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PREMILLENNIALISM

THE Premillennial view of the return of Christ is that our Lord will return before a thousand-year period held to be mentioned in the Book of Revelation, that during that period He will reign upon this earth, and that after that period will come the final judgment.

Many Christian people, believing in the full truthfulness of the Bible, hold that Premillennial view.

Other Christian people, believing with equal firmness in the full truthfulness of the Bible, reject the Premillennial view and hold that our Lord's return will be followed immediately by the last judgment.

Both these groups of Christian people accept with equal clearness and firmness the great doctrine of the personal and bodily return of Christ and reject with equal abhorrence the Modernist "spiritualizing" or explaining away of that doctrine.

Both these groups of Christian people are represented in the ministry and eldership of The Presbyterian Church of America. Have they both a right to be so represented?

The answer to that question can be found only in the doctrinal declaration made by those who took part in our first General Assembly and prescribed for all those who may subsequently become ministers or elders or deacons.

The first clause in the declaration declares that "the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice." There is obviously no difficulty about that. That clause obviously can be subscribed to both by Premillennialists and by those who are opposed to the Premillennial view.

The second clause declares that "the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms contain the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures." Can both Premillennialists and those who are opposed to the Premillennial view subscribe to that second clause?

We think the question should be answered in the affirmative. We think that both Premillennialists and those who are opposed to the Premillennial view may subscribe to that clause.

It is true, the Westminster Confession of Faith and

Catechisms teach not the Premillennial view but a view that is opposed to the Premillennial view. That is particularly plain in the Larger Catechism (Q. 87 and 88).

But subscription to the Westminster Standards in The Presbyterian Church of America is not to every word in those Standards, but only to the *system* of doctrine which the Standards contain.

The real question, then, is whether a person who holds the Premillennial view can hold that system. Can a person who holds the Premillennial view be a true Calvinist; can he, in other words, hold truly to the Calvinistic or Reformed system of doctrine which is set forth in the Westminster Standards? We think that he can; and for that reason we think that Premillennialists as well as those who hold the opposing view may become ministers or elders or deacons in The Presbyterian Church of America.

We think that a man who holds that the return of Christ and the final judgment take place not in one act, as the Westminster Standards contemplate them as doing, but in two acts with a thousand-year reign of Christ upon the earth in between, yet may honestly say that he holds the system of doctrine that the Standards contain.

It is no new thing to take this position regarding creed-subscription. It is the position which has long been taken by orthodox Calvinistic theologians. I think any fears which Premillennialists in The Presbyterian Church of America may have lest their view may suddenly be regarded by anyone in the Church as a heresy unfitting them for ordination are quite groundless.

Of course, that does not mean that a man may subscribe to our ordination pledge no matter how many errors he holds, provided only he is a Premillennialist. Undoubtedly there are many errors held by many Premillennialists, as also there are many errors held by many who are not Premillennialists, which ought to prevent a man from being received into the ministry or eldership of The Presbyterian Church of America. But the point is that such persons are to be excluded from the ministry or eldership not because they are Premillennialists, but for other reasons.

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