



SELECTED READINGS ON THE PRESBYTERIAN DOCTRINE OF
The Spirituality of the Church

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PRIMARY SOURCES

Adger, John Bailey, 1810-1899. "Dr. Thornwell's Memorial on the Recognition of Christianity in the Constitution." *Southern Presbyterian Review* 16:1 (July 1863): 77-86.

An aborted attempt by Thornwell to have Jesus acknowledged as Lord of the nations in the Confederate Constitution. Raises serious questions about Thornwell's consistent application of the "spirituality" doctrine, questions raised vigorously by Thomas E. Peck, one of Thornwell's finest students, *infra*.

———. "The General Assembly of Columbia." *Southern Presbyterian Review* 16:1 (July 1863): 87-119.

An account of the proceedings and the debates concerning the Thornwell memorial.

———. "Northern and Southern Views of the Province of the Church." *Southern Presbyterian Review* 15/4 (March 1866): 384 ff.

Answer to Hodge, *infra*, denying that the doctrine is a novelty developed by Thornwell—insisting, in fact, that the doctrine had been held by the Northern Presbyterians and by Hodge himself before 1861. Adger shows through a variety of examples the Northern church's abandonment of the doctrine after 1861. Concludes: "Thus we find this Church court, through a series of years, persevering in the utterance of political decrees. The thing is not done once, in the heat of passion, but . . . over and over, deliberately, and of set purpose." By way of comparison, Adger argues the Southern Church's commitment to the principle and defends her from the charges of inconsistency urged by Hodge.

Boggs, William E. "Church and State in their Reciprocal Relations and Fundamental Contrast." *Southern Presbyterian Review* 35/1 (January 1884): 137 ff.

Inaugural address to chair of Ecclesiastical History and Church Polity at Columbia Theological Seminary, stating and defending the doctrine, noting that commitment to the Spirituality of the Church was one of the reasons for the separate existence of the Southern Presbyterian Church.

Curry, A.B. "The Relation of the Church to the Prohibition Movement." *Presbyterian Quarterly* 1/1 (July 1887): 169-173.

Pastor in Darien, Georgia, on the occasion of the failure of a complaint by James H. Baird in the PCUSA (Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. 1887, p. 128). Concludes that the dismissal of the complaint indicated the GA's endorsement of the actions of the Synod of Pennsylvania in supporting prohibition. Curry's purpose in writing is to remind Southern Presbyterians of their

¹ Please note: this bibliography is a work in process—some of the citations are incomplete, in part, because I have not been able to personally verify the information as yet. So too, the annotations are not yet completed. I am releasing the work as it is to aid the research of others on this neglected subject. If the reader knows of more complete citations or of works that ought to be added, please contact David F. Coffin, Jr., P.O. Box 705, Fairfax, VA 22038-0705.

commitment to the doctrine of the spirituality. He argues that the church, as such, was not free to espouse the prohibition cause, or any similar enterprise, or to league itself to it in any way whatever. "The Church is a Kingdom whose laws are all made for her by her King. The code is placed in her hand, finished and complete in every respect. No power is given to her to alter this code. . . . She cannot take from it nor can she add to it, without incurring the King's curse." Concludes that since prohibition is not inculcated in the Bible, it follows, as night follows day, that no such political solution may be espoused by a church, whose ends are spiritual, whose methods are spiritual, and whose power is spiritual. Is the church then to stand aloof? By no means. Let it preach temperance as a spiritual grace, drunkenness as a spiritual evil, teach this with authority, and enforce it when necessary through the divine power of the keys. "This is the Church's way of dealing with the Temperance question. It stands in favorable contrast to Prohibition."

Robert L. Dabney. "Civic Ethics." In *Discussions by Robert L. Dabney, D.D., LL.D.* Ed. by C.R. Vaughan. Vol. III, *Philosophical*. Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1892). Reprint (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books and Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1980), pp. 302-328.

RLD compares three opposing theories: 1. Social Contract; 2. Theistic; 3. Divine Right. He refutes the last and the first (more extensively), before setting forth a masterful exposition of the true theory—discussing the ground of government, the rights of conscience, equality, women's rights, natural rights, liberty of thought, civil disobedience and the right of revolution, concluding with a rigorous defense of religious liberty.

———. "Civic Ethics." Chapter in *The Practical Philosophy. Being the Philosophy of the Feelings, of the Will, and of the Conscience, With the Ascertainment of Particular Rights and Duties*. Mexico, MO: Crescent Book House, 1897. Reprint, with an Introduction by Douglas F. Kelly (Harrisonburg: VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1984), pp. 372-419.

———. "The Civil Magistrate," and "Religious Liberty and Church and State." Chapters in *Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology Taught in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia*, Published by the Students. Richmond, VA: Shepperson & Graves, Printers, 1871; 2nd ed., revised. St. Louis, MO: Presbyterian Publishing Company of St. Louis, 1878). Reprint of 2nd ed. entitled *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), pp. 862-872; 873-887.

———. "Dr. Dabney's Reply to Dr. Pitzer's Criticisms of the 'Open Letter.'" *CP* 23:11 (Sept. 28, 1887): 2.

Responds to an article by the above named on Sept. 7, 1887, which article was critical of a published "protest" signed by RLD and Drs. Palmer, Vaughan, and others. In discussing a defeated proposal for union with the Northern Church, RLD defends the "spirituality of the church" doctrine as well as the Southern Church from the charge of inconsistency with respect to that doctrine. The protest is listed in Prince (2556) as follows: Palmer, Benjamin Morgan. *An Open Letter, Prepared by B.M. Palmer, R.K. Smoot, C.R. Vaughan, R.L. Dabney, J.L. Girardeau [and others]*. [New Orleans: E.S. Upton], n.d. 17 pp. First page of text: "An open letter to the members of the Southern Presbyterian Church." Copy at UTS.

and resistance."

———. "The New State-Church." *CP* 3:28 (Jan. 29, 1868): 2; "Religious Liberty." *CP* 3:29 (Feb. 5, 1868): 2; "Is Jesus Christ King of Nations?" *CP* 3:30 (Feb. 12, 1868): 2; the first article only reprinted in *Discussions by Robert L. Dabney, D.D., LL.D.* Ed. by J.H. Varner. Vol. V, *Miscellaneous Writings*. Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1999, pp. 275-279.

From the first: "Wise historians have long remarked that church-establishments never arose out of the craving of religion for political alliance, but from the craving of politics to use religion as its tool. The union now taking place is no exception." RLD charges the Northern Church, in its conduct during the war, with "the most conclusive instance of apostasy that can well be imagined, from Protestantism to religious *despotism*." Observing the post-war movement in the North toward union of churches and political involvement, he predicts dire consequences for both church and state. Concludes calling upon the best of the Northern men "to arise and

teach their people the true line of separation and independence between the sphere which is spiritual, and the sphere which is civil.”

———. Review of *The Memoir of Rev. Samuel B. McPheeters, D.D.* *SPR* 22:2 (Apr. 1871): 235-254.

After a brief statement of the salient points of McPheeter’s life and labors RLD considers at length the “position which the Northern Presbyterian Church has deliberately taken and now holds, touching the rights of conscience, the spiritual independence of Christ’s Church, and his headship over it. Includes very clear summary statement of RLD’s view of the duty of a minister *qua* his sacred office and *qua* his civic responsibilities and a forceful statement of the case for separation of Church and State.

Hodge, Charles. “Relations of the Church and State.” *Princeton Review* (1864): 679- . Reprinted in *The Church and Its Polity*. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1879, pp. 106-188.

After surveying the history of the matter, the views of the several traditions of the Church, and setting forth 4 New Testament principles concerning the relation of these two God-appointed institutions concludes, “we have reason to rejoice in the recently discovered truth, that the Church is independent of the state, and that the state best promotes her interests by letting her alone” (118).

Jones, Alfred. “Thoughts on the Relations of Church and State.” *The Presbyterian Quarterly* 4 (April 1890): .

“[U]nder the New Testament dispensation, church and state are intended by our saviour to be absolutely separate and distinct. They are different spheres, touching at no point.” “[T]he church is a spiritual body, seeking spiritual ends, and using spiritual means to accomplish them. She has no lawful connection with any civil government.” Jones argues that moral reform in the commonwealth belongs exclusively to the voluntary efforts of Christian citizens, not to the church as a spiritual body.

Law, Samuel Spahr. *Reasons for the Organization and for the Perpetuation of the Southern Presbyterian Church*. n.p., n.d. [1910?].

The PCUS serves as “an organized protest against the church meddling with State and political or secular affairs, and as such deserves perpetuity.” Urges that from its beginning the doctrine of the “absolute spirituality or non-secularity of the Christian Church” has been the “pole star” of the denomination.

McPheeters, William M. “The Spirituality of the Church.” *Christian Observer* (October 24, 1888).

Argues that the church is to hold out to the soul of the individual certain general principles and here its duty and prerogative ended. The church has no power or authority “to prescribe specific rules for the countless moral contingencies arising out of these relations, or to take the concrete application of the general principles she has announced, out of the hands of the individual, be he father or son, sovereign or citizen.”

———. *The Spirituality of the Church*. n.p., n.d.

From a series of articles in the *St. Louis Presbyterian* reviewing Rev. Dr. S.J. Baird’s pamphlet on “Reunion,” urging, contra Baird, that the difference between Thornwell and Hodge on the subject characterize the Southern and Northern Churches respectively, and that this difference is an insuperable obstacle to reunion. Provides extensive citation of the relevant literature as well as a review of the history of the debate. WM urges that “the importance of this doctrine to the purity and peace of the Church and to the success of her mission, should be clearly recognized. . . .” The *status questionus*: “Is the Church of God *competent*, in *all* questions of *morals*, to act as arbiter, not only for those within her pale, but for all men individually, and for all as organized either into voluntary associations or *civil governments*? Is she *authorized*, in the Word of God, so to act? Is it either her *duty* or *privilege* to lend her aid either as a *patron* or an *ally* to *all* parties and projects, no in themselves corrupt, for advancing *moral* reforms in society and in civil government?” (p. 1). WM’s answer: “there are great *moral questions* upon which the Church in her corporate capacity cannot pass without endangering her peace, purity and mission, and without ruthlessly trampling upon the most sacred rights of conscience of her members. . . [and] there are multitudes of schemes for the moral improvement and elevation of the race, many of them good enough in themselves, to the advancement of which the Church, as such, cannot lawfully lend her endorsement either as patron or ally.” (p. 6).

Thomas E. Peck, 1822-1893. "Church and State." *Southern Presbyterian Review* 16:2 (Oct. 1863): 121-144. Reprinted in *Miscellanies of Rev. Thomas E. Peck*. 3 vols. Selected and edited by T.C. Johnson. Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1896, 2:266-289.

Student of Thornwell; professor at Union Theological Seminary (1860-93), first of Ecclesiastical History and Church Polity and then of Systematic Theology. An answer to the argument by Thornwell in favor of a statement in the Confederate Constitution acknowledging Jesus as Lord of the nations. See Adger, *supra*.

———. "XII. The Nature and Extent of Church Power" and "XIII. The Power Ecclesiastical Contrasted With the Power Civil. Relation of the Church to the State." *Notes on Ecclesiology*. Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1892, pp. 106-119, 119-156.

Robinson, Stuart, 1814-1881. *The Church of God As An Essential Element of the Gospel, and the Idea, Structure, and Functions Thereof*. A Discourse in Four Parts. With an Appendix, Containing the More Important Symbols of Presbyterian Church Government, Historically Arranged and Illustrated. Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1858.

Locus classicus on the Spirituality of the Church from one of its chief proponents. Development of the author's Inaugural Discourse at Danville. Appendix includes The First Book of Discipline, The Second Book of Discipline, a 1643 letter of Robert Baillie recounting debates concerning church government at the Westminster Assembly; extracts from Gillespie's Notes of Procedure in the Westminster Assembly; the votes passed in the Westminster Assembly concerning Discipline and Government; the Form of Government agreed upon by the Westminster Assembly. "That the general doctrines of the following discourse are no novelties will be manifest from a comparison of the discourse itself with the Appendix which accompanies it."

———. "Of the Place of the Church in the Revealed Scheme of Redemption; and the Doctrine of the Church as Fundamental in the Gospel Theology" and "Relation of the Temporal and Spiritual Powers Historically Considered. The Scoto-American Theory." Appendices to *Discourses of Redemption: As Revealed at "Sundry Times and in Divers Manners," Designed Both as Biblical Expositions For the People and Hints to Theological Students of a Popular Method of Exhibiting the "Divers" Revelations Through Patriarchs, Prophets, Jesus and His Apostles*. Louisville, KY: A. Davidson, 1866, pp. 453-470; 474-488.

In the Appendix, Note to Discourse IV., Robinson provides a succinct statement of his teaching concerning the relation of the secular and spiritual powers by distinguishing what is common to, and what distinguishes, church and state as institutions ordained of God. "They have nothing in common, except that both powers are of divine authority, both concern the race of mankind, and both were instituted for the glory of God as the final end. In respect to all else, their origin, nature, and immediate end, and their mode of exercising the power, they differ fundamentally." In Note D. to Discourse X, Robinson reviews the history of the relation between church and state, and argues for the importance of Virginia Presbyterians James Waddel, William Graham and Stanhope Smith, and the Hanover Presbytery's Memorials for Religious Liberty, in the formation of the American theory of separation of church and state.

Thornwell, James Henley. "Address to All the Churches of Christ Throughout the Earth." Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America. 1861, pp. 51-60. Reprinted in *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*. 4 vols. 1871-1873. Reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974, IV:446-452.

Address of the GA of the PCCS unanimously adopted at its first organization in Augusta, Georgia, Dec. 1861. Thornwell, announcing the birth of a new Presbyterian Church and justifying its separate existence. The first of the three grounds given concerns the Spirituality of the Church: "[T]he course of the last Assembly, at Philadelphia, conclusively shows that if we should remain together, the political questions which divide us as citizens, will be obtruded on our Church Courts, and discussed by Christian Ministers and Elders with all the acrimony, bitterness and rancour with which such questions are usually discussed by men of the world." This should never be done, however, because "The provinces of Church and State are perfectly distinct, and the one has no right to usurp the jurisdiction of the other. . . . The power of the Church is exclusively spiritual, that of

the State includes the exercise of force. The constitution of the Church is a Divine revelation—the constitution of the State must be determined by human reason and the course of Providential events. . . . They are as planets moving in different orbits, and unless each is confined to its own track, the consequences may be as disastrous in the moral world as the collision of different spheres in the world of matter.”

———. “Societies for Moral Reform.” *Collected Writings*, IV:469-471.

A report which JHT, as Chairman of the Committee of Bills and Overtures, submitted to the GA of 1848, and which was adopted by it as expressive of its views. According to McPheeters, *supra*, this work signals the beginning of the discussion of the subject in the PCUSA. “It contains the germs of Dr. Thornwell’s doctrine upon the mission, sphere and functions of the Church.”

Van Dyke, Henry J. *The Spirituality and Independence of the Church*. A Speech Delivered in the Synod of New York, October 18th, 1864. By Henry J. Van Dyke, Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn. New York, 1864.

Pamphlet of 40pp. Henry Jackson Van Dyke (1822-) longtime Presbyterian pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn, NY; and father of Henry Van Dyke, Jr, the more famous poet, author & minister. In this pamphlet the senior Van Dyke objects to the General Assembly of 1864 endorsement of, on the subject of slavery: “the President’s declared Policy not to consent to the re-organization of civil government in the Seceded States upon any other basis than that of Emancipation.” He believed that the church should adhere to spiritual issues and stay away from pronouncements on political issues, thereby preserving the independence of the church.

Vaughan, C.R. “The Non-Secular Character of the Church.” *Presbyterian Quarterly* 2:3 (October 1888): 412-444.

Classic statement and defense. Commended by Palmer in a private letter to CRV as expressive of his own views as well (Montreat, Vaughan Papers).

Wilson, Samuel R. “Declaration and Testimony against the Erroneous and Heretical Doctrines and Practices which have obtained and been propagated in the Presbyterian Church in the United States during the past five years.” 1865; also printed in Minutes of the Presbytery of Louisville. 1865, pp. 82-113. Reprinted in John S. Grasty, *Memoir of Rev. Samuel B. McPheeters*. St. Louis: Southwestern Book and Publishing Co., 1871, pp. 316-27.

The most thoroughgoing and momentous critique of the Northern Church from the view of the Spirituality doctrine, by the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Louisville, adopted by the Presbytery. It declares that the Presbyterian Church (Northern), in its “assumption on the part of the Courts of the Church of the right to decide questions of State policy” had departed from “the true spiritual and divine nature of her calling and work.” Testimony is borne “against all and every movement in the Church, however cautiously or plausible veiled, which looks to a union of the State with the Church, or a subordination of the one to the other, or the interference with the jurisdiction of the other. We testify against any test of a religious character in order to the exercise of the right of citizenship, and against any political test whatever as a qualification for membership in the Church or the exercise of the functions of the Gospel ministry.” The “Declaration” was condemned by the Assembly of 1866 as “a slander against the Church, schismatical . . . an act of rebellion against the authority of the General Assembly,” which condemnation provoked the secession of the Presbytery from the Northern Church. See E.T. Thompson’s discussion of the history of this document, *supra*, pp. 164-175. According to Thompson, pamphlet copies are rare, but one can be found in the Library of the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia.