History, Ecclesiology, and Mission, 
Or, Are We Missing Some Options Here? 

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Introducing the Topic 

Three thousand years ago the author of Ecclesiastes wrote, under divine inspiration, “There is nothing new under the sun.” This does not mean, of course, that revolutions never happen, but it does mean that history has a penchant for reduplication. And no matter how revolutionary a new development may be, it always has informing precedents that take a bit of luster away from its apparent novelty. And so it is with the idea of churches “going missional.” Before Christopher Wright and Darrell Guder came John Stott and Leslie Newbigin. Before these came Georg Vicedom and Karl Barth. And these revolutionaries revolted against something even more historically distant—figures like Schleiermacher, Rauschenbusch and Gladwin. And so on. At each step along the way, each figure mentioned above appeared to be revolutionary. But all of them rest on a bed of precedents that are historically networked. My suggestion today is that the missional idea, while refreshing for its revival of certain neglected ecclesiastical concerns, addresses these concerns within a historically narrow—and troubling—school of ecclesiology. 

If I can hazard a summary of a somewhat amorphous idea, a missional church views itself as sent by God in fulfillment of the timeless mission of God. Specifically, they are agents of the whole grace of God, recognizing the full implications of God’s reign—not only for evangelism, but also for social justice: the church is sent “to restore and heal creation and to call people into a reconciled covenantal relationship with God.”\(^1\) As such, the mission exhibits certain qualities:

- The mission of the church is timeless and is contiguous with the mission of Israel and the mission of Christ—in short, it is the mission of God.\(^2\)
- The mission of the church is coextensive with the mission of its individual members, who must cease being “ecclesiocentric” and become “theocentric.”
- The mission of the church countenances no bifurcation of secular from sacred or common from special grace—everything is to be collapsed into a single, over-arching restorative mission of the people of God.
- The basis for mission needs to expand beyond Christ’s commission to evangelize (Matt 28:18–20) and must embrace in its scope the dominion mandate and the Kingdom of God. 

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\(^2\)It is telling that leading theologian of the missional church, Christopher Wright, is an OT ethicist who ties the mission of the people of God not to the Great Commission, but more significantly and more distantly to the Dominion Mandate in Genesis 2. Likewise, appeals for the essence of mission by the parent model, incarnational ministry, are to the earthly ministry of Christ.
Every one of these presuppositions is worth exploring for its biblical/theological validity, but such an exploration would exceed the parameters of this study. Instead I hope to offer some historical perspective on the issue of the institutional church as it relates to socio-political concerns. I conclude that the missional model is really a new twist on old models that have been in place for centuries—and that the problems (and solutions to the problems) of the missional model have likewise been in place for centuries.

**Two Master Models**

While it is impossible to reduce the whole corpus of theories about ecclesiastical mission to binary terms, it is possible to identify in history two master models of ecclesiastical mission that have dominated the history of the church—the two-kingdom model (hereafter 2K) and the one-kingdom model (hereafter 1K).

While not new to him, Martin Luther often receives credit for the 2K model, which he crafted out in distinction from the contemporary practice of the Roman Catholic Church. In brief, this model understands the believer to operate within two distinct “kingdoms” or spheres of responsibility—civil and ecclesial—and he has distinct, non-overlapping responsibilities in each sphere. As a citizen of the *civil* kingdom (secular society), he is under obligation to be a good neighbor, a good citizen, a good worker, and in general an exemplar of Christian piety in all his relationships (e.g., as a husband, wife, slave, master, magistrate, etc.). In this sphere he is governed by the dominion mandate, the many moral directives of Scripture, and above all, the Great Commandment: loving one’s neighbor as oneself. This includes pursuits such as industry, politics, social welfare, and even art—anything practiced outside the community of God’s elect. As a citizen of the *ecclesial* kingdom (the church) he operates as part of a new and separated community with an ecclesiastical mission distinct from the civil mission. Within that community the community submits to God according to the regulative principle supplied in Scripture, to itself according to the “one another” commands of Scripture (including a vital social mandate), and toward those without according to the Great Commission (an evangelistic mandate).

This model represents, then, a reaction to the prevailing 1K model of Christian life and ministry that dominated the Roman Catholicism of Luther’s day, and later, theological liberalism, the “new” evangelicalism, Neo-Kuyperian Reformed thought, and now missional thinking (diverse as these traditions may seem). In this one-kingdom model, everything that the Christian does is the work of the kingdom. This kingdom, which becomes a rather amorphous concept, includes in its scope every aspect of life. The traditional distinctions of *ora/labora*, culture/cultus, and sacred/secular are flattened, and are subsumed under the broad umbrella of kingdom living here and now. Also flattened is the sphere of responsibility: the mission of the organized church and the mission of the individual believer are not bifurcated, but are instead coextensive in scope.

The following is a narrative survey of ecclesiastical movements that illustrates the struggle between 1K and 2K theology in the life of the church. In this survey I lean a great deal on the recent work of David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought*. After completing this survey, this essay will close

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3Eerdmans, 2010. VanDrunen’s major argument is that the two-kingdom model has been the prevailing model in Reformed circles prior to the nineteenth and especially the twentieth centuries, and that is more in keeping with the heart of reformational theology. While his conclusions may be slightly more optimistic than the data suggests, his thesis is not thereby jeopardized. VanDrunen has a second book, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A*
with an appeal for the church to reconsider two-kingdom ecclesiology as a historically (and biblically) more compelling model than one-kingdom ecclesiology offers.

**Reformation Developments**

One cannot really understand the idea of the Reformation unless one knows what was being reformed. The Roman Church that the Reformation sought to reform had multiple areas in need of reformation, and not all of these were addressed immediately or evenly (in fact, one could argue that there are still latent Romanisms in the Reformed Church that have yet to be excised). One of the more unevenly addressed of these Romanisms is the role of the church in the sociopolitical arena.

Although Augustine and Aquinas had taught otherwise, it remains an unfortunate fact that the Roman Church accrued to itself a vast amount of civil power during the Middle Ages—so much so that the idea of a strict separation of church and state disappeared. There were, to be sure, both civil and ecclesiastical rulers, but their spheres overlapped a great deal. Without doubt, the church served as the great stabilizing influence of the medieval period, supplying constancy to a politically turbulent and fragmented Europe in the wake of the Roman Empire. Kings bowed to bishops in matters of state. Monastic orders controlled all of Europe’s banking and commerce. Priests directed local economies, often discouraging personal wealth-building, industry, and competition in the interests of ecclesiastical profit. In the wake of the late Roman Empire’s welfare disaster, the church also assumed responsibility for social justice and welfare initiatives, redistributing societal wealth strategically to both stabilize society and also create dependencies that served well the interests of the Church. As time passed, the Church gradually assumed the role not only (or even chiefly) of defender of the faith, but also of dispenser of social welfare and agent of political affairs.

This model has not proven an easy one to overcome—and the resistance that the Reformers faced in changing this model was surprisingly strong. Such is uniformly the case in all attempts to decentralize power. The four branches of the Reformation exercised considerable variety in addressing this problem. Anglicanism did the least to effect reform; the Radical Reformation the most, almost completely severing church/state ties (sometimes violently, sometimes passively). The Lutheran and Reformed traditions offered the most complete models for reform, but these were slow to be adopted.  

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*Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, forthcoming), that is slated for imminent release. This second title will add a prescriptive, two-kingdom element to the descriptive history detailed in *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*. Other published representatives of the Reformed 2K model exemplified in VanDrunen include Michael Horton, Darryl Hart, and Jason Stellman.


5That is why governments expand easily but contract with great difficulty. Decentralized power is always viewed by those with dependencies as a breach of responsibility and inattentiveness to the needs of the poor. And the greater the pool of dependents, the more difficult governmental contraction becomes. The same is true in ecclesiastical life (see esp. David W. Hall, *Calvin in the Public Square* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2009], pp. 105ff).

6See below, for instance, in the matter of Michael Servetus.
Of particular interest is the recovery, refinement, and implementation of the two-kingdom model that Augustine had offered the world in seminal form in the early fifth century—a development that occurred both in Lutheran and Calvinist circles. The Lutheran and Calvinistic expressions were not identical with each other (or with Augustine for that matter), but both offered alternative models to the Roman system, seeking to extricate the spiritual “kingdom” from the civil “kingdom” that had been hopelessly fused as one during the Medieval period. However, they also eschewed the hostile stance of the Radical Reformers, who so isolated themselves in counter-cultural, alternative communities that virtual isolation from the socio-political concerns occurred. In short, the mainstream Reformers sought middle ground between what would be later identified by Niebuhr as the “Christ of/over culture” model and the “Christ against culture” model. What they offered to us were models in between these two poles—two kingdom models that resisted both isolation and conflation.

Luther and Calvin did not offer to Christendom a monolithic model of the intersection of church and culture; in fact, much ink has been spilled detailing the distinctions between the Lutheran and Calvinist models. What emerges in both models, however, is the idea of separation between the ecclesiastical and civil roles of the believer. The believer is a citizen of two disparate kingdoms—the civil kingdom and the ecclesiastical kingdom, or perhaps better, he is a citizen both of organized humanity and of the organized church. And these two realms have distinct areas of responsibility before God. The church does not encroach upon tasks that God has assigned to civil society and the state does not encroach upon tasks that God has assigned the institutional church. The Christian lives in both realms, but the realms themselves remain distinct—at least in the present administration of God’s activities on earth. There was a time, to be sure, when these two kingdoms were amalgamated (the OT economy), but no longer. In the words of one modern 2K advocate, the two kingdoms mingle “when God’s people are a holy theocracy (and only then).” Since in the present economy we do not find ourselves in a “holy theocracy,” it follows that many of the directives and practices prescribed in the Old Testament (the dominion mandate, capital punishment, civil expressions in the Mosaic economy, etc.) are normative not for the church, but for collective humanity. This being the case, the role of the institutional church in the public square has been self-consciously truncated.

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7See esp. his City of God.
8H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (San Francisco: Harper, 1951). I recognize that Niebuhr was not technically discussing church and culture, but has categories still hold with minor adjustment.
9The Lutheran branch of the Reformation traditionally gives us Niebuhr’s “Christ and culture in paradox” category; the Reformed branch his “Christ transforming culture” category. For recent and helpful treatments of the models of both Reformers see William J. Wright’s Martin Luther’s Understanding of God’s Two Kingdoms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010) and David Hall’s two works referenced above, Calvin in the Public Square (2009) and Calvin and Culture (2010).
11Paul Marshall argues that the dissolution of the priesthood “dethroned…the church, at least as an organization. It was no longer, in principle, regarded as the head, the highest body, the leader of society. Hence the question of the relation of different institutions in society has opened up” (“Calvin, Politics, and Political Science,” in Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview, ed. David W. Hall and Marvin Padgett [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2010], p. 147).
Excursus: John Calvin and Poverty. A presentation of this brevity cannot hope to deal comprehensively with all the developments in ecclesiology and social justice enjoyed during the Reformation. However, since John Calvin is regarded as one of the foremost visionaries on this topic, a brief glance at his understanding seems in order. Calvin dedicates the last chapter of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* to civil government, and offers there a helpful picture of the “twofold government” (*duplex in homine regimen*) that he urged upon his readers.

Predictably, Calvin sees war as the purview of natural law and civil government, not canon law and ecclesiastical government.\(^{12}\) On the other hand, heresy was to be an ecclesiastical, not a civil matter, except in embarrassing occasions where ecclesiastical dispute threatened civility. Normally, government was to insist upon no particular form of Christianity; they were instead to protect the right of “a public manifestation of religion to exist among Christians.”\(^{13}\) Believers were not to bring suits against one another in the civil courts (Matt 18:15–18; 1 Cor 6:1–8), but only before the Consistory, which had authority in ecclesiastical matters; believers could, though, make use of the courts for disputes outside the assembly—this is precisely what civil government was instituted to provide.\(^{14}\)

But perhaps the most pertinent topic of Calvin’s model to the conference theme is his response to poverty. Calvin is famous for his organization of the ecclesiastical diaconate as a means of curbing poverty and for his suggestion that as much as half the church’s income be used to this end.\(^{15}\) He did not, however, understand indiscriminate poverty relief to be the task of the organized church. The organized church has as its mandate canon law, which prescribes poverty relief only for its own: mendicancy was to be unknown in the church, though it would always exist in secular society. Further, extreme care was to be exercised to distinguish the indolent from the truly needy in the disposition of church assets, and those who (1) lacked commitment to the church or who (2) otherwise took advantage of the church when civil sources of income were available were to expect nothing (2 Thess 3:9; 1 Tim 5:3ff)—ecclesiastical benevolence was as much an instrument of discipline as it was of encouragement.\(^{16}\)

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\(^{12}\) *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.20.10–12.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 4.20.2–3. The unfortunate case of the execution of Michael Servetus for heresy looms large as an apparent violation of this policy, though perhaps not so much once the details are known. It should be known first of all that the event happened in 1553, at the zenith of Calvin’s conflict with the Libertines then in control of the civil structures of Geneva. Calvin was no magistrate at this time—in fact, he was not even a citizen of Geneva. And when Servetus entered his church, Calvin’s Consistory was denied even the power of excommunication. To get around this untoward civil restriction, Calvin insisted that Servetus be arrested and tried on civil charges (Servetus was a fugitive heretic wanted throughout the region). This placed the Libertines in a very awkward position of either abdicating their authority to Calvin or else using their authority in a way that would increase Calvin’s popularity. They chose the latter and condemned Servetus to burn at the stake. At this point Calvin argued passionately for a commutation of Servetus’ sentence, but the Libertines refused his plea and the execution went forward as planned. Interestingly, this event proved a major catalyst for reform, and Calvin’s model of civil/ecclesiastical government was implemented shortly thereafter in Geneva.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 4.20.17.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 4.4.5–8.

\(^{16}\) So Hall, *Calvin in the Public Square*, p. 112. In the interest of full disclosure it should be noted that Calvin did not forbid the use of church monies for general poverty relief. The matter of orphans, particularly was a matter for ecclesiastical consideration, since orphans represented a class of humanity who, due to their adolescence, could not be rightly related to the church so as to merit ecclesiastical benevolence. The rule, however, was that
This policy is in stark contrast to Calvin’s view of the responsibility of individual believers to the poor. These have a responsibility to all mankind indiscriminately as a matter of natural law. Charity, Calvin opined, was to be extended by believers (and by all of mankind, for that matter) to all people (Gal 6:10; 1 Thess 3:12) irrespective of their undeserving, contemptible, worthless, or even persecutory character; it mattered only that the needy were made in God’s image—this fact alone, Calvin insisted, renders our fellow humans worthy objects of charity. Of course, because of depravity, this responsibility can never be left to individuals alone: anarchy and greed would soon stifle all poverty relief. For this reason God instituted civil government to ensure “that humanity be maintained among men,” and even permitted taxation as necessary to create a “public largesse” to that end. As such, general poverty was to be viewed foremost as the concern of collective mankind, and not properly that of the organized church.

To summarize, it seems that the early Reformers sought to correct the misperception, perpetuated by the Roman Church, that the church was the “highest body, the pillar of society.” Instead, they understood that God’s structural order had become bifurcated since (1) the dissolution of the theocracy and (2) the emergence of individual priesthood of believers in the aftermath of the crosswork of Christ. The roles of religious vis-à-vis social structures had undergone systemic change such that OT models of social justice and mercy ministry have little to do with NT models of social justice and mercy ministry. There are now two kingdoms as opposed to one, and this vital fact has an enormous impact on the mission of the New Testament church of God.

Post-Reformation Developments

That Calvin’s model was not implemented entirely or permanently goes without saying. Some of the blame for this may be laid on failures by each of the two governments—corrupt civil governments that failed in their primary duty to “maintain humanity” and idealist spiritual governments that became so untowardly optimistic as to imagine that the civil kingdom might be rendered unnecessary through the successes of the church. Calvin envisioned both problems, but the latter, especially, proved more pervasive than he had anticipated.

In his Institutes Calvin anticipated a day when “God’s Kingdom, such as it is now among us, wipes out the present life.” But he added that it was folly to imagine that the church could ever muster such perfection as to eliminate all need for civil government. “Such perfection,” he noted, “can never be found in a community of men”—such an idea stems from “stupid imagination.” As such, Calvin anticipated a long-standing relationship of the two kingdoms. Many of Calvin’s successors, however, were more optimistic. These imagined that the foretaste of God’s Kingdom as seen in Calvin’s microcosmic spiritual kingdom could overcome the deficiencies of and need for comprehensive poverty relief.

ecclesiastical responsibility extended only to its own. As such, Calvin’s efforts to effect general poverty relief often took the form of pleas for civil government to appoint city officials to coordinate with the diaconate to supply comprehensive poverty relief.

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17 Natural Law is made up of the moral laws of the OT and the common dictates of conscience that are binding on all humanity irrespective of faith (Calvin, Institutes, 4.20.16).

18 Ibid., 3.7.6.

19 Ibid., 4.20.3.

20 Ibid., 4.20.13.

21 Ibid., 4.20.2.
for a civil kingdom. Rather than settling for a 2K state of affairs in which a paradox exists between Christ and culture, the church should instead anticipate and effect a 1K state of affairs in which Christ transforms culture.

This transition from a 2K model to a 1K model was neither uniform nor sudden, and not all succumbed to the shift in emphasis.\(^{22}\) But there are several nodal points that lent momentum to this shift:

- **The rise to prominence of postmillennialism.** Though incidental adherents to the postmillennial system sprinkled the 17th century, the modern rise of postmillennialism is commonly attributed to Daniel Whitby (1638–1726).\(^ {23}\) Whitby’s emphasis on the prominent role of humanity in bringing in the kingdom of God fit the times well, giving explanation and further impetus for the advances in science and industry of the day. Though himself a Unitarian, Whitby’s eschatological model found wide acceptance among conservatives as well. Hope for the conversion of the world was high, and optimism that the spiritual kingdom would eventually assume the roles currently the purview of the civil kingdom was widespread.

- **The creeping progress of Pelagianism.** The Pelagian idea that unbelievers were not so deeply tainted with sin as to be beyond persuasion also transformed perceptions of the role of the church. Rather than seeing organized benevolence as primarily a matter of duty within the Christian community and secondarily a matter of neighborliness, Pelagianism saw in philanthropy a means to penetrating the sluggish will of the heathen and advancing the Gospel. As such, multiplied expressions of philanthropy, mercy, and social justice, once considered the purview of the civil kingdom, could be retooled as a means to the advance of THE (singular) kingdom. Civil Law and Canon Law paled in significance as the idea of the universally benevolent moral government of God came to dominate the New England Theology.\(^ {24}\)

- **The rise to prominence of theological liberalism.** Theological liberalism, with all its emphasis on the universal Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the presence of the kingdom led naturally to the acceptance of a kind of 1K model. Instead of maintaining their place as agents of Gospel proclamation, churches slowly evolved into dispensers of social benevolence and platforms for political agendas.\(^ {25}\) Unlike more

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\(^{22}\)That Niebuhr credits Luther with the “Christ and Culture in Paradox” view is a testimony to the fact that the Lutheran branch resisted this evolution more successfully than the Reformed branch.


\(^{25}\)It is not without reason that American dispensationalism emerged at this time. J. H. Brookes developed his dispensational model due to ecclesiological concerns—concerns about the *mission of the church*. Brookes was a pastor in a border state (St. Louis, MO) in the aftermath of the American Civil War, and broke from his Presbyterian denomination out of weariness over what he had come to view as an unbiblical display of political maneuverings perpetuated prominently in the churches of his day—maneuverings that threatened the very existence of his church. Brookes came to this decision based on a studied conclusion that the church, unlike OT Israel, was a spiritual organism that had no distinct civil or socio-political agenda. As such, it had no place taking sides in the debates over post-bellum reconstruction or the promotion of Northern/Southern causes (see Carl E. Sanders, *The Premillennial*
conservative postmillennial expressions that await a transcendent eschatological utopia, however, theological liberalism taught that the kingdom was immanent, and could be actualized as all of humanity mimicked the holistic example of Christ—irrespective of gospel proclamation.\textsuperscript{26}

- The rise of Neo-Kuyperianism. David VanDrunen argues persuasively that a shift in Reformed thinking occurred in the early twentieth century, begun in part by imprecision in the writings of Dutch Calvinists Abraham Kuyper and Cornelius Van Til, but more fully in the writings of Herman Dooyeweerd and the intellectual successors of Van Til.\textsuperscript{27} While Neo-Kuyperianism should not be considered a monolithic entity, what ties them together is an intense commitment to the King of the Kingdom (something severely lacking in the Social Gospel). Practically, however, their commitment to the Kingship of Christ over all Creation meant that the \textit{church} was fulfilling the cultural mandate, and the mission of the church continued to be the redemption of all of culture in view of the present Kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{28}

- The rise of Barthian Christocentrism. Also persuasively argued by VanDrunen is his claim that Barth, while likewise rebelling against the liberal experiment, erred fundamentally by not adopting a 2K model; instead, he further established a 1K model with his Christocentric conception of the \textit{Missio Dei}.\textsuperscript{29} For Barth, the believer’s encounter with Christ supplied not only the sole means of revelation about God, but also

\textit{Faith of James Brookes: Reexamining the Roots of American Dispensationalism} [Lanham, MD: University Press of America], 2001). The birth of American dispensationalism, as such, stems not from eschatological peculiarities, but from a specific vision of the mission of the NT people of God (who function today under a 2K administration) in contradistinction from that of the OT people of God (who functioned under a 1K administration). This remains, in my opinion, one of the most significant practical contributions of dispensational theology for the church today and it is a contribution that is presently being threatened by ignorance and the unguarded pursuit of gospel unity. In the interest, again, of full disclosure, it should be noted that other Presbyterian ministers of Brookes’s day adopted a 2K model of ministry without abandoning Covenant Theology. Of particular note here is the case of Stuart Robinson, another border pastor (Louisville, KY), whose theology is documented in Preston Graham, Jr., \textit{A Kingdom Not of This World: Stuart Robinson’s Struggle to Distinguish the Sacred from the Secular During the Civil War} (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002).

\textsuperscript{26}Walter Rauschenbusch, the father of the social gospel, wrote, “If theology is to offer an adequate doctrinal basis for the social gospel, it must not only make room for the doctrine of the Kingdom of God, but give it a central place and revise all other doctrines so that they will articulate organically with it. This doctrine is itself the social gospel” (\textit{Theology for the Social Gospel} [New York: MacMillan, 1917], p. 131, cf. also 216–25). Washington Gladden, another major representative of the social gospel, wrote, “When we are bidden to seek first the kingdom of God, we are bidden to set our hearts on the great consummation when every department of human life—the families, the schools, amusements, art, business, politics, industry, national policies, international relationships—will be governed by the Christian law and controlled by Christian influences…. The complete Christianization of all life is what we pray for and work for, when we work and pray for the coming of the kingdom of heaven” (\textit{The Church and the Kingdom} [New York: Revell, 1894], p. 7).


\textsuperscript{27}\textit{Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms}, chaps. 7, 9–10.


\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms}, chap. 8.
the source of his ethic. To know God as redeemer was to know him as creator; to know God in realm of special grace was to know God in the realm of common grace (in fact, Barth denied this division of God’s grace as illegitimate). While two spheres can be identified in Barth, they are one in Christ—the kingdom of God is the kingdom of Christ.

Nowhere is this idea more evident than in his concept of the Missio Dei. Our Trinitarian God, for Barth, was by nature a sending God with a singular mission which the church shares. This mission is embodied in Christ and participated in by the similarly sent-out church. God is not merely redeeming his elect, but is also redeeming all creation—these two “missions” cannot, in fact, properly be distinguished. It is impossible to overstate the influence of this model on modern missiology.

- The rise of the new evangelicalism. It is inaccurate to suggest that retreat of premillennial fundamentalism from the public square at the opening of the twentieth century was a principled reversion to Reformed 2K theology. Negative reactions to postmillennialism and the social gospel, however had this practical effect. Regrettably, the reaction was in some quarters an overreaction, and what often emerged was not a Christ-and-Culture-in-Paradox model common to the 2K Reformers, but instead a kind of counter-culturalism seen more commonly among the Radical Reformers.

Unfortunately, middle ground proved elusive, and the new evangelical experiment that ensued had at its center a reversion to 1K thinking. Alarmed by the increasing irrelevance of fundamentalism and its absence from the public square, a band of fundamentalists began arousing what they understood to be the “uneasy conscience” of fundamentalism and began calling for a “new evangelicalism” that addressed the shortcoming of fundamentalism. Specifically, they called for the adoption of a view of the kingdom that would accommodate a cultural mandate. In short, the pendulum swung back too far.

30Carl Henry devotes a chapter of his Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism (Grand Rapids: Eerdman, 1947) to correcting dispensational views of the kingdom, encouraging his readers to “discard elements of its message which cut the nerve of world compassion” (p. 57), and instead to find a both/and balance between the “kingdom now” errors of liberalism and the “kingdom then” errors of dispensationalism. Later he would write, “While not itself the kingdom, the church is the kingdom’s most vital approximation and manifestation in the present age. Its ongoing mission is to extend the King’s victory over the hostile forces of sin and evil, injustice and oppression” (Christian Countermoves in a Decadent Culture, pp. 25–26). The chief architect of this new view of the kingdom, George Ladd, successfully accomplished this goal. Joel Carpenter captures Ladd’s objective well when he describes it as Ladd’s personal “quest” to “replace dispensationalism with an evangelical view of the kingdom of God and the end-times that was…more able to sustain evangelical social engagement” (Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997], p. 195).

The rise of progressive dispensationalism, ironically, has appeal to some because it has goals similar to Ladd’s. Bock and Blaising affirm, for instance, that “the social ministry of the church…flows from…the fact that the church is a manifestation of the future kingdom” (Progressive Dispensationalism [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993], p. 286). They continue that the church’s “connection with the coming kingdom gives the church a basis for an evangelistic participation in the political and social affairs of this world” (pp. 289–90), adding that as “the church becomes the workshop in which kingdom righteousness is pursued in the name of Christ, then social ministry externally becomes a call to Christ” (p. 289).

The Modern Scene: A Brief Critique and Proposal

That the missional model (or perhaps missional models) stands on the shoulders of movements that precede it should be evident to all. It does no good to deny that this is the case or to assume that the modern missional movement has successfully eradicated the features that contributed to the failure of its predecessors. In the welcome words of Ed Stetzer (himself an advocate of one expression of missional church life), “It would be, in my opinion, the height of historical naiveté to have the same conservations about the same issues and not consider the results of the last two times such conversations were had (the *missio dei* movement and Social Gospel).”

One can only hope that such candor will come to characterize the whole of the movement. It simply will not do to watch again the progression that has occurred repeatedly in the history of the church:

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<td>MID MISSIONAL</td>
<td>(Social Justice and Mercy Ministry and Gospel Proclamation as the Church’s Two Parallel Ends)</td>
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<td>HIGH MISSIONAL</td>
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Better yet, though, it is the hope of this presentation that even the first step in this sequence be reconsidered for its biblical/theological propriety. This will involve grappling with issues such as (1) the relationship of God’s universal kingdom to Christ’s mediatorial kingdom; (2) the extent (if any) of the penetration of Christ’s kingdom into the present day; (3) the relationship of the transcendent mission of God to the Jewish mission, the Messianic mission, and the church’s mission, noting not only continuities but also discontinuities; (4) the effects of mercy ministries on unbelievers and the apologetical role (both negative and positive) they play; and (5) the distinction (if any) between the mission of the believer as citizen of humanity and his mission as member of God’s church.

It is an unfortunate reality that fundamentalism and dispensationalism have gained reputations as paragons of Christ-Against-Culture isolationism. Some of this has unfortunately been earned by genuine misinformation perpetuated by some within these respective historical movements. So ingrained has been the principled resistance to the social gospel and organized, ecclesiastical social action that it has many believers have inferred that it is inappropriate to be nice to unbelievers. Such an absurdity has not been lost on the thoughtful, and so the idea of missional living has proved a welcome relief to what is truly inauthentic, reclusive Christianity.

It is my suggestion that there is an elusive option that lies somewhere between the polar extremes of *counter-culturalism* that is sometimes manifested in dispensational fundamentalism *cultural transformationism* manifested in much contemporary missional thinking. I further suggest that this neglected option, once prominent among the 2K Reformers, has as its greatest potentiality

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for biblical development the fertile soil of traditional dispensational thought. Note the following summary observations:

- There is a universal kingdom of God, mediated by collective mankind (ideally, as part of a democratic society) that is answerable to global, divine imperatives such as the dominion mandate, the moral law of God written upon the table of man’s heart, and the summary Great Commandment to love neighbor as self. Believers individually should be model citizens in this kingdom, actively fulfilling civic duty, exhibiting mercy, defending true justice, and exhibiting the love of God to all men without distinction (Gal 6:10; 1 Thess 3:12). And yet, since believers and unbelievers alike fail in this duty, civil government is instituted to ensure that, in Calvin’s words, “a public manifestation of religion may exist among Christians, and that humanity be maintained among men” (so Rom 13:1–10).

- There is also a spiritual kingdom of Christ that is not yet in power, but the constituency of which the church is directed to assemble via gospel proclamation. While this kingdom will one day be characterized by perfect justice, material abundance, physical well-being, the near absence of death and reversal of many of the effects of the Curse, the present abeyance of that kingdom anticipates no such benefits today. While Christ confirmed his Messiahship by localized miraculous manifestations of this age to come (Heb 6:5), such is not the mission of the organized church, nor can it be. Instead the mission of the institutional church toward those without its membership is the Great Commission—the invitation to all men without distinction to participate in the coming kingdom.

- Since the gospel has holistic effects on its adherents, there is a sense that conformity to the whole gospel in personal conduct can earn a hearing for the gospel and “adorn” the gospel (Matt 5:16; Tit 2:6–10; 1 Pet 3:1; 2 Pet 3:16; etc.). Benevolence cannot, however, contribute any efficacy to the gospel, and can in fact dilute it or distract from it.

- While there is an all-encompassing mission of God, it does not follow that the mission of the New Testament people of God is coextensive with the mission of God. Further, it does not follow that the mission of God’s people can be rendered monolithic such that all practical discontinuities between the dispensations are flattened out and removed. May God grant us discernment in rightly discerning, communicating, and embodying these distinctions in the development and outworking of our institutional and individual missions before God.

33Russell Moore’s suggestion that evangelical theology needs to adopt a “‘Reformed Dispensationalism’ or an ‘apocalyptic Kuyperianism’” is a fascinating one worth exploring (Kingdom of Christ, p. 177).


35The glib appeals by the missional community to texts such as John 17:18 and 20:21 (“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you”) as proof texts to this end are fraught with difficulty. Exegetically, it abuses the simile in view (it is the act of sending, not the content of the mission that is being compared). Practically, it leads to missional absurdities (the church cannot possibly presume to co-fulfill Christ’s mission in its totality). And historically, despite strenuous denials by some of a connection of missional theology to historical precedents, similarities between the missional use of John 20:21 and historic appeals to 2 Peter 2:21 are impossible to ignore.