

A TALE OF TWO KINGDOMS: THE STRUGGLE FOR THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHURCH AND THE GENIUS OF THE DISPENSATIONAL SYSTEM

by
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Dispensationalism exists today because the fathers of the movement had a deep and abiding interest in the spirituality of the church. There were other factors, of course, that contributed to the formation of the dispensational system, and other features of the system that eventually became more prominent, but the primary historical impetus for the rise of dispensationalism was concern for the spirituality of the church. It is my contention and the burden of this article to demonstrate this fact and also that contemporary disinterest in this doctrine has robbed dispensationalism of much of its practical utility. To that end this article will briefly define the doctrine of the spirituality of the church, trace its historical development and role in the establishment of the dispensational system, identify its detractors, and explain why the church generally and dispensationalists specifically need to give greater attention to the doctrine of the spirituality of the church.

THE DEFINITION OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHURCH

While the phrase “spirituality of the church” may refer generally to the spiritual health and purity of the church, the phrase is usually employed more technically to communicate “the notion...that the church has no business *as an institution* meddling with political or social questions.”² Stripped thus of all secular jurisdiction, the church’s “prerogative” is instead “simply to declare the truth of God as revealed in his Word and to require that the truth should be professed and obeyed by all under its jurisdiction [i.e., its members].”³ The church is a spiritual kingdom with a strictly spiritual (not social or political) mission/function.

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²Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 568, emphasis added.

³Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 2:604.

Several caveats concerning this simple definition are in order. First, in arguing that the church has no secular jurisdiction, advocates of the spirituality of the church are not saying that the church cannot speak to the civic duties of its members. The church may (and must) inform its members of their responsibilities as godly neighbors, citizens, parents, children, employers, and employees (see, e.g., Titus 2:1–10). The church may also appeal to the Scriptures in identifying and censuring civic/public vice (e.g., abortion, drunkenness, or homosexuality) by its members under pain of excommunication; likewise, it may appeal to the Scriptures in promoting specific civic virtues by its members as they seek to “do good to all men” (Gal 6:10). However, even here the church has limited authority: it has “no power over the lives, liberty, and property of its members” beyond what is clearly demanded in Scripture.⁴ In matters beyond the scope of Scripture, the church may not dictate even to its own; instead, believers answer in such matters to the state, the family, other secular “masters” (teachers, employers, etc.), or directly to God.

We note secondly that adherence to the doctrine of the spirituality of the church does not mean that individual members or officers of churches are barred from civic involvement or even from vocational civic service; indeed, John Murray insists that individual Christians “*must...engage in politics.*” Murray clarifies, however, that they are to do so “only in their capacity *as citizens of the state, not as members of the church.*”⁵

As a third caveat, we observe that acceptance of the spirituality of the church does not even mean that the institutional church is bound to total silence in the civil arena. In the words of the *Westminster Confession*, churches may speak to the civil sphere “by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary; or, by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate.” However, the general rule in such matters is that “synods and councils are to handle, or conclude nothing, but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth.”⁶

Finally, it must be noted that the outworking of this doctrine has

⁴Ibid., 2:604; also and esp. Hodge’s most comprehensive discussion of this topic under “The State of the Country,” *The Biblical Repository and Princeton Review* 33 (1861): 548–52, 556–68.

⁵John Murray, “The Relation of Church and State,” in *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1976–1982), 1:255. See also James Henley Thornwell’s distinction between “assemblies of Christian gentlemen” that speak to civil affairs and the “court of Jesus Christ” that speaks only to spiritual matters (*The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, ed. John B. Adger and John L. Girardeau [repr. of 1873 ed., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986], 4:472–73). This distinction separates the Reformed doctrine of the spirituality of the church from countercultural expressions common among radical sects (e.g., Mennonites, Amish, etc.) that self-consciously restrict, to a greater or lesser degree, the intersection of individual Christians with his secular culture.

⁶*Westminster Confession of Faith* 31.5.

not been monolithic in its historical expression. Some see the doctrine as a rather vague affirmation of the separation of church and state, perhaps prohibiting speeches/prayers by political candidates during worship services or restricting the display of national flags in the sanctuary. Others appeal to the doctrine to mute the church's official voice in debated matters of public/political ethics (e.g., organized advocacy for or against gun control, immigration reform, civil rights, military action—even abortion, same-sex unions, or slavery). Still others go beyond the political sphere to shorten the church's social arm, appealing to the doctrine to curtail the church's provision of "education" or "mercy ministries for those beyond the church's membership."⁷

But no matter how differently the doctrine is applied, proponents of the spirituality of the church universally affirm, on one level or another, that spiritual matters are the purview of the church, and secular matters are the purview properly of some other seat (e.g., the state, the family, or the individual himself). Furthermore, they affirm that these spheres of responsibility do not *ultimately* overlap.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHURCH

The spirituality of the church is sometimes dismissed as little more than a 19th-century Southern Presbyterian invention designed to give moral credibility to the Confederate cause during the American Civil War.⁸ But while it is true that some of the most articulate expressions of the doctrine come from that milieu,⁹ the *idea* of the spirituality of the church is easily as old as the Reformation, even as old as Augustine, and arguably traces to Christ's demarcation of what belongs, respectively, to

⁷Mark E. Dever, "The Doctrine of the Church," in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 814, n. 104. To be fair, Dever clarifies that "the Scripture in no way *denies* the right or ability of a congregation to care for the physical needs of non-Christians in their area. [But] neither does Scripture *require* the local congregation to alleviate the physical needs of non-Christians in our community" (814). Such matters fall beyond the pale of the institutional church's mission, and undue attention to them "potentially distracts the church from its main and unique responsibility, that of incarnating and proclaiming the gospel" (814, n. 104). For a stance much sharper than Dever's, see James Henley Thornwell, who decries all institutional involvement of the church in general civil/social matters, be they "hospitals," "asylums," "temperance," or the "philanthropic" relief of the blind, the poor, or the enslaved. To "implicate the Church" in such matters, Thornwell argued, is to "endanger her efficiency" (*Collected Writings*, 4:472–78). Such matters are the proper domain of "Christian gentlemen," but not of the church.

⁸See, e.g., Jack P. Maddex, "From Theocracy to Spirituality: The Southern Presbyterian Reversal on Church and State," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 54 (Winter 1976): 438–57; James O. Farmer, Jr., *The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 258–61; E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture 1795–1860* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978), 154.

⁹See below.

Caesar and to God (Matt 22:21).¹⁰

For sake of this article, I will adopt a formal birth date of the doctrine that corresponds with Martin Luther's *Zwei Reiche Lehre* or "doctrine of the two kingdoms,"¹¹ a doctrine echoed in John Calvin's teaching of the *duplex in homine regimen*, or "two governments of God."¹² Both Luther and Calvin meant by these expressions that there were two spheres of divine jurisdiction in the world, viz., the church (a spiritual kingdom) and the state (a civil kingdom). These two "kingdoms" (a.k.a. "governments" or "spheres") are distinct in origin and non-overlapping in jurisdiction. While NT believers hold a kind of "dual citizenship" in both of these kingdoms, the kingdoms themselves remain distinct, with neither intruding on the other's purview.¹³ The adoption of this view proved in the short term to be an effective tool for the early Reformers in dismantling the ecclesiastical/magisterial alliances that had long been brokered in Europe by the Roman Catholic Church.

As time passed and Reformation-friendly magisteria began to emerge, however, state and church reverted to their old patterns of symbiotic fraternity, and new church-state alliances—now *Protestant* ones—began to appear throughout Europe. And so the doctrine of the spirituality of the church, which began so promisingly, fell into decline. Perhaps better, its locus shifted to the new minority. Just as the early Protestants had found relief from Roman oppression when their secular rulers adopted the idea of the church's spirituality, so now the disenfranchised "non-conformists" and "radicals" sought relief from their Protestant oppressors on the same grounds. Chief among these were the English Baptists, whose emphasis on the "separation of church and state" has been forever enshrined as one of the traditional "Baptist Distinctives."¹⁴ The most visible expression of this ideal is seen in America, where odd bedfellows like Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians, and even Roman Catholics carved out a nation whose first freedom was from a legislature that might attempt to "make [a] law respecting an

¹⁰For a comprehensive treatment of this topic, see David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

¹¹While this doctrine is critical to Luther's overall theology, he tended to assume rather than to prove it. His most formal treatment of the doctrine (albeit brief) may be found in his "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 45, ed. Walter I. Brandt (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1962), 83–104.

¹²This is a major topic of discussion in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), esp. 3.19.15; 4.20.

¹³Calvin, for instance, would write that the "spiritual kingdom of Christ and the civil government are things far removed from one another," and that to commingle their respective aegises would be to revert to "Judaic folly" (*Institutes* 4.20.16, n. 39).

¹⁴I was disappointed that this topic was not addressed in VanDrunen's otherwise impressive study on *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* (see above), but he undoubtedly had his reasons for this omission.

establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This was, perhaps, the political high water mark for the doctrine of the spirituality of the church.

It would not, however, be the most famous expression of the doctrine. This prize goes instead to Reformed stalwarts seeking urgently to preserve the unity of the Presbyterian Church during the American Civil War. As its popular name suggests, the Civil War was not an ecclesiastical but a *civil* conflict, with contours of a political, economic, sociological, cultural, and ethical nature. Despite this fact, the nation's ecclesiastical institutions felt compelled to speak liberally to the conflict, and the divisions became painfully stark. Whole denominations split on geopolitical lines, and none more bitterly than the Presbyterian denomination. Standing squarely against this division, however, was a renewed and desperate appeal to the doctrine of the spirituality of the church as a hopeful means of preventing schism. Most of the proponents of this doctrine hailed from Southern Presbyterian quarters that arguably lacked moral high ground and stood the most to lose by schism.¹⁵ However, advocacy for the doctrine was not limited to southern representatives, and included figures such as Charles Hodge, who firmly opposed slavery and remained loyal to the Union, and James Bannerman, a Scottish Presbyterian with no vested interest in the American conflict.¹⁶ But the most ardent proponents of the doctrine were found in the pulpits of "border churches"—churches positioned along the geographical boundary between the Union and Confederacy, and easily the most vulnerable of all to violent schism.¹⁷

¹⁵See esp. the succinct treatments of two leading stalwarts of Southern Presbyterianism, Robert L. Dabney (*Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology Taught at Union Theological Seminary, Virginia*, 6th ed. [Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1927], 873–87) and William Henley Thornwell (*Collected Writings*, esp. 4:446–64, 472–78).

¹⁶See esp. Bannerman's volume *The Church of Christ*, 2 vols. (repr. of 1869 ed., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960), 1:148–59.

¹⁷For key defenses from border churches see T. E. Peck (pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Lynchburg, VA, part of the Baltimore Presbytery), *Notes on Ecclesiology* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1892), 119–62; Stuart Robinson (pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of Louisville), *The Church of God* (repr. of 1858 ed., Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2009), 60–77. Robinson's story is perhaps the most accessible of these, thanks in no small part to an impressively documented account of Robinson's struggles prepared by Preston Graham, Jr., *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).

Discussed further below is also the story of Samuel McPheeters (pastor of the Pine Street Presbyterian Church in St. Louis), whose commitment to the spirituality of the church during the Civil War cost him his church office, despite a vigorous defense mounted by a sympathetic James Hall Brookes (pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church and later the Walnut Street Presbyterian Church, both in St. Louis). Of particular interest concerning this situation are (1) the resultant essay by William Marcellus McPheeters, *The Spirituality of the Church* (n.p., 18--?), and (2) a two volume tome edited by W. M. Leftwich and authored in part by Brookes, *Martyrdom in Missouri: A History of Religious Proscription, the Seizure of Churches, and the Persecution of Ministers*

These uniformly argued that the institutional church should not take sides on questions of slavery, union, states' rights, etc., *because of the administrative discontinuity of the Christian church and the Jewish theocracy of Old Testament times*. The Christian church, they argued, should not take its cue not from the OT (where cultic and civic concerns intertwined), but from Christ's new command to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt 22:21).¹⁸ As such, the church should formally disengage from institutional participation in civic debate.

Unfortunately, while many of the best minds of Presbyterianism were committed to the doctrine of the church's spirituality, the tide of popular sentiment could not countenance the doctrine, and the church shattered. The idea of the spirituality of the church suffered a great blow—but not a terminal one. Vestiges of the doctrine persisted in the Reconstruction South and in the Princeton theology (and later in the theology of Westminster Seminary), and particularly within the minority movement that resisted the tide of Modernism. Among the latter, J. Gresham Machen stands out as the most consistent and principled advocate of the church's spirituality, staunchly maintaining the doctrine in the face of two very opposite foes: liberalism and fundamentalism.¹⁹ Today, the tradition continues in corners of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church,²⁰ especially in a breakaway band of scholar-theologians

of the Gospel, in the State of Missouri during the Late Civil War, and under the "Test Oath" of the New Constitution (St. Louis: Southwestern Book and Publishing Co., 1870).

¹⁸Thornwell, *Collected Writings*, 4:474; Dabney, *Systematic and Polemical Theology*, 874–75; Peck, *Notes on Ecclesiology*, 124–28. Charles Hodge, after an appeal to Matthew 22:21, affirmed, "The kingdom of Christ under the present dispensation [defined as the 'collective of churches' formed by 'all who profess the true religion together with their children']...is not worldly in the sense in which the ancient theocracy was of this world. The latter organized the Hebrews as a nation, and directed all their municipal and national, as well as their social and religious affairs. It, therefore, could not coexist in time and place with any other national organization." He adds further (and provocatively) that this structure will be "arranged into a higher form when He shall come the second time" (*Systematic Theology*, 2:604–5).

¹⁹On the one hand Machen drew the ire of the fundamentalists for refusing to "take a stand" and leading the Westminster churches to join the fundamentalist coalition of cultural resistance (e.g., adopting a prohibitionist stance on drinking or smoking—issues that were for Machen [1] non-ecclesiastical matters upon which [2] Scripture was less than clear). On the other hand, Machen also waged war against theological liberalism/modernism over the missional arm of his own Presbyterian church, fiercely guarding it against the penetration of doctrinally indifferent or even heterodox wolves who sought to replace the church's true mission of Gospel proclamation with a civic errand of social service that Machen regarded as totally ancillary to the church's true mission. For a helpful interweaving of Machen's story with his emphasis on the spirituality of the church, see the sixth chapter of Darryl G. Hart's *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

²⁰See, e.g., Darryl Hart, *Recovering Mother Kirk* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 51–65; also Carl Trueman's "Case of the Missing Category," blog post at

clustered around Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California.²¹ This aggressive expression has generated a lot of noise in recent days, but its voices are few and much maligned.²²

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHURCH AND ROOTS OF DISPENSATIONALISM

Heretofore in this article the preponderance of representation for the spirituality of the church has come from Lutherans, Puritans, Baptists, and most especially, Presbyterians. We shift now to the relationship of this doctrine to the rise of dispensationalism. The connection between early dispensational emphasis on the spirituality of the church and the Reformed emphasis has been observed by many.²³ What eventually derailed the alliance, however, were ecclesiological extremes that

<http://info.alliancenet.org/mos-beta/postcards-from-palookaville/the-case-of-the-missing-category>, accessed 3 December 2014).

²¹Michael Horton represents this model well by asserting, after linking to Matthew 22:21, “Unlike the theocracy in Eden before the fall and in Canaan instituted at Sinai, cult (worship) and culture (common vocations in the world) are sharply distinguished, though not intrinsically opposed. Nowhere in the New Testament is the Great Commission fused with the cultural mandate” (*The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011], 713).

Jason Stellman, whose later defection to Romanism colors any appeal to his earlier writings as a Two-Kingdom Presbyterian, is even more direct. For Stellman God’s rule began as (1) a “theocratic” arrangement in Eden, where “there was no sharp distinction between sacred and secular activity,” was followed by (2) a period of “unnatural separation between cult and culture” between the Fall and Abraham, and then by (3) a “pilgrim” arrangement (the period from Abraham to Moses) where Abraham’s relationship to the world was “culturally common but religiously distinct.” After the arrival of Moses and the giving of the Law, (4) an arrangement with similarities to Eden commenced in which, so long as the people of God were in their “distinct land,” they operated in a “theocratic” microcosm where cultic and cultural functions were merged into a single kingdom. The era of the church, finally, represents (5) a new “pilgrim” period, where the absence of a land means that the people of God are once again a strictly spiritual kingdom living out their faith within a common, secular kingdom comprised of both the elect and the non-elect (*Dual Citizens: Worship and Life Between the Already and the Not Yet* [Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2009], xvii–xxix).

In addition to these, see also VanDrunen’s *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*; Horton, *Where in the World Is the Church?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 175–204; and R. Scott Clark’s collection of weblog articles on the topic at <http://heidelberg.net/category/twofold-kingdom/>.

²²For a particularly harsh example of this criticism see John M. Frame, *The Escondido Theology: A Reformed Response to Two Kingdom Theology* (Lakeland, FL: Whitefield Media Productions, 2011). A more irenic version can be found in Ryan C. McIlhenny, ed., *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012).

²³See, e.g., Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 169; Douglas M. Strong, *They Walked in the Spirit: Personal Faith and Social Action in America* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), xxxi; Gary Scott Smith, *The Search for Social Salvation: Social Christianity and America, 1880–1925* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000), ch. 10; Russell D. Moore and Robert E. Sagers, “The Kingdom of God and the Church: A Baptist Reassessment,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12 (Spring 2008): 70.

moved the dispensationalists outside the pale of subscriptionist Presbyterianism. Rather than seeing the NT church as a new *administration* of the one people of God (as Hodge, Dabney, Thornwell, Peck, Robinson, and other Reformed figures listed above had done), the dispensationalists effectively argued that the NT church was a people of God *distinct in identity* from the Jewish people of God (Israel), with each group boasting distinct origins, purposes, and destinies. As time passed, the popular emphasis of dispensationalism shifted to the last of these concerns—the prophetic destinies of these two groups—and the movement became known primarily for its eschatological theories. But eschatology was emphatically *not* the impetus or the heart of the movement at its outset. Instead, the spirituality of the church, as seen in its *constituency* and *mission*, was dispensationalism’s historical *raison d’être*.

John Nelson Darby and the Spirituality of the Church

One cannot begin to address this issue without at least a token appeal to J. Nelson Darby, widely acknowledged as the founder of the dispensational system. Darby, a curate in the Irish Anglican Communion and a highly successful evangelist in the mission field of disenfranchised Roman Catholics, began over time to despair over the political collusions and maneuverings of his own denomination, specifically doubting that the “kingdom” described in the Christian Scriptures had anything at all to do with the politically devious and theologically bankrupt state church that he served.

The major catalyst for Darby’s breach with the church came in 1826, when Archbishop Magee, Darby’s superior, ordered Darby to secure from all of his converts oaths of allegiance to the British Crown as a prerequisite to admittance into the Anglican Church. Darby refused and shortly thereafter resigned his curacy, arguing that a church concerned chiefly with the political loyalties of its members to their king (over which it had no jurisdiction) and scarcely at all with their spiritual loyalties to Christ (the church’s one true jurisdiction) was no church at all. For Darby, Magee’s policy represented not only a betrayal of the church’s pure spiritual *function*, but also a threat to the church’s pure spiritual *constituency* (i.e., it encouraged the inclusion of the unregenerate and discouraged the inclusion of the regenerate in the church of God). For this reason Darby withdrew to develop a new and pure spiritual brotherhood free of the political-denominational strictures of the Anglican Community that reeked, he opined, of the long-expired Jewish theocracy. His new brotherhood had no creed but Scripture and practiced two simple offices: (1) the public evangelization of the lost with an unadorned Gospel and (2) the private edification of believers—and nothing more.²⁴

²⁴See W. G. Turner, *John Nelson Darby* (London: C. A. Hammond, 1944), chaps. 3–4; Max S. Weremchuk, *John Nelson Darby* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1992), 44–49, and all of chap. 2.

James Hall Brookes and the Spirituality of the Church

Better documented than Darby's story, however, is that of James Hall Brookes, father of American dispensationalism, and a greater influence than Darby on the movement during its late-nineteenth-century rise to significance. We have already fingered Brookes as a Presbyterian pastor in a border city during the crucible of the Civil War and an advocate of the spirituality of the church as a hopeful means of maintaining ecclesiastical unity in this fractious period. Like all border residents, Brookes endured the onslaught of loyalty oaths enforced broadly along the border to secure loyalty from local secular officials, but occasionally also from churchmen in times of particular unrest (e.g., the 1864 Rosecrans Oath). Missouri, however, went further than all other border states by preparing, at the close of the War, a new state constitution featuring a "Test Oath" of loyalty to the Union as a "prerequisite for public teaching, preaching, or performing of marriages."²⁵ The oath was extreme, demanding not only present loyalty, but also an affirmation that the minister had *never* harbored Confederate sympathies. As a result,

Missouri will ever be conspicuous in the annals of history as the only State of the Union to inaugurate and authorize a formal opposition to Christianity, as an institution, and legalize the persecution of ministers of the gospel, as a class.... Ministers of the gospel have been indicted by grand juries, arrested and imprisoned with common felons, mobbed and put to death for no other cause than that of preaching the gospel without taking the "Test Oath" of the New Constitution.²⁶

It was in this crucible that Brookes labored, and in this crucible that American dispensationalism was incubated. His entire story cannot be told here,²⁷ but a brief distillation of the key events leading to Brookes's embrace of dispensationalism can be made to show that the movement's primary antecedents were not eschatological but ecclesiological/missional.

The Sad Story of Rev. Samuel B. McPheeters

Our story begins with Brookes's very personal retelling of the mistreatment of one Rev. Samuel B. McPheeters of the Pine Street Church (St. Louis).²⁸ McPheeters, it seems, voted in session (with many other

²⁵Sanders, *Premillennial Faith*, 46.

²⁶Leftwich, *Martyrdom in Missouri*, 1:3.

²⁷The reader is directed for the best primary material to Brooke's contributions to Leftwich, *Martyrdom in Missouri*, 2:9–16, 193–221; for a fine secondary summary, see Carl E. Sanders, III, *The Premillennial Faith of James Hall Brookes: Reexamining the Roots of American Dispensationalism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001), 37–102.

²⁸This section is an abridgement of Brookes's full accounting in Leftwich,

ministers of his persuasion) against a divisive paper on the state of the Union that was subsequently adopted in 1862 by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America. Despite McPheeters's reasoning that the paper was "inconsistent with the nature of the church and the proper functions of its judicatories to express any judgment on political questions and that such expressions would tend to increase the distractions under which many of our churches were suffering,"²⁹ three members of McPheeters's own congregation decided to use McPheeters's voting record to steal his church away from him. Their first tack was to summon a sympathetic local provost-marshal (a leading military police officer), upon whom they prevailed to order McPheeters banished from his home, and the church properties transferred to "the control of three loyal members...who shall see that its pulpit be filled by a loyal minister of the Gospel who can invoke the blessing of the Head of the Church upon the efforts of the [Federal] Government to re-establish its authority."³⁰ McPheeters countered with an immediate appeal to President Lincoln, who personally countermanded these orders, making an apparent end to the matter.

Stymied in the civil legal system, however, McPheeters's enemies did not desist, and instead turned to the ecclesiastical courts. Here injustice and intrigue prevailed. After calling a meeting of the St. Louis Presbytery, McPheeters's wily enemies once again used the military police to their advantage, this time using them to restrict the movement of McPheeters and his supporters, successfully preventing them from appearing at the meeting of the presbytery. This accomplished, it was not difficult for the three minority representatives of McPheeters's church to convince the few presbyters in session that McPheeters's removal was the express interest and desire of the Pine Street Church.

James Hall Brookes, then pastor of the Walnut Street Presbyterian Church of St. Louis, took the lead in opposing this injustice. At the request of the Pine Street Church, he moderated a local meeting of the church in which six of seven elders and nearly two-thirds of the membership protested the decision of the presbytery. However, a second meeting of the presbytery met with results similar to the first. Only twenty of the more than sixty eligible voters were permitted to attend by military police, and these voted eleven to nine in favor of upholding McPheeters's removal.

Appeals and counter-appeals were made in turn, until finally the General Assembly ruled in 1864 against McPheeters—over the objections of Charles Hodge himself, who announced that McPheeters's dismissal was "an injustice which has few, if any, parallels in the history

Martyrdom in Missouri, 2:193–221. Additional material may be gleaned from Charles Hodge, "The Complaint of Rev. Dr. McPheeters," *The Princeton Review* 3 (July 1864): 551–75; John S. Grasty, *Memoir of the Rev. Samuel B. McPheeters. D.D.* (St. Louis: Southwestern Book and Publishing Co., 1871), *passim*.

²⁹Hodge, "Complaint of Rev. McPheeters, 552–53."

³⁰*Martyrdom in Missouri*, 2:204.

of our church.”³¹ McPheeters was exiled to Kentucky, where, broken, he died shortly thereafter at just fifty years of age. Brookes’s conclusion to the matter is profound: “If this be Presbyterianism,” he exclaimed, “the less we have of it the better.”³²

James Hall Brookes’s Own Story

Brookes’s habit of diverting sympathy to McPheeters and other ministers who suffered immeasurably during the War³³ might possibly suggest that Brookes himself escaped serious mishap during the conflict. This is not the case. Brookes’s own church, the Second Presbyterian Church of St. Louis, divided in 1864 over Brookes’s insistence on the spirituality of the church, and Brookes found himself charged with the care of a splinter group of just 150 members, which he organized as the Walnut Street Presbyterian Church.

Brookes remained a faithful elder within the Missouri Synod of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) throughout the War, weathering the 1861 Springs Resolution (obliging all members to swear allegiance to the Federal Government) and resisting calls by many in his congregation to join the Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States of America, later renamed the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS). After the War, however, the Northern church adopted a vicious posture toward the border churches, requiring public acknowledgment of sin and penitence from all existing members of the Assembly who were suspected of disloyalty to the Union at any time throughout the War years. The Missouri Synod (Brookes) and Louisville Synod (Stuart Robinson) responded with a joint complaint, the *Declaration and Testimony*, protesting the action of the General Assembly, but to no avail.³⁴ The General Assembly summarily dissolved the border synods. Having no place else to fellowship, many of these disenfranchised churches turned to the Southern church, which gladly received them in 1869 with great fanfare. Brookes, however, could not follow this path either, because in his mind *both* branches of the church had compromised the church’s spirituality.³⁵ Instead, Brookes took the lead in developing a new body, the Independent Synod of Missouri, where he hoped that he might finally realize the same kind of peace that Darby had found in the formation of his

³¹Hodge, “Complaint of Dr. McPheeters,” 575.

³²*Martyrdom in Missouri*, 2:216.

³³Brookes offers reports of other such injustice, including one perpetrated against Harvey T. McCune, and summaries of injustices suffered by “Anderson, and Farris, and Parks, and Madeira, and Morton, and Smith, and Quarles, and Chaney, and Gray, and Hobson, and Symington,” under the Missouri arrangement (*ibid.*, 217–21).

³⁴The substance of Brookes’s argument may be found in his *Argument Delivered before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States, on the 31st of May, 1866 in Defence of the Louisville Presbytery* (St Louis: George Knapp & Co., 1866).

³⁵See esp. the discussion in Graham, *Kingdom Not of This World*, 148–66.

Plymouth Brethren group. Instead, the PCUSA relaxed its partisan stance a few years later, and in 1873 Brookes rejoined that body in good conscience. Most of Brookes's Missouri brothers, however, never forgave the injustices perpetrated against them by the PCUSA, and eventually joined the Southern church.

To the end Brookes remained a sad paradox, a firm advocate of a doctrine that was maintained by almost none of his brothers. And while Brookes remained loyal to his denomination until his death, his experience of disenfranchisement over the course of decades left him less a Churchman and more a non-conformist. Brookes would find solace in the company of other disenfranchised churchmen (Presbyterian and non-Presbyterian alike) who followed him in finding a locus of camaraderie around the doctrine of the spirituality of the church—the dispensationalist movement. This army would grow rapidly over the next several decades as additional churchmen, disenfranchised not only by Civil War but also by the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy, left their denominations in search of more amicable bases of fellowship.

James Hall Brookes and Social Action

Brookes's view of the spirituality of the church also appears to have informed his view of social reform. While Brookes admittedly broke with some of his stricter Presbyterian brothers and supported evangelistic efforts that included a social element or "hook,"³⁶ he had nothing but contempt for the ecclesiastically organized social reforms that the Modernists were making increasingly central to the church's mission. Some have assumed that this hard stance arose out of Brookes's premillennialism, arguing that his reticence to engage in social reform stemmed from his view that present age would end in failure. Carl Sanders has convincingly demonstrated, however, that Brookes's negative view of institutional social action predated his conversion to premillennialism by many years.³⁷ Instead, Brookes's resistance to ecclesiastical social reform flowed from his deep commitment to the Reformed doctrine of the spirituality of the church. That is to say, Brookes cited the collapse of Israel's theocracy as the basis for assigning socio-political reform to the purview of the civic kingdom (the state) and not that of the spiritual kingdom (the church). For Brookes this was not an eschatologically informed much less a premillennial stance, but rather a

³⁶Brookes called, for instance, for Christian workers who would go "house to house with bread for the body in one hand, and the bread of life in the other" (*The Truth* 11 [1885]: 16–17). Critics will view this as a betrayal of the doctrine of total depravity, sympathizers a positive step away from overly-introvertish Calvinism. Let the reader decide.

³⁷Sanders, *Premillennial Faith*, 58–64. If anything, Sanders, argues, Brookes *relaxed* his strict position after becoming a premillennialist, complaining that the Presbyterian Church was doing too little in this matter and thus missing evangelistic opportunities among the poor.

biblical and *True Presbyterian* one.³⁸

Conclusion

While the dispensational movement will forever be linked, especially in its popular form, with eschatological fascinations and fancy, history divulges that eschatological theory was markedly absent in the opening chapter of the movement. Dispensationalism, it may be demonstrated, was originally a peculiar expression of the doctrine of the spirituality of the church. Specifically, it began when its earliest proponents concluded, in the crucible of contemporary crisis, that Israel's ancient theocratic amalgamation of all things civil and spiritual had been bifurcated by Christ himself during his First Advent into two isolated jurisdictions—church and state—that were and are fundamentally distinct. It is from this principal biblical inference that the whole dispensational model flows.

There is no doubt that the ensuing adoption of premillennial principles by dispensational founding founders J. N. Darby and J. H. Brookes both confirmed and advanced the doctrine of the spirituality of the church in unexplored directions. However, it is a central contention of this article that the eschatological notions of premillennialism and pretribulationism are *implications* of the dispensational system and not the *cause*.³⁹ The historical *cause* for the birth of dispensationalism was strict subscription to the doctrine of the spirituality of the church.

THE DECLINE OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHURCH IN DISPENSATIONAL LIFE

If the *raison d'être* for dispensationalism is, as I have argued, the doctrine of the spirituality of the church, why then is this doctrine practically unknown among its modern proponents? Has dispensationalism lost its way? And if so, what does this mean for the survival of the movement? The following represent notes toward an answer to these questions.

Reasons for the Decline of the Spirituality of the Church in Dispensational Life

A great many reasons may be cited for the decline of the doctrine of

³⁸I borrow the phrase *True Presbyterian* from the title of Stuart Robinson's short-lived newspaper—a paper of just 58 installments dedicated principally to the defense of the doctrine of the spirituality of the church.

³⁹Indeed, in what may be the very most provocative statement of this article, I would contend that the dispensational system has more in common with the *postmillennialism* of Hodge, Dabney, and Thornwell and the *amillennialism* of Machen, Murray, and Horton than it has with the *historic premillennialism* of Henry, Ladd, and Grudem. Historic premillennialism, given its radical Neo-Kuyperian vision, is not, as is often supposed, dispensationalism's nearest relative but its very most polar opposite. See below.

the spirituality of the church among dispensationalists. **First** in historical order was the *association of the doctrine with the vice of slavery*. The banner under which the pro-slavery churches of the South operated before, during, and after the War had this doctrine emblazoned upon it, and so the doctrine came to be regarded as part of the “wrong side of history.” Thus chastened, the doctrine was quietly suppressed.

As memories of the Civil War began to fade, however, a **second** factor usurped the first in importance: *Modernism*. For many Americans, America had been built, to small degree, on the Puritan idea of a “city on a hill”—a utopian vision of a nation built on Christian principles. This vision, established on a vibrant postmillennial foundation, imagined the world moving toward a visible, economic, political, sociological, and otherwise ideal society with King Jesus at the helm. Even the Civil War, which might easily have proven fatal to this idea, contributed to the optimism: the elimination of slavery became symbolic of the “glory of the coming of the Lord” and a triumph of God and truth as they kept “marching on.”⁴⁰ Years of relentless church involvement in civil affairs in early American history came finally to full flower at the close of the nineteenth century—but at the cost of the mission of the church. No longer did the church exist (in the public opinion at least) to secure converts to Christ and thence subscribers to particular doctrinal systems; instead, the church existed to *materially facilitate* the Kingdom of God that had “always” been but was now “coming” to the world in new and explosive ways.⁴¹ For Walter Rauschenbusch, widely regarded as the chief spokesman of this model at its height, there were four facilitating agencies (not only church, but also state, family, and the “industrial organization of society”) that were working in concert to this grand end.⁴² And what was the church’s primary role in this utopian society? Engaging in and promoting philanthropy, charity, public education, temperance, civil equality, and other virtues, not as “an annex to the orthodox conception of the scheme of salvation,” but as its “essence.”⁴³ The model met with rave approval from believers and unbelievers alike. The church had adapted to meet society’s two greatest evils—identified so famously by Charles Dickens as “ignorance and want”—and it was experiencing incredible success. This was the golden age of theological liberalism, and it succeeded by convincing the majority that God’s kingdom, complete with all of its many *visible* and *physical* components, was arriving, with the church at the helm.

⁴⁰The reader will recognize the familiar words of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” that became a rallying hymn for the Northern armies.

⁴¹These terms regularly employed by Walter Rauschenbusch have appeared as the title of a recent biography: Christopher Hodge Evans’s *The Kingdom Is Always but Coming: A Life of Walter Rauschenbusch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

⁴²Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: MacMillan, 1917), 145.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 131.

Pockets of resistance to this socio-cultural Modernist wave emerged predictably from dispensational fundamentalism,⁴⁴ but also, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, from a band of subscriptionist denominational Presbyterians.⁴⁵ The resistance, however, came at great cost. Followers of D. L. Moody and J. G. Machen alike endured crushing slander and ridicule for withstanding the Modernist vision of the church and advocating a purely spiritual mission of simple Gospel declaration in its place.⁴⁶ The doctrine of the spirituality of the church had been roundly chastened by the majority church, and the doctrine very

⁴⁴For these, the *eternal* kingdom of God (the *always* kingdom) is to be distinguished from the *mediatorial* kingdom (which began promisingly in the OT theocracy but was suspended until the second coming of Christ in power and glory to establish a 1000-year earthly reign). While this latter kingdom *had* and *will have* vast and far-reaching civil, political, sociological, and material features, its absence today leaves the institutional church with a strictly spiritual mandate (see esp. Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959]). Of course, as citizens of God's eternal kingdom, believers still have material responsibilities to their fellow-man; these responsibilities are not to be administered by the church, however, but by the family/state.

⁴⁵The Orthodox Presbyterian cohort that broke from the PCUSA/Princeton under the leadership of J. Gresham Machen, being mostly amillennial, held out no hope for a future, earthly, 1000-year Jewish Millennium (a stance that led eventually to the expulsion of the few premillennialists that were originally part of the group). But neither did they have any patience for the liberal vision of the church as developing a comprehensive temporal and material kingdom on earth. Instead, they understood that Christ, during his first advent, introduced fundamental changes in the theocratic program that rendered its purview strictly spiritual. While God in Christ continues to oversee the civil realm in a very real way through the age-old institutions of family and state, the ecclesiastical realm or spiritual "kingdom" remains separate from it (so Calvin's "two governments of God" discussed above). And while Machen's disciples did not all share his vision perfectly, their arm's-length regard of the new evangelicalism that emerged shortly afterward stands as a testimony to their suspicion that the evangelical social agenda was only marginally removed from the Modernist agenda. It is not surprising that the modern revival of "two kingdoms" theology has emerged from this theological family.

⁴⁶Ernst Sandeen raised eyebrows when he affirmed an "alliance" between Old Princeton/Westminster and the dispensationalists ("Toward a Historical Interpretation of the Origins of Fundamentalism," *Church History* 36 [March 1967]: 67), but his theory has seen nothing but qualification, minimization, and even outright dismissal ever since (so George Marsden, "Defining Fundamentalism," *Christian Scholar's Review* 1 [Winter 1971]: 67; also Joe L. Coker, "Exploring the Roots of the Dispensationalist/Princetonian 'Alliance': Charles Hodge and John Nelson Darby on Eschatology and Interpretation of Scripture," *Fides et Historia* 30 [Winter-Spring 1998]: 41–56; and many others). All practical similarity between the two groups has been dismissed as coincidence or at best a marriage of convenience—the theological discontinuities were much too great, critics affirm, to countenance any *real* cooperation.

Todd Mangum, however, has done the church a great service in demonstrating that there *was* at least one point of theological continuity between Old Princeton/Westminster and the dispensationalists that has been routinely overlooked, viz., *a common high regard for the doctrine of the spirituality of the church* (*The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift: The Fissuring of American Evangelical Theology from 1936–1944* [Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2007], 8–10; 103–6). This common principle, I believe, supplied easily as much of the glue requisite to this alliance as did their common regard for the inspiration and authority of the Bible.

nearly died of embarrassment in the court of public opinion.

It was this embarrassment, then, that led to a **third** factor in the collapse of the doctrine of the church's spirituality: the *new evangelical adoption of "realized eschatology" as its governing missional premise*. Feeling the weight of disenfranchisement in both the academy and in the court of public opinion, a band of progressive fundamentalists sought to "reawaken" their movement from its socio-political slumber and so to recover the "place at the table" that they had relinquished during the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy.⁴⁷ The great barrier to this goal was obvious: the persistent dispensational reduction of the mission of the institutional church to a strictly *spiritual* errand. To succeed, the "new" evangelicals needed to eliminate all vestiges of this doctrine of the spirituality of the church.

It was to this end that Carl Henry published in 1947 his *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*—a clarion call for middle ground between the "kingdom now" error of liberalism and the "kingdom then" error of dispensational fundamentalism. It was the latter error, however, that clearly galled Henry the most, because it "cuts the nerve of world compassion," "undercuts world relevance," and thereby "destroys the essential character of Christianity."⁴⁸ The only solution for the dispensationalist fundamentalists, for Henry, was for them to alter their belief structure to affirm "both that the kingdom is here, and that it is not here."⁴⁹ This theological affirmation was, for Henry, the only way to (1) justify evangelical social action, to (2) reacquire world relevance and a "place at the table," and to (3) thereby ensure the continued success of the Gospel.

Henry's appeal was answered formally by George Eldon Ladd, whose 1959 work *The Gospel of the Kingdom* reflects the foremost expression of his personal mission (in the words of Joel Carpenter) 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."⁵⁰ Ladd's work immediately raised eyebrows by both its tone and sources. While harsh toward his dispensational brothers, Ladd was fawning in his praise of non-evangelicals, whom he cited not only favorably, but also *exclusively*. The writings of C. H. Dodd and Oscar Cullmann supplied Ladd's primary argument, and their "realized eschatology" lent considerable substance to Henry's model.⁵¹ For Ladd and

⁴⁷The emphasized terms I borrow from the titles of two key works detailing this period of ecclesiastical history: Joel Carpenter's *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford, 1997), and John A. D'Elia's fascinating study, *A Place at the Table: George Eldon Ladd and the Rehabilitation of Evangelical Scholarship in America* (New York: Oxford, 2008).

⁴⁸Carl Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 53, 57.

⁴⁹Ibid., 53.

⁵⁰Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 195.

⁵¹It must be observed in the throes of the First World War, the postmillennial vi-

Henry, the fact that God's undifferentiated kingdom both *is already* and *is not yet* supplied an indisputable basis for expanding the church's mission far beyond the "spiritual mission" championed by dispensational fundamentalism.⁵²

Also playing a significant role in the theology of the new evangelicism and in the suppression of the spirituality of the church is a **fourth** and final factor, viz., *Neo-Kuyperianism* (sometimes called *Neo-Calvinism*). Abraham Kuyper (from whom the system derives its name) was a most remarkable figure in both Dutch Calvinist theology and Dutch politics at the close of the nineteenth century. Eminently quotable, Kuyper is perhaps best known for his statement that "there is not one square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'"⁵³ In so saying, Kuyper asserted that nothing subsisted outside the broad scope of Christ's *singular lordship and kingship*: there is but *one kingdom* and Christ is the King—and Kuyper's broad involvement in a great many spheres of this kingship (ecclesiastical, political, economic, educational, etc.) communicated to his followers that these were all legitimate targets for influence by the institutional church. Whether Kuyper intended all of this is a matter of intense debate;⁵⁴ nevertheless, the message that his disciples heard and perpetuated was this: the mission of the church was not merely to carry to the world the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but to bring *every* domain (not just the *spiritual* domain) of human existence under the undifferentiated kingship of Jesus Christ.

It is difficult to know how much Neo-Kuyperianism influenced the

sion of modernist liberalism died suddenly, leaving the church's vibrant socio-political mission without any identifiable anchor. But rather than abandon the mission, the solution was to forge a new anchor—one supplied, in no small part, by Dodd, Cullman, and others of their ilk. And so while modernist liberalism *as a theological system* was technically a casualty of the War, the liberal *mission* survived the War and extends to the present day.

⁵²For modern appeals for a return to the model of Henry and Ladd, see Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004); Gregory Alan Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism: Applying the Wisdom and Vision of Carl F. H. Henry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), and to a degree James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World* (New York: Oxford, 2010). Among the few refreshingly dissonant voices raised against this model within the evangelical community, see Arthur Johnston, *The Battle for World Evangelism* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1978), and more recently, Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011).

⁵³Inaugural address for the Free University of Amsterdam, 20 October 1880, discoverable in James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 489.

⁵⁴A more thorough study of the context of Kuyper's "not one square inch" divulges that Kuyper partitioned the kingship of Christ over the universe into sovereign and independent but interlocking "spheres." As such, he probably would not have approved of the intrusion of the institutional church into these other spheres. This detail was lost, however, on many of his followers, hence their identification not as Kuyperians but as *Neo-Kuyperians*. For a careful discussion of these distinctions, see David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, chaps. 7, 9, and 10.

new evangelicalism and continues to influence conservative evangelicalism today. By all accounts the influence was significant.⁵⁵ And it was by so adorning the realized eschatology of Dodd and Cullman with the conservative and Calvinistic trappings of Neo-Kuyperianism that the new evangelical movement was able to galvanize its claim to be truly evangelical. It also explains in part, I think, why the new evangelicalism gladly maintained alliances with those who denied the central tenets of the Gospel, but slowly squeezed out the dispensationalists and their doctrine of the spirituality of the church.

Results of the Decline of the Spirituality of the Church in Dispensational Life

All of the factors above have left dispensationalism today in a terrible state of disarray. Most dispensationalists have forgotten the historical foundations of their own theological system, and many of those who *do* remember have expressed embarrassment about those foundations.⁵⁶ For many, the only notable reason to prefer dispensationalism to non-dispensationalism is its peculiar eschatology, an admittedly minor area of theology. The best informed of the dispensationalists persist in their dispensationalism for hermeneutical reasons, believing their approach to offer the most consistent and comprehensive explanation of the identity of the people(s) of God, the nature of the biblical covenants, the fulfillment of God's Law, and the unfolding of the whole biblical

⁵⁵Other Dutch Calvinist figures in the train of Kuyper and Bavinck and influential in early-twentieth-century American evangelical life include Herman Dooyeweerd, Dirk Hendrik Theodoor Vollenhoven, and most importantly, Louis Berkhof. The latter looms very tall not only for his four decades teaching at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI, but for his landmark *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932, with later editions), which was adopted widely in American evangelical schools. For helpful summaries of Neo-Kuyperian influence in American evangelicalism see David F. Wells, ed., *Dutch Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), and James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984). Major figures that self-identify with the movement today include Al Wolters (esp. his *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005]), and Richard J. Mouw (among many sources see his *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992]; *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002]; and *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship: Essays in the Line of Abraham Kuyper* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012]).

⁵⁶Darrell Bock and Craig Blaising, for instance, in their apology for progressive dispensationalism, argue almost identically to Carl Henry as they make their case for the abandonment of traditional dispensationalism. Concerned that the traditional dispensational model has produced a church ambivalent to social engagement, Bock and Blaising plead for a revivification of "the social ministry of the church" on the grounds that "the church is a manifestation of the future kingdom" (*Progressive Dispensationalism* [Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1993], 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" (289–90). They conclude 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" (289).

story-line. Relatively few, however, cling to dispensationalism for the primary reason offered by the founders of the movement, viz., their commitment to the spirituality of the church.⁵⁷ And to the degree that this is true, I would contend that dispensationalism has lost much of its practical/missional utility.

Specifically, I would argue that the loss of the dispensational vision of the church's spirituality threatens to (1) domesticate the Kingdom of Christ, rendering it immanent and mundane rather than transcendent and spectacular, (2) endanger the efficiency of the Gospel by expanding its scope to include all sorts of non-spiritual matters, and (3) compromise the purity of Christ's church with an endless pursuit of cultural relevancy and social acceptance.

CONCLUSION

The doctrine of the spirituality of the church is not, of course, a distinctively dispensational doctrine. And to the degree that other systems have perpetuated the doctrine, I believe they have been rendered immeasurably the better for it. But of all the theological systems extant today, none rests with greater necessity upon the doctrine of the church's spirituality than does the dispensational system. Without this doctrine, dispensationalism is robbed of its historical genius and becomes little more than a novelty. The system may survive indefinitely as a minority model for hermeneutics, biblical theology, and eschatology, but will continue to lose market share to Neo-Kuyperian evangelical churches with their fashionable readiness to not only share Christ but also to engage and transform civil society and culture at large. If, however, dispensationalists can succeed in reviving and defending the doctrine of the spirituality of the church, I believe the system has hope for a bright future.

⁵⁷Specifically its distinction between (1) the culturally-informed and civically-involved participation of individual Christians in the world as charitable humans, voting citizens, dedicated family members, diligent laborers, and attentive neighbors and (2) the culturally transcendent, civically indifferent, and singular fixation of the institutional church on the proclamation of the Christian Gospel.

