

Dispensationalism — Forged from the Reformation

“Of all the sixteenth century reformers, it is Martin Luther (1483–1546) who stands out as the premier fountainhead to challenge Rome’s clerical abuses. Yet, his protest did not remain in 16th century Germany. Luther’s calling-to-task the Catholic Church’s captivity of Western Christianity was picked up again three centuries later by another commanding reformer dealing with almost identical issues in the United Kingdom—the Anglican clergyman, turned pioneer of modern dispensationalism, John Nelson Darby (1880–1882). With a focused interaction of Luther’s three most controversial treatises published targeting the Catholic Church in 1520, the methodology used here will be to analyze and compare his manifesto with Darby’s three most controversial treatises targeting the Established Church in the 19th century. It will be shown that identical notions of both Scripture and ordained clergy held by Luther and Darby—though separated by time and geography—are what connect these two reforming giants. Moreover, it will be suggested that Darby simply extended the mantle of Luther’s reforms to their ecclesiastical conclusions. Finally, certain key New Testament texts will be interspersed throughout the chapter giving Scripture its due authoritative honor—a technique exemplified by both men.”
—— Cory M. Marsh, *Luther Meets Darby, The Reformation Legacy of Ecclesiastical Independence*, in *Forged From Reformation*, 110.

“John Darby’s disdain for a professionalized, corrupt clergy that kept the laity under bondage from the beauties of Scripture was matched only by Martin Luther three hundred years prior. And, it was Darby’s relentless traveling, preaching, and writing ministry concerning the church that would bear a subtle, yet, enduring impact on American evangelicalism. Indeed, his treatises and preaching concerning ecclesiastical independency had a peculiar impact on the United States, where he visited at least a half dozen times.”
—— Cory M. Marsh, *Luther Meets Darby, The Reformation Legacy of Ecclesiastical Independence*, in *Forged From Reformation*, 139.

“however blessed as we are all bound most thankfully, to acknowledge the Reformation to have been, was not the case: it was much and manifestly mixed with human agency . . . there was much of the old system which remained in the constitution of the churches, and which was in no way the development of the mind of Christ, by setting up the light and authority in the word.”
—— John Nelson Darby, *Considerations on the Nature*, 1:21.

“The Reformation was seen as a great light in this growing darkness, and most certainly a work of God in which the truth of justification by faith alone shone brightly. Yet Darby thought the movement overlooked much Scriptural teaching regarding the church and substituted the opinions and the preferences of the leaders of the time. These leaders sought the favor and protection of the world, while Roman Catholicism had always sought to control the world.”
—— Cf. Turner, *Unknown and Well Known*, 78.

“This chapter seeks to demonstrate that the origin for anti-Jewish sentiments in the church can be traced to faulty hermeneutics that allegorized key texts intended for Israel, which were fallaciously misapplied to the church. This abandonment of a normative interpretation of Scriptures containing God’s promises made to Israel became an acceptable hermeneutical practice that gave sway to resentment toward the Jewish nation. Moreover, it will be shown that despite Martin Luther’s heroic reforms against papal Rome’s abuses—which ironically included his promotion of literal biblical hermeneutics—he also succumbed to allegorizing tendencies that replaced Israel with the church.”
—— Brian Moulton and Cory M. Marsh, *How Dispensation Thought Corrects Luther's View of Israel*, in *Forged From Reformation*, 180.