He actually believed that NAR was comprised of various independent church movements that existed throughout the 20th century such as the African Independent Church movement (around 1900), the Chinese rural house church movement

(mid-1970s), and the Latin American grassroots church movement (in the 1970s). For Wagner, the NAR as we know it today in North America really began around 2001. Understanding the NAR in the current US political context is important. Many of the NCP leaders and their followers discussed in my book have embraced NAR ideas of church governance and the role of Christians in politics, views that have come to challenge pluralism and democratic values in the US.

What role does mainstream media play in supporting these movements?

For many years, US mainstream media has neglected to report on the Christian Right, and even less so on the NAR. The movement, therefore, surfed under the radar for many years. It attained some of its goals by helping Trump get elected in 2016. NAR leaders have also been quite active in 2020 and have taken on an active role in the wake of the 2024 elections. In the past couple of months, the MSM finally caught on, and began reporting on the NAR. Reporters have been consulting scholars and independent journalists familiar with the movement. I've been actively working to provide reporters accurate information on the NAR. Journalists need to get the facts straight

when it comes to religion. Religious language can sometimes be difficult to understand, and this where the scholars comes in handy. I co-wrote a three-part “Reporter’s Guide” to the NAR with veteran independent journalist Frederick Clarkson to help navigate this complex movement and its involvement in US politics.

How do the ideas of Dominion, Seven Mountain Mandate, and Spiritual Warfare - how they think about government, democracy, accountability – clash with actual policies and interest groups?

The Christian right leaders I discuss in my book adhere to a political theology that is called “Dominion,” or what is referred to “Dominionism.” This is the theocratic idea that Christians are called by to exercise dominion over every aspect of society by taking control of political and cultural institutions.

Now, this political theology of power needed to be infused with a mobilizing strategy to get Christians to embrace the dominion project. This is where the idea of the “Seven Mountain Mandate” comes along. This strategy aims to mobilize Christians and empower them to occupy top roles in seven spheres cultures, also referred to as

mountains, which are usually understood to be: government, education, business, family, arts and entertainment, media, and religion. The ultimate goal is to establish dominion, which can only be achieved by placing Christians in leadership positions at the head of these cultural mountains.

In terms of “Spiritual Warfare,” this is also key to the establishment of dominion. Some Christians believe that to “occupy,” (aka “exercise dominion”) one must neutralize and displace the enemy. Spiritual warfare enthusiasts work tirelessly to remove obstacles to achieving dominion. These obstacles are primarily understood as demonic forces that seek to hinder God’s Kingdom through various means, including politics. This can ultimately lead to demonization of political opponents, individuals, and social groups seen as hindering dominion.

Do you think these Trump-supporting Christians truly envisioning a form of theocracy for the US?

We can answer this question with another question: what happens to those who disagree with this Christian hegemonic project for America? There are individuals, both Christians and non-Christians, who do not share the beliefs and goals of leaders in the NAR movement. Knowing

that the idea of dominion can sound worrisome, some NAR leaders seek to camouflage the language of dominion. One strategy is to replace the term “dominion” with “influence.” The Seven Mountain Mandate is being presented as a means of gaining influence to address modern-day social problems. They even audaciously assert that people will rejoice when Christians exercise dominion!

But despite their claims of merely seeking to influence culture, the political agenda of NAR leaders is not congruent with the values of many democratic societies. Denigrating political opponents through the use of spiritual warfare language is quite alarming. Those who stand against their vision of a Christian-led America are characterized as being under the influence of demonic forces, making them not only political adversaries, but also enemies of God.

How are you feeling given the America's democracy crisis, this existential election, Jan. 6? What are the impacts on Canada and the rest of the world?

It is quite concerning to see American democracy is such a perilous state. Trump’s proactive pursuit of those who oppose him is

emblematic of a vengeful disposition. His political slogan, centered on “retribution,” highlights this vindictive nature.

Trump’s win in 2016 had a profound impact on the global political landscape, and has led the way to severe crises in numerous democracies. We have seen a rise in authoritarianism, an erosion of democratic institutions, and multiple attacks on the rule of law. People worldwide need to remain vigilant, seeking to protect the independence of the judiciary, ensuring freedom of the press, safeguarding the right to peaceful protest, defending human rights, and promoting transparency and accountability in governments globally.

<https://www.concordia.ca/cunews/artsci/2024/03/06/trump-and-the-new-apostolic-reformation-.html>