

Article

Documenting Domination: From the Doctrine of Christian Discovery to Dominion Theology

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Abstract: The Doctrine of Christian Discovery is a series of fifteenth-century papal bulls that served as the theological and legal justification for the colonization of the world and the enslavement of the Original Free Nations, starting first on the African continent before spreading across the globe. In the 1800s, these bulls and other documents like *The Requerimiento* and colonial charters would be codified and enshrined together in U.S. law as the Doctrine of Christian Discovery, becoming the foundation of property law and international law. Also, considering what Peter d’Errico calls Federal Anti-Indian Law, we will trace and document how this framework of domination began with the Catholic crowns of Europe and transformed into the dominion theology found within Christian nationalist theologies today. Our research highlights how the Doctrine became enshrined and encoded within Protestantism and the imagined “secular” of the U.S. and Canada, countries who rhetorically espouse separation of church and state while justifying land theft, treaty violations, and the abuse of Indigenous nations and peoples through the Doctrine. We craft a genealogy of Christian domination by carefully analyzing primary sources, especially the colonial charters. We will conclude by juxtaposing the domination framework and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy’s principles of the *Gayanashagowa* (Great Law of Peace).

Keywords: religion; religious studies; Indigenous studies; law



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1. Introduction

The Doctrine of Christian Discovery is a series of fifteenth-century papal bulls that served as the theological and legal justification for the colonization of the world and the enslavement of the Original Free Nations, starting first on the African continent before spreading across the globe. In the 1800s, these bulls and other documents like *The Requerimiento* and colonial charters would be codified and enshrined together in U.S. law as the Doctrine of Christian Discovery, becoming the foundation of property law and international law. Also, considering what Peter d’Errico calls Federal Anti-Indian Law, we will trace and document how this framework of domination began with the Catholic crowns of Europe and transformed into the dominion theology found within Christian nationalist theologies today. Our research highlights how the Doctrine became enshrined and encoded within Protestantism and the imagined “secular” of the U.S. and Canada, countries who rhetorically espouse separation of church and state while justifying land theft, treaty violations, and the abuse of Indigenous nations and peoples through the Doctrine. We craft a genealogy of Christian domination by carefully analyzing primary sources, especially the colonial charters. We will conclude by juxtaposing the domination framework and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy’s principles of the *Gayanashagowa* (Great Law of Peace).

Charles H. Long (1926–2020) was one of the founding luminaries of the History of Religions school. In his landmark work *Significations*, he established two critical marking points which are relevant to this present inquiry. First, the universalizing and totalizing force of the European Enlightenment. Second, that the concept of “religion” has been irredeemably shaped and modeled by colonialism and conquest. Navigating between

these landmarks, we further Long's analysis by highlighting how European Christianity becomes the universal and totalizing hegemon through which all elements of life and society must be understood. Second, the quest for knowledge of the other (especially the other's "religion") becomes a method and tool of domination. No knowledge can escape the hegemonic gaze of the Christian colonial land surveyor. Using Charles H. Long, David Carrasco, and Philip P. Arnold et al., we seek to uproot the landmarks placed by the Doctrine of Christian Discovery and its attendant theological and ideological framework of dominion by illustrating how the Indigenous lifeways and values of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy provide a powerful counterpoint and means of resistance to the Doctrine of Christian Discovery and its dominion theology.

Jonathan Z. Smith reminds us of the importance of the settler colonial encounter with Indigenous peoples and its impact on the category of "religion". Smith turns not to Augustine and Aquinas but to Richard Eden's translation of "A treatyse of the newe India [sic]", where Christopher Columbus encounters an Indigenous people "without shame, religion, or 'knowledge of God'" and Pedro de Cieza de León finds Indigenous peoples "observing no religion at all, as we understand it. . ." ([de Cieza de León et al. 1922](#); [Münster 1553](#); [Olson and Callari 1994](#); [Smith 1998](#)). Having provided these two exemplars, Smith concludes that in the sixteenth century, religion "is a category imposed from the outside on some aspect of native culture". Secondly, religion is considered universal, and its perceived absence is remarkable. Third, the "generic category 'religion,' [and] its characteristics appear natural to the other". Fourth, "'religion' is an anthropological, not a theological category" ([Smith 1998](#)). Following Smith, we approach the concept and category of "religion" in much the same way throughout this essay. For us, religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study, and when it is applied to Indigenous religions, it conceals as much as it reveals. Conversely, when the category of religion is applied to Christianity during the sixteenth century, it creates an infinite loop where theology and religion reinforce one another. Instead, in this essay, following Philip P. Arnold's work, we will speak of Indigenous lifeways and values and contrast them with Christian theology, particularly what we see as the incredibly powerful strand of dominion theology that is concomitant with the Doctrine of Christian Discovery ([Arnold 2023](#)).

Contrasting Haudenosaunee lifeways and values and dominion theology, we turn to the concepts of place, intersectionality, thanksgiving, balance, and seventh-generation thinking. One of the most important protocols of the Haudenosaunee is the "Thanksgiving Address: Or the Words that Come Before All Else". This protocol is instructive because it begins by giving gratitude to Mother Earth and all living beings ([Haudenosaunee n.d.](#)). It reminds the hearers of the responsibility to live in the right and proper peaceful relationship with one another and to use their good minds to work together for the seven generations yet unborn. Living in balance and harmony with all living beings requires dismantling the supremacy culture where there is a hierarchy of power and control, with humans exercising domination and dominion at the top and the Earth as the passive raw material to be manipulated. In supremacy culture, animals are only about their use value to human beings. Haudenosaunee lifeways also emphasize intersectional thinking. No one sphere can be separated from another. Gender, race/ethnicity, sexualities, class, and identities are all bound together with clan, community, ecology, and history. Learning one's name means learning one's relational place in the community and the natural world. All these pieces lead to a sense of rootedness and being tied to the natural world, to the places at the center of your etiologies. Haudenosaunee means People of The Longhouse. Onondaga means People of the Hills. It is not hills in general, but the hills surrounding Onondaga Lake. The sacred lake, which gives birth to the Confederacy and Deyhontsigwa'ehs (lacrosse), are two of the more well-known gifts of this lake ([Onondaga Nation n.d.a](#); [Heath and Hill 2014](#)).

Dominion theology is first a displaced, dislocated, missionizing theology that celebrates God becoming flesh in the brown skin of a Palestinian Jewish man known as Jesus of Nazareth in the first century of the Common Era. Dominion theology is an atemporal terraforming theology that seeks to reinscribe and reinterpret the present moment through

the stories and names of the past, displacing the present in favor of an imagined place. Second, dominion theology is a catastrophizing and utopic theology. It is a theology that yearns for the coming of a new heaven and a new earth. The new has come, and the old has passed away. The nostalgic desire to reshape the world in the image of the past is always in irresolvable tension with the apocalyptic yearning for the perfection of newness. In this irresolvable and chaotic tension, one finds the cataclysm of colonialism. Finally, dominion theology is marked by the excessive certainty of exceptionalism. These true believers are the true heirs of the true God and, therefore, demand nothing less than the full measure of everything.

2. Intersectionality and the Doctrine of Christian Discovery

Intersectionality provides a means for thinking about the intersections of gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, and all the interstices of power/knowledge and their impacts upon our world. Kimberle Crenshaw, the critical theorist who first developed intersectionality as a theory, began by illustrating what intersectionality is through the story of a traffic accident where each person who saw the accident happen had a different perspective that was informed by their gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, and relationship to dominant structures of power/knowledge (Carbado et al. 2013; Cho et al. 2013). Crenshaw's theorizing and her example demonstrate the importance of land and place. Intersectionality unfolds in place, and structures of power/knowledge have reshaped the place, and all folks residing in a place have been shaped by the place.

To study the Doctrine of Christian Discovery and to examine its continued impact on not only Indigenous nations of the world but also the African descendants of enslaved persons and all persons living in settler colonial nation-states that find their beginnings in the Crusades waged by the European nations and churches and the subsequent "age of discovery" or as Steven T. Newcomb (Shawnee/Lenape) puts it more accurately, the age of domination and dehumanization (Newcomb 2011), enslavement, exploitation, and extraction all find their beginnings here in the Doctrine of Christian Discovery. Tracing the Doctrine of Christian Discovery means tracing the ways that racism flows into and out of Christianity. Speaking of racism elides the situatedness of racism within Christianity. Likewise, speaking of Christian hegemony elides the racialized dimensions of that supremacy. Therefore, at this moment, starting from the fifteen hundreds and stretching to perhaps even today, untangling the Gordian knot of white Christian hegemony is a herculean task. Instead, we wish to highlight the interstices where one strand of Protestant theology comes into *bas relief*. Here, we focus only on the mainly white Puritan and Calvinist strands of racist dominionist theology. Other scholars in this special issue highlight different valences of religious racism (Randall and Randall n.d.).

3. What Is the Doctrine of Christian Discovery?

The Doctrine of Christian Discovery comes from a series of fifteenth-century papal bulls that helped to start the age of domination and dehumanization (Indigenous Values Initiative 2024). After the failure and expense of the crusades, the Roman Catholic church and the European princes turned their focus from Palestine to Africa, Asia, and the rest of the world. Church and state struggled under the debt and damage from the crusades, and thus, they both began looking for new lands to exploit, valuable economic resources to extract, and more peoples to enslave in the quest for capital acquisition. Quite simply, the Doctrine of Christian Discovery provides a rubric for the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands and for the enslavement and exploitation of non-Christian peoples as both "heathens" to save and a resource to further the quick assimilation of human capital. It also allows for the extraction of all natural resources. The logic of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery is simultaneously the visible yet invisible frame of society.

The Doctrine of Christian Discovery, as it becomes solidified in U.S. law, is a collection of fifteenth-century papal bulls, colonial charters, and treaties. Vine Deloria Jr. emphasizes how the entire foundation of the United States and the nation-to-nation treaties between

Indigenous nations and the United States are built upon a house of cards. He writes, “Federal Indian law actually begins with a sleight-of-hand decision that proclaimed that the United States had special standing with respect to ownership of the land on which the Indigenous people lived” (Deloria 2006). Onondaga Nation General Council Joseph J. Heath and Newcomb have both traced this claim to a special relationship back to the U.S. legal concept of “plenary power”, which is itself a feint attempt at granting the divinatory and regulatory power of a *deus otiosus* to the United States government (Newcomb 1992; Heath 2018; Arnold 2023).

As seen in U.S. property law and what Peter d’Errico rightly renames as Federal Anti-Indian Law, domination and dehumanization have become inextricably linked through the colonial period and the establishment of the United States (D’Errico 2022). The enshrining of domination and dehumanization via property law, Federal Anti-Indian law, plenary power, enslavement, and the three-fifths’ compromise are all examples of the enshrinement of Christian privilege within the United States.¹ The religious freedoms protected by the First Amendment are clearly limited (Smith 2015). Having briefly traced how the doctrine of Christian discovery works today, we will now provide a brief overview of its components.

Popes Nicholas V and Alexander VI issued several papal bulls that comprise the Doctrine of Discovery. Nicholas V issued *Dum Diversas* in 1452 and *Romanus Pontifex* in 1454. Both papal bulls were issued to King Alfonso V of Portugal. *Dum Diversas* purported to legalize the transatlantic slave trade by authorizing Alfonso V to subjugate “Saracens [sic] and pagans and any other unbelievers” (Nicholas 2018). By fiat, Nicholas V issued a self-referential papal bull that sought to legitimate and provide an alibi for chattel slavery and what would become the transatlantic slave trade. Notice how the language of this papal bull places Muslims, pagans, and “others” on the same plane of existence. To the popes and the monarchies of Europe, non-Christians and non-European nations were denigrated as being less than, equivalent to one another, and lacking (in the colonizers’ minds) formation as nation-states. What mattered to the colonial powers was categorizing others into a system of domination and dehumanization without their consent and stripping them of personhood based upon a European understanding of these others’ “beliefs”. Additionally, while the terms “Saracen” and “pagan” are pejoratively utilized against the peoples of the western and southern hemispheres, they were also weaponized against non-Christians in Europe (Nadhir 2016; Warburg et al. 1999).

In 1454, Nicholas V *Romanus Pontifex* followed up on *Dum Diversas* and granted power to Catholic countries in Europe to conquer newly “discovered” lands. It granted the power to

Invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens [sic] and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed. . . and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery. . . and appropriate to himself and his successors the Kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit. . . the said King Alfonso, or, by his authority, the aforesaid infante, justly and lawfully has acquired and possessed, and doth possess these islands, lands, harbors, and seas, and they do of right belong and pertain to the said King Alfonso and his successors. (Nicholas 1455)

Looking across the Mediterranean at the African continent, the church and crown imagine an Edenic paradise, one that is ready for plunder; without ever consulting the places and peoples subject to these papal bulls, the pope and king assume themselves greater, having a divinely given power and justification for theft and domination. *Romanus Pontifex* expands upon the powers of the former bulls and added to perpetual slavery. In this bull, one can already see Newcomb’s summative framework of enslavement, exploitation, and extraction as being part and parcel of dominion theology. It is important to acknowledge the recursive and entirely self-referential nature of these documents. These documents’ primary purposes are to legitimize a framework of domination and dehumanization. They provide a theological and jurisprudence alibi for harm. The atrocities to be committed are justified in the name of God and sovereignty. As Arnold rhetorically asks,

how do you find and destroy a place you see as your theological paradise and possibly the start of your creation etiology and destroy it? (Arnold 2000). The papal bulls suggest a total lack of imagination about what these bulls entail. The world in their minds was so much smaller and casually domitable. Their ambitions outstripped their imagination.

By 1493, Christopher Columbus had returned from his voyage of conquest. Spain, jealous of Portugal, seeks papal clarity about the scope and boundaries of the colonial fray. Sebastian Modrow and Melissa Smith's recent translation of Alexander VI's bull *Inter Caetera* raises some important questions about this bull's history. There are three bulls that share this name, and there are important scholarly questions about the dating and backdating of the three bulls operating under this name (Alexander 2022). We are focused on the third iteration here. The third iteration seeks to assuage the thirst for the conquest of two greedy monarchs while assuring the church receives a cut of the profits. Alexander VI must carefully split the world between the Portuguese and the Spanish in such a way that he avoids open conflict between the two powers. Turning now to the text of the bull itself, Alexander VI praises Columbus' voyage as being blessed with divine aid. The pope praises that the citizens of these recently "discovered" countries and islands believe in one God. Instead of pausing to reflect on what it means to encounter other sovereign nations and how Alexander VI might feel if people showed up and tried to take his home, he continued on. Additionally, he does not pause to consider that these sovereign monotheists are perhaps more similar than different (Alexander 2022).

Refusing to consider the ramifications of his words, Alexander VI soldiers on ignoring Indigenous sovereignty and theological commitments, instead granting title and rule over lands of which they have no comprehension other than the biased accounts of those who have returned. One of those who had returned, Columbus, returned bound in chains and spent some time in prison for his crimes aboard. One would think this would raise questions about the reliability of his narration, but it does not. All that matters is ensuring that the lands and peoples can be dominated and dehumanized. His one concern seems to be ensuring that the Christian nations of Europe do not try to dominate and dehumanize each other like they were doing to the Indigenous nations and peoples of Turtle Island (the Americas). The only reason this papal bull worked and is still having effects today is the ways in which colonial nation-states and churches continue to cede and grant legitimacy to these documents, especially through a refusal to repudiate them. The sheer quest for political power and capital is barely veiled by theological and jurisprudential reasoning. The mere existence of lands, nations, and peoples unknown to them is more than enough justification for domination. Even mentions of monotheistic others are not enough to slake the thirst for power and control.

Dum Diversas, *Romanus Pontifex*, and *Inter Caetera* were not enough theological and jurisprudential justification to secure domination theology. They had to be expanded to divide the world in a more granular fashion between competing Christian hegemonies. Some of the more important key moments are the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, the patent granted by King Henry VII to John Cabot and his sons on 5 March 1496, and *The Requerimiento* of 1510. The Treaty of Tordesillas between Spain and Portugal in 1494 shifted the demarcation line of *Inter Caetera* to allow Portugal to sail to and settle in some parts of the new world that would become Brazil. In 1500, Pedro Alvares Cabral set sail for modern-day Brazil and called it Terra da Vera Cruz (the land of the true cross) (Quagliioni 2018). Not to be left out of the fun, Henry VII of England issued a patent to Cabot and his sons that gave them the power to investigate all lands "unknown to all Christians". Cabot was also allowed to seize and claim dominions over cities and towns of any size just so long as they were not Spanish or Portuguese claims (Henry VII 1909). Henry VII found ways to utilize these Roman Catholic documents to further his own ends and to provide an opening for Protestants to capitalize on the work of the Roman Catholic Church. It is intriguing that even as Henry VIII was committed to creating a Church of England and breaking with the Roman Catholic Church, he easily appropriated the dominion theology of the papal bulls. Now, the church and crown were united in purpose under his crown.

The English King Henry VII's Cabot Charter purported to give "those places thus newly discovered" to John Cabot and his descendants and their agents. The language of the charter states the following: "find, discover and investigate whatsoever islands, countries, regions or provinces of heathens and infidels, in whatsoever part of the world placed, which before this time were unknown to all Christians". The language of the Cabot Charter continues to build on the rhetorical style of previous documents, but the difference is that it focuses primarily on Cabot's responsibilities to the English Crown. The Cabot Charter approves of the Cabot family and their agents stealing land from "heathens and infidels" in places that "were unknown to all Christians". Cabot acknowledges the lands they desire are occupied by non-Christian nations and peoples and admits to a lack of geographical knowledge on the part of Christians and, by extension, the English. The Cabot Charter is open, and the goal is domination, dehumanization, and the exploitation and extraction of peoples and resources. The Charter fantasizes about the subjugation of cities, towns, and peoples, and it assumes that the nations and people will become vassals of the English king. Should Christians be encountered and conquered, so long as it is not a headache for the sovereign, it seems fine for the Cabots and their agents to acquire for England "dominion, title, and jurisdiction" of whatever nations, peoples, and lands they should encounter. The *carte blanche* and recursive authority the Cabot Charter grants by fiat is telling and alarming. It is a repetition of the bulls, with the critical difference being the consolidation of power between one country and one king (Henry VII 1909).

In ca. 1513, Juan López de Palacios Rubios drafted *The Requerimiento* for Ferdinand II. This ultimatum was to be read aloud to the Indigenous peoples, who they were about to attempt to subjugate as a salve for the consciences of the conquistadors. The fact that the Indigenous peoples would not be able to understand and often did not even hear the document being read aloud was of little consequence. *The Requerimiento* served as a quick way for conquistadors to be granted preemptive absolution for the genocide they were about to commit. This is dominion theology's true magic—read the incantation scroll, and the lands and peoples become yours, and the Indigenous peoples' souls are damned. The accelerationism of *The Requerimiento* emphasizes just how important seizing land and enslaving peoples was for the church and state; a conscience gets in the way of domination.

The ceremony of *The Requerimiento* was not for the Indigenous nations but for the conquistadors. Planting a flag and holding dirt in one hand meant that all dirt and land and the peoples and nations who dwelt upon it were in the minds of colonists now subject to the kings and queens of Europe. The totalizing conquest meant that the smallest grain of sand contained within it the multitudinous desire for Europe to manifest its desire for nothing less than everything. Christendom hides in plain sight, for example, when it provides the theological and legal justification for conquest. The preservation of domination is the preservation of Christendom.

4. Protestantism and the Doctrine of Christian Discovery

Tracking the absorption of a Roman Catholic doctrine into the fabric of the United States and Protestant theology is an opaque and fragmentary process that involves holding early Puritan theologians like Increase and Cotton Mather, along with the founding fathers and the legal system of the United States. Like many concepts, the Doctrine of Christian Discovery was absorbed through osmosis and convenience. It was adopted because it fit within the epistemological and theological frameworks of American Protestantism and because it provided a significant benefit to those who sought to utilize it. They could dispossess Indigenous nations and peoples of their lands and claim the land as their own all in the name of their God (Arnold 2023).

The animating theological principles of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery are found in the oscillation between the Holy Land and the Garden of Eden. Unable to claim the Holy Land, European powers shifted from crusading visions of the Holy Land towards utopian visions of paradisaal lands just over the horizon. Like their Catholic forebears who encountered the Indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica and saw a paradisaal and utopian land-

scape ripe for plunder and exploitation, so too did the Puritans who landed at Plymouth Rock. Theologically, what was happening by the eighteenth century was that Puritanism was thoroughly invested in a *deus otiosus* (inactive God) and eschatological visions of a new heaven and a new earth to come. The care and stewardship of these resources on this Earth have become less important. As Newcomb emphasizes, Protestants found solace in interpreting Genesis 1:28 through a dominionistic lens (Newcomb 2016).

Unable to occupy the physical lands known as the Holy Land, white European Christians turned to building their own alternatives, leaning into the utopian yearnings of Christian theology. They turned to building a new heaven, a new earth, a new Jerusalem; a shining city on a hill that serves as a hierophany (or a manifestation of the sacred). The cosmovision of the settler colonialists of the new world is a repetition of the “old world” left behind mixed with a yearning for the Holy Land and for an actualization of the utopianist elements of Christian theology (Carrasco 2013). This theological miasma seeps into the American landscape with the erasure of Indigenous place names and the enthronement of Imperial Roman place names. Syracuse, Ithaca, Rome, Utica. Sicilian and Italian cities of lore were reborn in the Empire State. The Holy Land comes to New York in cities with biblical place names such as Athens, Babylon, Bethany, Bethel, Bethlehem, Canaan, Ephrathah, Goshen, Hebron, Jericho, Jerusalem, Lebanon, Malta, Moriah, and Salem (Farrell 2002; Maar 1926). Any state in the United States has similarly named cities, rivers, and national parks. This new sacred geography is protected by these Greco-Roman outposts against Indigenous resistance.

In their yearnings for the halcyon days of Oliver Cromwell’s merry ole England, white U.S. Protestants reimagined Turtle Island/Abya Yala as both a paradisaal Eden, which is *terra nullis*, and a nostalgic reimagining of the old world made new. New Amsterdam. New York. New Jersey. New England. In white Protestant hands, the Doctrine of Christian Discovery becomes a heady alchemical mixture of utopianism, nostalgia, displacement, and exceptionalism.

They yearned for the “old country”, the uninhabited lands of scripture, and the utopian. U.S. Christian theology is a displaced theology. Removed from the lands, languages, and peoples from which the Christian sacred texts come, Christians who came to Turtle Island sought to remake and refashion the landscape in their image. They founded flourishing nations and cities larger than the cities of Europe. They found what they saw as or imagined it to be a paradise, and instead of respecting and preserving the paradise, they razed it to dust.

The early Protestant preachers and theologians of the era imagined a world animated by the theological metaphors of a new Israel, a new Jerusalem, a city on a hill, Eden, and utopia. Dislocated from the lands and peoples of their own stories and history, early Protestant settlers mapped their stories onto this land. To be rooted in place, to inhabit and dwell in a landscape with *elan vital* was not part of the *telos* of Christian theology and its colonial conquest in the Americas. Instead, paradise having been found must be lost once more. If the promised land was not to be dominated by Christians, it could not be had by anyone, and the peoples who inhabited these paradisaal lands had to be enslaved and converted.

Turning now to specific examples, the Doctrine of Christian Discovery became protestantized through the Cabot Charter, Protestant theological imagination, the Massachusetts Bay Charter, and other quotidian moments. Protestants putatively imagined their forebears coming to Turtle Island to escape religious persecution of the crowns of Europe. When it comes to property law in the Americas, Protestants are more than happy to build on the foundation laid by the Roman Catholics, English Common Law, and the various charters coming out of England.

Queen Elizabeth I of England (1533–1603) granted a charter to Walter Raleigh for the lands that would be renamed in her honor, Virginia. Like other monarchs and heads of church, Queen Elizabeth I issued a charter by fiat to Walter Raleigh for him “. . .to discover, search, find [sic] out, and view such remote, heathen and barbarous lands, countries, and

territories, not actually possessed of any Christian Prince, nor inhabited by Christian People, as. . .". Similarly to other documents, Victoria's document utilizes the rhetoric of "heathen", "barbarous", and "Christian". She encourages Raleigh to conquer, in her name, lands that are inhabited by Indigenous nations and peoples who are not Christian. Her concern is that he does not take land that has been claimed by a Christian prince or lands inhabited by Christian people. She is trying to avoid wars in Europe, but she is unconcerned about the wars on Turtle Island/Abya Yala. For Queen Elizabeth I, possession can only be fully vested in the European Christian sovereign (Elizabeth I 1909).

The Charter of New England and the Mayflower Compact both demonstrate a continuation of the self-referential appeals to authority and to God to justify the colonial aims. The Charter of New England defines the Christian religion as Protestant and labels Roman Catholicism as a superstition. The list of those excluded from the promised land continues to grow (James I 1909b). Here, England treats Turtle Island not as a real place but as the first bank of Christendom. The English colonial project is the Bank of Christendom, a land bank with a commodities market. Indigenous Africans and Indigenous Turtle Islanders are stripped of their personhood, seen only as commodities to be bought and sold. In the mind of the English, being a human being requires being a subject of the crown. England seeks to exert control over a place thousands of miles away. The God of the Church of England is *deus otiosus*. Here, the crown seeks to become *deus otiosus* and exercise the power and authority of domination over an ever-expanding empire (James I 1909a; 1909b). The king of England, as the sovereign over church and state, consolidates power and taxation/tithes. Instead of colonists having to pay both church and state, their patronage now flows into one coffer.

The 1691 Charter of Massachusetts Bay continues to blend church and crown theology and law without distinction. All lands not owned by another Christian prince can become the province of the king. The charter affirms peaceable and civil government even if there are religious differences amongst the colonists. Furthermore, the charter does acknowledge the presence of "Indians Natives of the Country" but only grants them status as lesser subjects once they have come to acknowledge the "Christian Faith" as the only true religion. Then, they are subjects of the English Crown. Accepting Christianity means accepting a European Christian monarch and becoming a subject of the monarch, no longer one of the original free inhabitants of Turtle Island. Herein lies the critical distinction between English Protestant colonialism and European Catholic colonialism: England's vertical integration. The monarch of England rules over church and country. Colonists must pay only one master. To become a subject of the English Crown would also mean leaving behind one's sovereignty and original nation. It is a fundamental contradiction. Even the New Testament acknowledges this contradiction: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other". (Matthew 6:24a, KJV). One cannot be having and enjoying the original free sovereign relationship with Mother Earth that Newcomb describes while also being the subject of the English Church and Crown. The English Church and Crown see themselves as the triumphalist usurpers. Of course, there were Indigenous peoples who worked to navigate this impossible tension, but the Charter of Massachusetts Bay assumed they would forsake their own for the English who magnanimously offered "Liberty of Conscience" but only through obedience to a foreign God and king.

5. Ivy League Dominion

Dominion theology is not just the domain of papal bulls, charters, and treaties. It is also the foundation of American higher education. Whose land is granted to these land grant institutions? The sale of enslaved Africans and the theft of their labor built these institutions as well. The charters of Harvard and Yale use the same language as the colonial charters, which used the same language as the papal bulls.

In 1636, Harvard was founded by teaching elders (of the church). The 1650 Harvard Charter begins by thanking the divine hand of God that moved people to

Bestow sundry gifts, legacies, lands, and Revenewes for the advancement of all good literature Arts and sciences in Harvard Colledge in Cambridge in the county of midelsex and to the mayntenance of the president and fellows and for all Accommodations of Buildinges and all other Necessary provisions that may conduce to the education of the English and Indian youth of this country in knowledge and godlynes. ([Harvard University Archives 1650](#); [Hodge 2013](#); [Morison 1936](#))

The college was founded to educate English and Indian [sic] youth in knowledge and Godliness. The charter goes on to empower the board of Harvard to purchase and accept gifts of lands, tenements, and hereditaments. The 1672 Charter reaffirms that Harvard was founded by God for the education of English and Indian youths and that part of the education would be training in Godliness. In 1665, Caleb Cheeshahteumuck (Wampanoag) was the first Indigenous person to graduate from Harvard. Harvard's "Indian College" stood on Harvard Yard until it was demolished, and Matthew's Hall was built over its previous site. It would not be until the 1970s, when Harvard admitted 11 Indigenous students to its master's programs, that the enrollment of Indigenous students at Harvard would match the levels of the 1600s. Today, the Harvard University Native American Program boasts 1000 alumnae/I, a mere fraction of the number of non-Natives ([Harvard College n.d.](#)).

In 1701, the Connecticut legislature granted Yale's Charter:

WHEREAS several well disposed, and Publick spirited Persons of their sincere Regard to & Zeal for upholding & Propagating of the Christian Protestant Religion by a succession of Learned & Orthodox men have expressed by Petition their earnest desires that fully Liberty and Priveledge be granted unto Certain Undertakers for the founding, suitably endowing & ordering a Collegiate School within his Maj. Colony of Connecticut wherein Youth may be instructed in the Arts & Sciences who thorough the blessing of Almighty God may be fitted for Publick employment both in Church & Civil State. ([Dexter 1916](#); [Kelley 1974](#); [Yale University 1928](#))

To the intent therefore, that all due incouragement by Given to such Pious Resolutions and that so necessary & Religious an undertakeing may be sett forward supported & well managed. ([Dexter 1916](#))

Yale was founded by zealots who wished to uphold and spread the "Christian Protestant Religion" through the training and education of youth who, upon graduation, would be a divine blessing to both the church and state. This higher educational undertaking was a religious one. Yale defined religion as the exclusive domain of Protestant Christians. Others need not apply. Elihu Yale, the namesake of the college, was an Indigenous slave trader. He was the governor-president of the British East India Company. He sent the college £1162 (\$1486), books for the library, which, of course, included theology, and a portrait of King George I. Non-Christian Protestants make for a commodity to be bought and sold to fund the educations of those who will study them anthropologically, historically, theologically, and medically. Even at the start of the eighteenth century, J.Z. Smith's hypotheses on the meaning of religion and religion remain true ([Blight 2024](#); [Dugdale et al. 2001](#)).

The language of domination emerges as a liturgical invocation. If the congregation of the "saints" says it loudly and long enough, they just might believe it.

6. The Theological and Social Christendom of Rhode Island

In conversations about religious freedom, Roger Williams and the founding of Rhode Island take a mythic and folkloric status ([Charles II 1909](#); [Gaustad 2005](#); [Strickland 1919](#)). The traditional rhetoric around the Rhode Island Charter is that it is one of the most progressive charters of the colonial period. The charter remained in effect from when it was issued in 1663 until 1843, when Rhode Island ratified the constitution. For almost 200 years, Rhode Island was governed by this charter. Rhode Island chose to keep the same document

in effect after separating from England and just updated the references to the crown. The charter was lauded for its acknowledgment of Indigenous nations and their rights to the land. The charter praises the Narragansett for caring for the lands which are flourishing and filled with life. The charter officially forbade further theft of land from Indigenous nations and prohibited further economic harm while also authorizing colonists to defend themselves from Indigenous nations and peoples. These promises would prove to be too good to be true (Ibid.). The Rhode Island Plantation illustrates the preservation of the American Protestant Christian conceit of the Indigenous compliant and willing submission to colonial demands. This demand runs through Christendom and its transformation into dominion theology, the papal bulls, *the Requerimiento*, and all the way through to the charters.

The founding of the Rhode Island colony was not as progressive as it imagined itself to be nor as has been interpreted. Instead, even as the charter posits religious freedom, it still participates in dominion theology. The document does not escape the Doctrine of Christian Discovery. In contrast, it does claim to pay the Narragansett nation for the lands taken from them. It still follows the foundation and pattern set by the Doctrine of Christian Discovery via the aforementioned documents. The attempted erasure of Indigenous nations and peoples through domination and dehumanization is the essence of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery. The entire colonial project of the Rhode Island Charter would not be possible without its antecedents and support from the “Christian Princes”. Roger Williams and the founders of the Rhode Island Plantations desired religious freedom for European Christians, which was not appreciably different from prior forms of Christendom. They expanded Christendom to include many types of Christians, but not all, while still preserving the missiological condescension towards Indigenous peoples who were both less than and seen as needing salvation.

The founding of Rhode Island as a colony dedicated to religious freedom by the iconoclastic Roger Williams is a great source of lore for Baptists. However, when thinking about Rhode Island as a place of religious freedom, it is important to ask for religious freedom. The Charter of Rhode Island is an important legal document because, like all these other legal documents discussed thus far, it is not only a legal document but also a religious document. The charter was given by Charles II of England to Roger Williams, etc. The chartering of Rhode Island was a response to Roger Williams, etc. being driven out of Massachusetts by the Puritans, and in their search for a new homeland, they decided that the Narragansett nation territory called Rhode Island would be the best place for them to assert their dominion and claim the land they believed was granted to them by divine providence. The language of the Rhode Island Charter is fascinating because of just how steeped in Protestant Christian rhetoric and theology the document is. The charter sought to prevent encroachment upon Rhode Island from other colonists while simultaneously establishing the Rhode Island colonists’ “right” to encourage the Narragansett nation and placing Rhode Island in the dual position of “protecting” and encroaching upon the Narragansett nation. Additionally, the charter speaks of the “holy Christian faith”, “the true Christian faith and worship of God”, and the colonists “right” to defend themselves from “enemies of the Christian faith”, and puts all “Christian Kings, Princes, and States” on notice that Rhode Island is a colony of England and under the protection of Charles II (Charles II 1909).

While putatively, religious freedom for the colonists was one of the goals of the founding of Rhode Island, so was “gaining over and conversion of the poor ignorant Indian natives” (Charles II 1909). There is only religious freedom in Rhode Island for Christians from other Christians. The Narragansett and other Indigenous peoples living in the land are cast as poor and ignorant based on the colonialist logic of the Christian settler colonial nation-state. Never mind, they were the caretakers and protectors of the land now under assault from the “Christian Princes” of Europe. The measure of poverty and ignorance being utilized here is a European one that is designed to paint the powers and principalities of Europe in the best possible light. The Rhode Island Charter acknowledged

the Narragansett nation by name while also using the term “Indian Natives [sic]”. It acknowledged that the Indigenous nations and peoples of North America had cared for the land and one another, and they had nations that the colonists envy. The colonists could see the flourishing of the lands, but instead of respecting the nations and lands upon which they were situated and encouraging the people and landscape to flourish, they claimed the providence of God and asserted that these were now their lands. In 1675, colonists murdered hundreds of the Narragansett, and in 1880, the Rhode Island legislature unilaterally proclaimed the Narragansett extinct ([Herndon and Sekatau 1997](#)).

The genocide of the Narragansett happened despite the charter’s praise of them as a kind and friendly society. The story of the Narragansett encounter with the colonists is like that of so many other Indigenous peoples. Treaties, protocols for peaceful coexistence, and kindness were repaid with violence. While the Rhode Island Charter sees the Narragansett nation as a great body [politick] and a friendly society, its members must still subject themselves to control and governance by the Christians of Rhode Island. It was assumed by colonists that the Narragansett nation and people would willingly subject themselves, their lands, and their people unto the Christian God and to the colonists. Once the Narragansett nation was assimilated into Rhode Island, the charter imagined there would be happiness for all of America (United States) because the colonial project would be complete ([Herndon and Sekatau 1997](#)).

Even a colony that was founded and established for religious freedom by Baptist scion Roger Williams centers the narrative around the domination and dehumanization of the Narragansett nation. The people were dominated through the dispossession of their land by colonial edict. The Narragansett were dehumanized by being imagined as subjects of the colony. Additionally, the happiness of “all America” hinged on the Narragansett’s submission to the charter of Rhode Island. The charter could not imagine making itself a subject to the preexisting Narragansett nation or coexisting alongside the Narragansett nation. It assumed that the Narragansett would be subsumed into Rhode Island, and then America would be happy. The happiness of the Narragansett is not mentioned. Additionally, the charter explains from the colonist’s perspective what they believed (imagined) to have occurred between them and the Narragansett nation. However, intertextually, the document itself does not articulate the Narragansett nation given their free prior and informed consent to becoming subjects to Rhode Island. Instead, the charter hopes that the friendly society and great body of the Narragansett nation, when given “encouragement”, will choose to become subjects “of their own accord”. Should the Narragansett do the tasks imagined by the Rhode Island Charter, they will become “a sure foundation of happiness for all America”. To take the metaphor of nation-building seriously, foundations are static and buried in the sand. American happiness requires the Narragansett to be buried in the sand. How can one sell land to invasive people? How can the land be sold in perpetuity to another? What price would ever be appropriate to ask for and to pay for the permanent dispossession of one’s nations and peoples from the lands of their ancestors?

Imagine the arrogance and hubris of putting a purchase price upon the Narragansett’s labor, industry, and land. How does one purchase everything, including “lands, islands, rivers, harbors, and roads” in perpetuity? ([Charles II 1909](#)). Could such a sum ever be paid and paid at one time? Could such a purchase even happen with the consent of the whole Narragansett nation? The charter’s language revealed, “seized and possessed, by purchase and consent of the said natives”. If something is being seized and possessed and someone is being dispossessed and having their lands seized, did they even consent? From the Narragansett perspective, did the land and animals consent to the sale? Gaeñ hia uh, when speaking about the alleged sales of Indigenous nations’ lands, asks, “How do you sell your mother?”

The rhetoric of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery and its central framework of dominion and dehumanization is found throughout the charter. Here, again, is dominion theology flexing its muscles and demonstrating its power. Even in a colony dedicated to

religious freedom, there is the pouring of a foundation for Christian nationalism that is concomitant with Christendom. The Rhode Island Charter takes Indigenous nations and peoples for granted and assumes that, of course, they are less than. Indigenous peoples are diminished and disrespected with each mention of them being somehow less than English colonists through terms like poor, ignorant, Indian, subject themselves, and other such terms. The Doctrine of Christian Discovery is also present in the persistent missiological focus of the document and in the document's presumption of Christian superiority and that Christian principles are somehow superior and have better foundations than those of Indigenous nations and peoples. The Doctrine of Christian Discovery may also be found in the elision of Indigenous religions. Indigenous religious practices are presented only through a lack. The Narragansett lacked Christian princes, Christianity, gospel principles, Christian faith, worship of God, and more. Religious freedom and sovereignty were not for the Narragansett within the framework of the charter.

7. Theologizing the Doctrine of Christian Discovery in U.S. Protestant Theology

Sara Diamond and Julie Ingersoll have all examined the dominion theology of American Protestant Christianity. We want to build on their work and to situate the scholarship on the dominion theology, Christian reconstruction, and Christian nationalism more broadly within the theology of domination proffered by the Doctrine of Christian Discovery (Diamond 2000; Ingersoll 2015). Weaving together Newcomb, Gonnella Frichner, and other Indigenous scholars of the Doctrine of Discovery with Diamond and Ingersoll, we see dominion theology as firstly providing a Christian theological and legal justification for enslavement, exploitation, and extraction and, secondly, building a society and culture which explicitly privileges Christianity and working towards an exclusively Christian society. It seeks to regulate secular society and law through recourse and appeal to Christian theology and conceptions of power. Third, it promotes and assumes European Christian religious supremacy. Fourth, it rejects the Haudenosaunee roots and influence of American democracy. Fifth, it endorses a Christian theological framing of law and society. As a theological movement. These five points are buttressed by nostalgia, displacement, dehumanization, and exceptionalism.

While there are a great many Protestant ministers and theologians to choose from for their contributions to the theologizing of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery and its framework of domination and dehumanization (Newcomb 2011), we wish to focus on Puritan theologians Increase and Cotton Mather as examples that are representative of a whole theological–legal socio-economic system of nostalgia, displacement, dehumanization, and exceptionalism. These men are the metonymy for the American instantiation of Christendom as the “shining city upon a hill” (Winthrop 1838).

8. Increase Mather (1681–1701)

Rev. Increase Mather was an influential enslaver and Puritan minister in the Massachusetts Bay Colony who would eventually become the President of Harvard University. Increase was the youngest of six children of Rev. Richard Mather and Katherine Mather. His father was a minister, and three of his brothers also became ministers. Mather graduated from Harvard College with a B.A. when he was just 17 years old. Experiencing a call to ministry, he earned a master's from Trinity College, Dublin, and was licensed to ministry by Oliver Cromwell. Upon graduation, he worked as a minister for an English military garrison stationed in the Channel Islands. After Cromwell's death and Charles II's ascendancy to the throne of England, Mather returned to Boston, MA, in 1661. In 1676, he published *A Brief History of the War with the Indians in New England* (Mather 1676). As President of Harvard University and pastor of North Church, he was also part of the Salem witch trials, and he published several books on the topic (Mather 1676, 1977). In his books, one sees his preoccupation with the theological concerns about witchcraft and its power. He attended and observed the trial of Rev. George Burroughs and agreed with the death sentence. Mather was known as a stalwart theologian and Puritan minister. Theologically, he was

a firm believer in God's disappointment and wrath and firmly believed that most people were experiencing God's displeasure daily via the weather, fires, politics, and Indigenous nations and peoples. Indigenous nations and peoples were simultaneously instruments of God's wrath and those most subjected to God's wrath and Christians' wrath.

Reading through Mather's oeuvre and intellectual biographies, we see a man preoccupied with dominion theology. As a minister, theologian, lawyer, and university president, his thinking became deeply intertwined with that of Protestant New England. Mather's theological and legal commitments justified domination and dehumanization through the enslavement of a man named Spaniard. He participated in the dispossession of Indigenous nations and peoples from their lands and saw the deaths of those who disagreed with him. Indigenous lifeways and even some Christian lifeways, ironically, were seen as witchery and deserving of death. His writings, especially his autobiography, provide theological insights that are representative of not only one of the scions of Puritanism but the types of men who were in various leadership roles within the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

9. Cotton Mather (1663–1728)

Increase's son Cotton shared the elder's disdain for Indigenous nations and peoples, which is found situated in his preaching and the metaphors he utilizes. Mather, like many other Christian theologians of his day, imagined Turtle Island as both a wilderness and a "New-English Israel". He sees the Christians as a "New-English Israel" and the Indigenous nations and peoples comprising a "Foolish Nation" (Deuteronomy 32:21, KJV). He understands the colonial struggle through reinterpreting his own religious texts. Mather paints quite a picture with his words as he calls Indigenous peoples: Indians, Devils, Unjust Men, Tawny Pagans, Heathen, Enemies, Foolish Nation, Divels [sic], verist tigers, Miscreants, and worse. He concludes his essay with the phrase: "Amalek that is now annoying this Israel in the Wilderness". The charge of Amalek takes some explanation (Mather 1689).

The use of the language of Amalekites is telling because, biblically, the Amalekites exist as a literary villain and foil to the people of Israel. The history of the Amalekite's existence is complicated and suited for its own article. According to Genesis, the Amalekites lived in the En-mishpat/Kadesh region (Genesis 14:7 NRSV). In Exodus, YHWH says "I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven" (Exodus 17:14b). According to Numbers, the Amalekites may have dwelled in the Negev (Numbers 13:29). The prophet Balaam had a vision of Amalek rising first among nations and first to perish as well (Numbers 24:15–24). In Balaam's vision, Jacob and Israel rose while Amalek was crushed. At the same time, biblical scholars helped to complicate and situate the origins of Amalek and the Amalekites and their relationship to Israel. We cite these more incendiary passages in this manner to contextualize the violent and genocidal interpretation being offered by Mather. Tragically, these interpretations of the Amalekites persist today (Jacobs 2017). Cotton Mather's condemnation of Indigenous nations and peoples, along with his elevation of Calvinist Christianity to the supersessionist replacement of Israelites and the transformation of the United States into Israel is tragically common in dominionist theological circles not only historically but also today.

Mather is incensed that the Indigenous people do not comport themselves in the ways he is accustomed, and he assumes that the ways in which things are conducted by Indigenous nations are wrong and witchcraft and that his way is right. Cotton Mather seeks a blood-soaked annihilation of Indigenous peoples. He writes the following:

Even in the meanest actions, the Glory of God is to be the Star to guide us and the Spur to move us. A Godly Man, among our first Planters here, was asked, while he was cutting off Wood, who was it for? Answered, I am Cutting of Wood for God. If in Cutting of Wood, much more in Killing of Men, you should be able to say, I am at work for God. Be not the Souldiers of Fortune, as they are called, but be the Souldiers of Jesus. (Mather 1689)

Mather seeks a holy war—one where Indigenous peoples and the natural world are murdered by the soldiers of Jesus. The dead Indigenous Peoples for Mather are to be sacrificed to the ghosts of the dead settler-colonialists (1689). For him, the Christian virtue of courage is found in the desire to execute vengeance against Indigenous nations and peoples. Within this polemic, Mather tells the soldier: “You are Fighting that the Children of God may not be made Meals or Slaves to the veriest Tygers upon Earth” (Mather 1689). Mather seeks to stir the hearts of the white settler colonists of European ancestry by reminding them of the imagined threats of cannibalism and slavery at the hands of Indigenous peoples who are reduced here to being seen only as tigers. Certainly, Cotton Mather was aware of the realities of slavery. His father enslaved Spaniard, and Cotton’s North Church presented Cotton with the gift of an enslaved man who he called Onesimus (a biblical reference to an enslaved man by the same name) (Koo 2007).

As a Harvard-educated ordained minister and son of a former Harvard president, Cotton Mather knew what he was writing. The essay interweaves classics, scripture, and Latin. He was stopping the flames using the strongest and most polemic rhetoric to which he had access, dehumanizing Indigenous nations, and painting them as ferocious animals in search of a meal and people to enslave was further polemical escalation. In the quotation, it is here where Mather turns white settler colonists of European ancestry anxieties upon themselves, reminding them of their own complicity within the system of chattel slavery. The fear there was being treated by Indigenous nations and peoples in the same way white folks had treated enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples.

While soldiers counseled and comforted, focusing on the undifferentiated “Northern and Eastern Indians”, Mather was not so ignorant as to not know about the Indigenous nations and peoples he critiqued. He mentions the Pennacook by name, and a close reading of the essay suggests he is using the Pennacook as a synecdoche for the Wabanaki Confederacy and/or all Indigenous nations and peoples. Mather blames Indigenous peoples for the bad relationship between the Pennacook and the settler colonists and says that Indigenous peoples have brought God’s wrath carried forth by the soldiers of Jesus upon themselves.

Increase and Cotton Mather, as two of the leading voices of Puritan theology, help to illustrate how the dominionist theological framework of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery flows from Catholic theology and law easily into Reformed theology and law by way of the power and the desire for Christian supremacy. For the Mathers, American Christian exceptionalism is built upon a genocidal and exceptionalist reading of the story of Amalek and the assumption that they are the heroes of the story. While there are many examples from the era that we could use, we use these two examples because we want to underscore how the colonial charters of New England and the theologians of New England helped to shape the relationships between Indigenous nations and the United States, Indigenous peoples, and non-Indigenous Christians in ways which still reverberate today. The Mathers preach a theology of nostalgia that seeks to ground and embody Biblical Israel, living in a land and time far removed from the Mathers’ own. Eisgetically, they reinterpret the biblical struggle of the children of Abraham as their struggle. They insert themselves into the biblical story and reinterpret the past through the lens of the biblical text and the present through the lens of the biblical text. These hermeneutical moves allow them to reimagine themselves as the heroes of their own narrative, as blessed by God, and to avoid confronting the atrocities that are being committed in the present. This sort of biblical action role-playing (LARP-ing) assuages the conscience and makes the struggles of the present into a cosmic theological battle between good and evil. They are rendering the present through an epic mythic framework paper over the trauma and suffering of the present. Irreality supplants dealing with the reality of the present. It is easier to fight the imagined mythical evil Amalekites versus committing genocide against the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. The spatio-temporality of this struggle hardly matters. Instead, what matters most is Christian triumph and supremacy.

10. Conclusions

As white Christian hegemony struggles to once again assert its supremacy, there are increasing examples of dominion theology. Two examples are Project 202 and Seven Mountain Mandate (7 MM). The Seven Mountain Mandate argues that for a Christian theocracy to become the theology and law of the land, Christians must seize control of the seven spheres (“mountains”) of government, education, media, arts and entertainment, religion, family, and business (Berry 2024). Key figures of this movement are “the father of American Dominionism” Lance Wallnau, one of the key figures at the January 6th insurrection (Tyler and Seidel 2022). Another important figure is Paula White, who served as a spiritual advisor to Hanadagā•yas Trump.²

Using Charles Long to analyze the BJC and FFRF report “Christian Nationalism and the 6 January 2021 Insurrection”, we can highlight some of the ways dominion theology is operating today. In the report, Andrew L. Seidel provides extensive documentation of the Christian nationalist signs, symbols, and significations which occurred during the insurrection (Cf. Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History and Department of Religious Studies at the University of Alabama 2021). As journalist Katherine Stewart, author of *The Power Worshippers*, notes in the BJC and FFRF report, “The strength of the movement is in its dense organizational infrastructure: a closely interconnected network of right-wing policy groups, legal advocacy organizations, legislative initiatives, sophisticated data operations, networking groups, leadership training initiatives, and media and messaging platforms, all working together for common political aims”. Challenging and contesting dominion theology requires the same level of scholarly collaboration and energy between scholars, lawyers, experts on religious nationalism, and experts in law.

This hegemonic framework of dominion theology thrives and grows in its visible/invisibility. So long as it is the unquestioned, uncontested force that frames societal understanding, it will continue to thrive and take over. As Long reminds us, it is the small, symbolic elements that help to preserve hegemony, no matter how quotidian. It is In God We Trust on money, license plates, classroom walls, and all over.

Whose/Which god(s) does not need to be asked because the U.S. Civil Religion is a Christian one, as the Federal Anti-Indian Law, Property Law, and IRS code amongst so many other examples reveal. However, it is also operative beyond the symbolic and discursive levels; it is militaristic, storming the capital, marching on cities, seeking to contest public funding of education through vouchers and redirect funds away from the public sphere where everyone has equal access towards private Christian ideological enclaves with deleterious effects on education, health, human resources, Indigenous sovereignty, and so much more. For further work on white Christian Nationalism today, we recommend the recent books by Anthea Butler, Pamela Cooper-White, Kristen Kobes DuMez, Robert P. Jones, Bradley Onishi, Samuel Perry, Katherine Stewart, Amanda Tyler, and Andrew Whitehead.

Christendom, as it becomes enshrined in the Doctrine of Discovery and the attendant dominion theology of American Puritan Christianity, sits in as relief over and against the teachings of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Thousands of years ago, on the shores of Onondaga Lake, the Peacemaker, Hiawatha, and Jikohnsaseh united five warring nations under the *Gayanashagowa* (Great Law of Peace) forming the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. This message of right thinking, justice, and health transformed the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Prophets like Handsome Lake reminded the Haudenosaunee of the importance of following this message and not succumbing to the white Christian Europeans’ alcohol, gambling, and religion. Likewise, the Wampum Belts of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, like the Dish with One Spoon and Two Row Wampum Belt, provide a necessary course corrective and reminder that not only is another world possible but also that it was already in existence. The Two Row Wampum treaty remains a powerful treaty that is still in effect and continues to serve as a necessary course reminding settler colonists of a moment to which they can return, and that is staying in their lane and living in the right proper relationship with the natural world and all living beings. These messages are those of peace

and a good mind, not that of violence, missionization, and salvation. Instead, they are called to be respectful and live in the right relationships.

Compared with the teachings and treaties of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the theological and jurisprudential genocidal violence of dominion theology as embodied by the papal bulls and the European Christian, colonization, and conquest of the world becomes even more horrific. A careful examination of the theological and legal history of these bulls serves as an important reminder of the urgency of repudiating and rescinding the papal bulls. The Episcopalian church began the process, as well as the recent Roman Catholic “Joint Statement of the Dicasteries for Culture and Education and for Promoting Integral Human Development on the ‘Doctrine of Discovery’” ([The Holy See 2023](#)). These statements of rescinding the papal bulls by so many Christian denominations are a good first step, but they fall short of the goal. For example, the recent Catholic Joint statement abdicates taking responsibility for papal bulls by saying that the Doctrine of Christian Discovery papal bulls “have never been considered expressions of the Catholic faith” ([The Holy See 2023](#)). If they have never been expressions of Catholic faith, why were they issued by the Pope, and why does the church refuse to rescind these papal bulls? Instead, the Catholic church attempts to use *Sublimis Deus* (1537) as a smoke screen to claim that they have already carried out this work, a claim undermined by their own 2023 Joint statement. Tina Ngata further demonstrates the profound irony of attempting to use *Sublimis Deus*, a papal bull that was widely ignored and ostensibly rescinded, as a justification for not rescinding such important and still-enacted papal bulls ([Ngata 2022a, 2022b](#)). Additionally, with the other denominations that have carried out repudiations, the time is now for the next steps, like the return of land, sacred items, and the Indigenous children buried at their residential boarding schools, along with reparations.

Newcomb, in his most current work, has turned to the metaphysics of domination and the ideological preservation of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery for over five hundred years ([Newcomb 2022](#)). Dominionist theology and law do not go away overnight, and the ideological tendrils are easy for a society and culture to want to hold on to. Even famed liberal jurist Ruth Bader Ginsburg found herself making recourse to the Doctrine of Christian Discovery because it was easier than rethinking U.S. property law to not be around Christian hegemony and domination ([Ginsburg 2005](#)). We believe that part of dismantling the theology and ideology of domination begins with listening and learning from the wisdom of Indigenous elders. Onondaga Nation Turtle Clan Faithkeeper Oren Lyons reminds us that there is an urgency to embrace Indigenous values. We need a value change for survival. Responding to Faithkeeper Lyons, Philip P. Arnold has taken up this call in his new book, *The Urgency of Indigenous Values* ([Arnold 2023](#)). Faithkeeper Lyons reminds us that the Haudenosaunee Confederacy begins each day with the “Thanksgiving Address or The Words That Come Before All Else” ([Haudenosaunee n.d.](#)). These words remind us of the right and proper relationship between humans and the natural world. Humans are not to dominate or seek dominion over Mother Earth or see ourselves as better than any other living species. We were all put on this Earth to live in a mutual and affirming relationship with one another. No living being is better than others. Another important teaching to bring into our minds here is the Haudenosaunee principle of seven-generation thinking. Everyone is working together to make the world a better place for the seven generations yet unborn. This stands in stark contrast to the dominion theology mindset, which does not worry about climate change because a new heaven and new earth are coming, so there is no need to leave a better world for future generations. Countering the nostalgia of dominion theology, these teachings remind us to focus on our responsibilities today and to work with a sense of futurity to make a better world for those yet to come. As the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt teaches, we are all eating out of the same dish with the same spoon, so let us share, make the world a better place, and work together so that we may be thankful.

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Notes

- ¹ For those who might not be familiar, during the U.S. Constitutional Convention the delegates reached a compromise that three out of every enslaved persons would be counted towards a state's population total for legislative and taxation purposes. This compromise is enshrined in Constitutional Article I, Section 2, Clause 3.
- ² In Onondaga, Hanadagā•yas translates as town destroyer and it is the formal title of address used for all U.S. presidents ever since Hanadagā•yas Washington waged a genocidal campaign against the Haudenosaunee Confederacy during the Sullivan Clinton Campaign. Cf (Onondaga Nation n.d.b; Spiegelman 2020).

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