



EFCA Statement of Faith: Article 9
Greg Strand, Director of Biblical Theology and Credentialing

Christ's Return

9. We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

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11. We believe in the personal and premillennial and imminent coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and that this "Blessed Hope" has a vital bearing on the personal life and service of the believer. [1950]

I. Introduction

II. History of Discussion

- A. Our intent and purpose was to emphasize the essentials of the gospel.
- B. We distinguished between the purpose and role of a Statement of Faith and distinctives.
- C. Our key identity is our focus on the gospel; we are evangelical. Not only is this our key essential, it is also our key distinctive.
- D. This meant two key, major changes: church polity and eschatology.
- E. Our history/heritage does include a broader statement on eschatology. Consider the Norwegian-Danish Free Association statement of 1912: "XI. We believe that Jesus Christ who ascended into heaven, shall come again in great power and glory."
- F. After three Draft Revisions, it was determined that it would be best for our movement to reinsert premillennialism (adopted by the Conference in 2008).
- G. In the second part of our two-part revision to our Statement of Faith (adopted by the Conference in 2019), the term "glorious" was added and "premillennial" was removed.

III. Logical Flow of This Article And Article 11 of the 1950 Statement of Faith

- A. This follows the biblical narrative, the unfolding plan of God's redemption.
- B. It follows theologically and logically in that the work of Christ applied by the Holy Spirit creates a new community that is marked by a new way of believing and living, both within the new community of believers and outside that community including unbelievers. The gospel changes lives.
- C. Next in God's redemptive plan to bring glory to Himself, as revealed in the Bible, is Christ's return.
- D. This article in the Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*) (9) is almost parallel with article 11 of the 1950 Statement of Faith.
- E. The term "bodily" was added.
- F. The term "glorious" was added and "premillennial" was removed. (2019)
- G. A statement of humility was added, "at a time known only to God."
- H. The expression "imminent" was changed to "constant expectancy," and it was strengthened through the addition of the word "demands."
- I. The "Blessed Hope" was changed to "blessed hope."
- J. The "vital bearing on the personal life and service of the believer" was expanded to include "motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission."

IV. Article 9

Christ's Return

9. We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

- A. We believe in the personal, bodily (Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7) and glorious (Matt. 16:27; 19:28; 24:30; 25:31; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 9:26; 21:27; Col. 3:4; 2 Thess. 1:10; Tit. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:7; 4:13; 5:1, 4) return of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 25:31; Tit. 2:13; 2 Thess. 1:6-8; Rev. 19:11-21).

- personal

- bodily

- glorious

- B. We believe the coming of Christ will occur at a time known only to God the Father (Matt. 24:36; Mk. 13:32).
- C. We believe the coming of Christ requires constant expectancy (Matt. 24:42-51; Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Thess. 5:1-11; Js. 5:8-9; 2 Pet. 3:10-14; Rev. 3:3).
- D. We believe the coming of Christ, as our blessed hope (Tit. 2:13), motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission (2 Thess. 1:6-8; 2 Tim. 4:8; Tit. 2:14; Heb. 9:28; 1 Jn. 3:2-3; 2 Pet. 3:10-14).
 - blessed hope
 - motives the believer
 - godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission

Summarizing connection to the gospel: *“God's gospel will be brought to fulfillment by the Lord Himself at the end of this age.”*

- V. Specific Ways the Article on the doctrine of **Christ's Return** has been strengthened, or new issues addressed.
 - bodily
 - glorious
 - at a time known only to God the Father
 - blessed hope
 - demands constant expectancy
 - motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission
- VI. Importance of Reaffirming the Biblical/Doctrinal Truths of **Christ's Return** Today (which also carries with it denials)
 - Bodily – This is important to reaffirm over against those who would conclude that it is only spiritual.

- Glorious – This is one of the most common ways the New Testament writers refer to Jesus’ return—it will be “with great power and glory” and that it will be “glorious.”
- Certainty – The certainty of Christ’s return is part of the gospel. If this is denied the gospel is denied.
- Future – This affirms Christ’s faithfulness to His promises, over against those who would say that either He will not return, or those who conclude that all the prophetic promises of Christ’s return happened in the fall of Jerusalem, 70 AD (full-preterism).
- Humility – At a time known only to God the Father is s recognition that He knows and we do not. This is over against those who would attempt to set dates.
- Demands constant expectancy – This is an exhortation to believers. Though they profess and confess the coming of Christ, it has very little bearing in the lives of believers. We are aliens and strangers, and we await our return home.
- Motivates the believer – This awaiting Christ’s return is not “pie in the sky” and an avoidance of “living in the world,” but a strong incentive to be “in the world but not of the world.”

VII. Additional Resources

Questions for Further Study

1. Why is it important to emphasize “the personal, bodily . . . return of our Lord Jesus Christ”? By strongly affirming His “personal, bodily” return, what is being denied by some? What does the “glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ” entail? What are the various views of the millennium and what are the strengths and weaknesses of each (premillennial, postmillennial, and amillennial)? What are the ways the tribulation is understood and what is the importance for the Christian? Is the specific timing of Christ’s return as important as the fact of His return?
2. Why is it important to acknowledge our ignorance and the Father’s knowledge of Christ’s return? Who alone knows the day and the hour (“at a time known only to God”)?
3. What does Christ’s certain coming “demand” of believers? What does the term “constant expectancy” mean?
4. How is it that Christ’s coming is “our blessed hope”?
5. Not only does Christ’s coming “demand” a “constant expectancy,” it also “motivates” believers? How? In what ways?

6. What happens if we become complacent about Christ's return? What happens if we become overly consumed with the details and intricacies of Christ's return? How do we retain the constant expectancy, while at the same time giving ourselves faithfully to "godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission"?
7. Generally, there are two contrasting trends (cf. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013], 1056-1059). There is an intensive preoccupation with eschatology: *eschatomania*. This falls into one of two responses. (1) It becomes the primary or preeminent focus of all of life. (2) It makes eschatology the whole of theology. There is also another trend, a fear of or aversion to eschatology: *eschatophobia*. Somewhere between the two extremes of preoccupation with and avoidance of eschatology, we must take our stance. For eschatology is neither an unimportant and optional topic nor the sole subject of significance and interest to the Christian. It is important to keep in mind the true purpose of eschatology. The eschatological truths in God's Word, like the rest of his revelation, are intended to comfort and give us assurance.

Preaching/Teaching Texts

Mt. 24:30-44

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

2 Pet. 3:3-13

Memory Verses

Titus 2:11-13

1 John 3:2-3

Hymns

Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending

Hallelujah, What a Savior!

Jesus is Coming Again

Choruses

Soon and very soon

The King is Coming

Therefore the Redeemed of the Lord

We Shall Behold Him

Appendix 1

EFCA Statement of Faith Commentary¹

Christ's Return

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[11. We believe in the personal and premillennial and imminent coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and that this "Blessed Hope" has a vital bearing on the personal life and service of the believer.] [1950]

bodily—

Though the notion of a “bodily” return of Christ was implicit in the word “personal,” we believe it is important to make it explicit by including the word.

glorious—

Where once Jesus came in the humility of a baby in a manger, he will return in majesty and glory as King of kings and Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:16). As the Risen Lord, Jesus has already entered into the glory of his heavenly Father (Heb. 2:9; 1 Pet. 1:21; Rev. 5:12). When Christ returns, this glorious and exalted status will be made known to all (cf. 2 Thess. 1:6-10). For now, we proclaim Christ as Lord, but a Lord whose glory is known only by faith. This glorious return of Christ will manifest two aspects of his role: he will come as King and Judge.

The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God—

This is a clear biblical teaching: cf. Mark 13:32—“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” 13:33—“Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.” 13:35—“Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn.” All tribulational views must be compatible with this affirmation.

demands constant expectancy—

¹This commentary will only highlight changes from the 1950 Statement of Faith and not expound the theological truth common to both statements.

With regard to the elimination of the word "imminent", our Committee observed that at the time of the merger in 1950, the EFCA was predominantly pretribulational.² In that context, the word "imminent" was assumed by many to mean an "at-any-moment rapture of the church" before the Great Tribulation. This position also had very important implications in the outworking of the saving plan of God in history and in the interpretation of the Old Testament, particularly in the way that passages referring to Israel were to be understood.

Though we know that as early as 1957 the posttribulational position was accepted for ordination in at least one case, now many of our pastors hold to that position,³ and this position was given official sanction in 1977 in a decision of the Committee on Ministerial Standing. In a memo of December of that year, President Tom McDill, on behalf of that Committee, recommended that district ordination councils allow a candidate for ordination "to interpret imminency within his convictions as long as such interpretation remains within the framework of premillennialism."⁴ This policy has prevailed since that time.

Among those who hold this posttribulational view, the word "imminent" is commonly not understood in the way that the original framers would have used it,⁵ and the millennial kingdom has a different sort of theological significance. In addition, the posttribulational position does not require the same approach to interpreting the Old Testament or the same role of Israel in the plan of God.

This change in theological understanding raises an important issue. Some consider it "fudging" when people sign a statement that uses the word "imminent" when those people no longer use that word in the way it was originally intended. We believe that that kind of erosion of a doctrinal statement is dangerous. The elimination of the word "imminent" effectively deals with this already recognized theological shift in our midst and clears away the confusion caused by the different ways this word "imminent" is now used.

We should note, however, that in the final sentence we have retained the biblical emphasis which the framers of the 1950 statement held dear—that the coming of Christ (whether that coming is in one stage or two) ought to motivate the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission. The Bible speaks of our need for constant vigilance and self-control, being constantly prepared as we eagerly await the coming of Christ (cf. esp. Matt. 24:36-51; Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Thess. 5:1-11; 2 Pet. 3:10-12; Rev. 3:3). We can affirm this without specifying an eschatological timetable.

our blessed hope—

²Cf. A.T. Olson, *The Significance of Silence* (Free Church Press, 1981), p. 199.

³ There are some who hold a midtribulational position, which has more in common with pretribulationalism than posttribulationalism.

⁴This position came before the National Conference in 1985 and was given denominational standing in the approval of tenure at TEDS for Doug Moo.

⁵The term is now understood by some to mean "impending," "about to appear," "the next major event in the timetable of God."

The expression "blessed hope" is no longer capitalized or put in quotation marks, since it is not considered a technical term but simply a biblical phrase taken from Titus 2:13. In that passage this hope specifically refers to the "glorious appearing" of Christ (cf. also 2 Thess. 1:6-8). This statement affirms simply that we long for the coming of Christ, whether that coming be in two stages or in one. This statement refers to the "return of Christ" as one big event and is not intended to exclude the view that the blessed hope may refer more specifically to the initial stage of a "two-stage" return of Christ (i.e., to the pre-tribulational rapture in Dispensationalism).

motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service, and energetic mission—

This phrase clearly expresses the biblical emphasis on the proper attitude toward the coming of Christ (cf. esp. Matt. 24:36-51; Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Thess. 5:1-11; 2 Pet. 3:10-14; Rev. 3:3). It expands the 1950 statement's reference to the "vital bearing" that the coming of Christ ought to have in the personal life and service of the believer.

Appendix 2

Frequently Asked Questions – Article 9

Part-One of the Statement of Faith Revision (2008)

Why was the whole gospel structure framework removed with the addition of premillennialism?

From the beginning, the Spiritual Heritage Committee (SHC) set forth a vision to craft a Statement of Faith explaining the "Evangelical" part of our name—a statement of the biblical gospel within the historic Evangelical tradition, incorporating only those theological convictions that are vitally connected to that gospel. It sought to embody that well known expression of Christian unity, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, charity; and in all things, Jesus Christ." It was an attempt to ensure that we truly majored on the majors and minored on the minors. This, we believed, was who the Free Church was – a movement centered on the gospel as we engaged in “the significance of silence” on the non-essentials. As a consequence, the Statement was explicitly structured around the biblical gospel, and it removed two aspects of the 1950 Statement that were not considered essential aspects of the gospel itself: our church polity, congregationalism, and our particular premillennial eschatology. This framework was evident in the all of the Drafts.

After the Board of Directors received the results of their research project, which revealed there was a strong minority – not a majority – that wanted premillennialism in the Statement of Faith (SOF), they asked the SHC to revise the Fourth Draft to include premillennialism. (By the way, all the articles of that Draft, with the exception of article 9, were what was presented to the BOD.) After this was done, the BOD unanimously approved this as a Proposed Revision to be presented at the 2007 national Conference, and it was adopted as our new SOF by the Conference in June 2008.

As you have observed, the addition of premillennialism in the SOF resulted in three major changes.

The first major change was the addition of the premillennial return of Christ in article 9, which was the basis of all of the changes. Here is the article in its two versions, the first the Third Draft, the following the Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*):

God's gospel will be brought to fulfillment by the Lord Himself at the end of this age.

9. We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ with His holy angels when He will bring His kingdom to fulfillment and exercise His role as Judge of all. This coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, requires constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

Christ's Return

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As you compare these two versions, you will notice that we have eliminated the word "glorious" and all language about angels, the coming Kingdom, and Christ as Judge ("with His holy angels when He will bring His kingdom to fulfillment and exercise His role as Judge of all.") because of the objections by some that these terms all referred to specific events in the eschatological timetable which they could not subsume under the term "Christ's coming." We simplified the statement as much as possible to avoid misunderstanding and contention and to achieve the widest acceptance.

The second major change was that the reference to the gospel in the preamble is removed and it is shortened. Here, again, is the Third Draft, followed by the Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*):

The Evangelical Free Church of America is an association of autonomous churches united in a common commitment to God's evangel--the gospel of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again to give us eternal life. To God's glory, the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Our essential theological convictions are vitally connected to this gospel.

The Evangelical Free Church of America is an association of autonomous churches united around these theological convictions:

Emphasizing the critical truths of the return of Christ, along with the essential gospel truths in the other articles, we could say with integrity that "Our essential theological convictions are vitally connected to this gospel." This meant that each of the articles was vitally connected to this gospel. It was a gospel essential SOF. With the addition of premillennialism, we did not believe we could say the same thing with biblical integrity. This is why we shortened it to read that we are "an association of autonomous churches united around these theological convictions." Saying that is accurate to the Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*), but it is quite different than the previous statement acknowledging that all of the theological convictions stated in the SOF are vitally connected to the gospel such that if you do not embrace the statements your commitment to the gospel as understood biblically and informed by historic Evangelical tradition could be questioned. This led to the third key change.

A changed preamble also meant that the gospel headings, which flowed from the preamble, are removed and shortened to include theological titles for each article. This was the third major change. It was no longer fitting or appropriate to include the gospel headings.

As much as we desired to retain a gospel framework, we simply could not do it with a clear conscience. This was the SHC's attempt to resolve the tension between saying we major on majors and minor on minors and we include the autonomy of the local church and premillennialism in our SOF. We had defended the Draft Revisions as a SOF that focused on

and emphasized gospel essentials. We had believed that our identity was rooted in Jesus Christ and the essentials of the gospel, not in our distinctives.

In summary, due to all of these connections to the gospel, we believed it would have been misleading to retain the gospel focus and framework. We believe it not only would have perpetuated the tension but added to it. We initially struggled with this as well, but the more we have pondered this and what this decision to add premillennialism entails, the stronger our convictions that what we did with the structure was right.

Why was the term “imminent” changed to “constant expectancy”?

You will see that we have replaced the term "imminent" with "constant expectancy." The reason this was changed is because "imminent" is a technical term meaning a pretribulational rapture. In the Free Church this is one of the acceptable positions but not the only acceptable position. In 1957 A. T. Olson approved an ordination of one who believed in the posttribulational position. In 1977 this was formally approved by the Committee on Ministerial Standing, and this was approved by the Conference in 1985 when they approved Doug Moo for tenure at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. When this was done, Dr. Olson stated that he believed it was providential that the term pretribulation was not used.

What does “constant expectancy” mean?

To your concern about the impact Jesus' return is to have on believers, we also believe that a good statement about this in our 1950 SOF has been made even stronger in the Draft Revision: "This coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, requires constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission." As we state in the commentary in the Draft Revision, "This phrase clearly expresses the biblical emphasis on the proper attitude toward the coming of Christ (cf. esp. Matt. 24:36-51; Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Thess. 5:1-11; 2 Pet. 3:10-14; Rev. 3:3). It expands the 1950 statement's reference to the "vital bearing" that the coming of Christ ought to have in the personal life and service of the believer."

Why the change from “Blessed Hope” to “blessed hope”?

Similar to the change from “imminent” to “constant expectancy,” we believed it was also important to change “Blessed Hope” to “blessed hope”. The former phrase is another technical term for a pretribulational rapture, and it is understood in this way because it is capitalized and placed in quotation marks. Since this is not the only acceptable way of understanding this we removed the capital letters and the quotation marks. For those who are not Dispensationalists they read this expression, taken from Titus 2:13, as a reference to Christ’s appearing, not a pretribulational rapture (“waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”). What we are saying is though a pretribulational rapture is an acceptable position in the EFCA, it is not an exclusive position. Therefore in order to make this statement explicit in our SOF this expression was changed.

What does it mean that Premillennialism has been reinserted? Does this affect our interpretation?

Broadly speaking this means that the EFCA will still be premillennial. But we will still be premillennial in all of this breadth with all of its nuances which has been true since 1977. This means we embrace a premillennialism that consists of Dispensationalism, Progressive Dispensationalism and Historic Premillennialism, along with the pre, mid, or post tribulation positions. As we learned at the 2007 Midwinter Ministerial, however, the Historic Premillennial hermeneutic is similar to the hermeneutic of Amillennialism, the key difference being in how they interpret Revelation 20. In the Free Church one can embrace one of those, but they must not deny the other positions or refuse to live and minister with those of another perspective. We are premillennial, but there is liberty granted within the broader premillennial category. Within the broader premillennial category we engage in "the significance of silence," much like we do with the Arminian and Calvinist position.

What is stated in article 9 on premillennialism?

It contains a statement of certainty (Christ will return personally and bodily), a statement of humility (at a time known only to God), a statement of ethical implication ("motivates the believer") and a statement of identity ("premillennial"). Because of the confusion with the term "imminent," the article refers to the preparedness as "constant expectancy." "Our blessed hope" (Tit. 2:13) is not to be used as a reference to the pretribulation rapture but rather to the return of Christ, and it is Christ's return that motivates the believer.

It appears that the SHC did not uphold our spiritual heritage for much of this discussion.

We were aware of all of our history and heritage, which includes 1950 but goes further back than that. For example, when recommending that the Free Church broaden our position on eschatology, though it was a change from our 1950 Statement of Faith, it was consistent with the article on eschatology from the 1912 Statement of Faith of the Norwegian-Danish Free Association: "XI. We believe that Jesus Christ who ascended into heaven, shall come again in great power and glory." They focused on the essentials of the return of Christ, which was the attempt in three Draft Revisions of the Statement of Faith. Though this broadened position is not part of the Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*), it has been present in our history.

Is there a single way the Bible is interpreted in the Free Church? Is there a single hermeneutic for understanding Israel in the EFCA?

This question is asked as if there is a single hermeneutic in the Free Church. This is not true. Even within the premillennial understanding of eschatology, which is the only position allowed in the EFCA SOF, there are significant differences between a Dispensational, Progressive Dispensational and Historic Premillennial interpretation of the Bible. All of these eschatology positions are committed to the inerrancy of the Bible and the premillennial return of Christ (granted liberty on the question of the tribulation, pre, mid or post), but among them are differences of understanding of Israel and the Church, prophecy, promise, fulfillment in Christ, the land. These differences are espoused by those who are premillennial and committed to the inspiration, inerrancy and authority of the Bible.

Is premillennialism the only millennial position that embraces the doctrine of inerrancy?

It is one of them, and we thank God for that, but not the only one. Many of the most ardent and ablest defenders of inerrancy through the years have not been premillennial: Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, Charles Hodge, J. Gresham Machen (these were all amillennial). Additionally, there is not a causal connection between a denial of inerrancy and eschatology. Most of those in denominations that have become liberal have done so through a denial of inerrancy and the deity of Christ, not eschatology. It is true that some of the denominations that have become liberal are not premillennial, but their eschatological position is not the cause for going liberal.

Was this revision an attempt to become more inclusive of evangelicals more broadly, especially with the suggestion in the first three draft revisions to broaden our statement on eschatology?

Our purpose was not to be "more inclusive" but rather to emphasize the essentials of the gospel, and our unity centered in the gospel of Jesus Christ. A result might be that it would have been "more inclusive" for other evangelicals of like belief, heart and commitment to become a part of the EFCA. But we must not confuse purpose, a focus on the essentials of the gospel, with the result, more openness to evangelicals more broadly. We believed our recommendation would have broadened where Scripture teaches us to be broad, and also narrowed where Scripture teaches us to be narrow. We do not want to broaden where Scripture exhorts to be narrow (liberalism), or narrow where the Scripture exhorts to be broader (separatism).

Appendix 3

Frequently Asked Questions – Article 9

Part-Two of the Statement of Faith Revision (2019)

Why should we affirm of Christ’s return as “glorious” rather than “premillennial”?

We believe that one of the most positive features of our movement is that we are centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the inerrant Scriptures, and that we aspire to be an association of believers only, but of all believers who can join with us in affirming those truths integral to the biblical gospel. So we say that we "major on the majors and minor on the minors." In light of this distinctive EFCA value of uniting around the central doctrines of the gospel, our SOF is silent on significant issues on which we have divergence of conviction and agree to disagree, such as Calvinist/Reformed vs. Arminian/Wesleyan views of conversion, cessationist vs. continualist views of the miraculous gifts, believer vs. infant baptism and the young vs. old age of the earth.

In presenting this EFCA identity we believe there is a significant inconsistency in continuing to include premillennialism as a required theological position when it is clear that the nature of the millennium is one of those doctrines over which theologians, equally knowledgeable, equally committed to the Bible, and equally Evangelical, have disagreed through the history of the church. All, however, have agreed that Christ's return will be "glorious"!

Premillennialism is clearly a minority position among Evangelical believers around the world and one widely recognized among us as a doctrine that is not central to the gospel. Broadening the acceptable millennial views in our SOF would allow us to be consistent with who we say we are, and the proposed change will allow us to speak with greater integrity when we affirm that our essential theological convictions are all vitally connected to the gospel and that they set forth "sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God," which he has now entrusted to us (1 Tim. 1:10-11).

What is the significance of the truth of Christ’s return being “glorious”?

This change will strengthen our Statement of Faith inasmuch as our current failure to affirm that the return of Christ will be "glorious" is a significant deficiency in what we proclaim about the coming of Christ. The conviction that our Lord Jesus Christ will return in glory was fundamental to the faith of the first Christians, and this aspect of his return is currently missing in our SOF. His return in glory was asserted by Jesus himself (Mt. 24:30; 25:31; Luke 9:26), and it reflected the notion that his vindication through the resurrection would be revealed to all at his return (Mt. 24:30; Rev. 19). His glorious return was also an assurance to the first believers that their suffering would not be in vain, for when he returns they would share in his glory (Phil. 3:21; Col. 3:4; 1 Pet. 4:13). Indeed, it is integral to faith, for as Paul writes, "We wait for this blessed hope: the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

It is this glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ which is our “blessed hope.” This, furthermore, is foundational for living our lives with “constant expectancy,” which is the mark of Christians. And while we wait for the Lord’s return, we are joyfully motivated “to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.”

Does the removal of the term “premillennial” mean one can no longer embrace the premillennial position?

Not at all. The EFCA has been exclusively premillennial, including the various positions within premillennialism consisting of dispensational, progressive dispensational, historic premillennial, and progressive covenantalism. This revision would mean the EFCA is no longer exclusively premillennial, but that there is openness on the millennial question. Although this revision would mean the EFCA is no longer exclusively premillennial, no one would be required to change their own personal premillennial view. It means other millennial views would also be acceptable.

What is the history of the church’s understanding of the millennium?

Throughout the history of the church, various millennial views have been emphasized at different periods of time. During those times of a specific millennial emphasis, the other millennial views were still present, but not prominent. Here is a broad and general historical overview, with the last period focusing primarily on the United States: 1st–4th centuries: Premillennial (Chiliasm) (Justin Martyr) and Amillennial (Cyprian); 5th–16th centuries: Amillennial (Augustine, Luther, Calvin); 17th-18th centuries: Postmillennial (Jonathan Edwards [Puritan and Anglo-American]); 19th-20th centuries: Premillennial (Darby [Dispensational]); 21st century: Premillennial (Ladd [Historic]) and Amillennial (Hoekema).

If we remove premillennialism from our Statement of Faith, is this a slippery slope to undermine the authority of the Bible or a denial of inerrancy?

Raising a concern about some possible outcome does not necessarily make it so. Being aware of it is wise. Knowing what some of the intentional and unintentional implications of decisions is important, as far as those can be known. However, the slippery slope argument is a logical fallacy, which is often used to close down discussion. Here is an example of this fallacy. Statement: “You said that if we allow A to happen, then Z will eventually happen too, therefore A should not happen.” Response: “The problem with this reasoning is that it avoids engaging with the issue at hand, and instead shifts attention to (often extreme) hypotheticals. Because no proof is presented to show that such hypotheticals will in fact occur, this fallacy has the form of an appeal to emotion fallacy by leveraging fear. In effect the argument at hand is unfairly tainted by unsubstantiated conjecture.” What would change the nature of this issue raised or concern is if there were actual validations made to support the claim. Then it would not be a slippery slope but an argument from causation, i.e., this cause results to this effect. In this instance, it would mean that having any other view than premillennialism results in a denial of inerrancy. This cannot be validated. In fact, the history of the last century speaks a contrary messages, as summarized by one: “the bell weather seminary for orthodoxy throughout the entirety of the 20th century was Westminster Theological Seminary, which has always had a

faculty that for the most part held to amillennialism. The Seminary even started in the late 1920's by separating from the liberal Princeton Seminary and starting a new one."

If we broaden our view of the millennium, will that open the door to theological liberals?

Broadening our view of the millennium is not a stand-alone doctrine that will open Pandora's Box, since we also must affirm the rest of the doctrines espoused in our SOF, which ensure our orthodox, evangelical theology, all in submission to the Bible as the "ultimate authority". Many of the ardent defenders of inerrancy through the years have been premillennialists. But ardent defenders of inerrancy are not limited to premillennialists. For example, consider the following list throughout history: Augustine (4th-5th centuries), Martin Luther (16th century), John Calvin (16th century), Jonathan Edwards (18th century), Charles Hodge (19th century), B. B. Warfield (19th-20th centuries), J. Gresham Machen (20th century), Greg Beale (21st century).

It is important to remember that anyone who affirms the EFCA statement on eschatology in Article 9 must also affirm the complete SOF "without mental reservation." If this amendment is adopted, one would have to affirm not only Article 9 on Christ's Return, but the whole of the SOF. It would also be required to go back to the beginning and affirm the doctrine of the Trinity, God's exhaustive foreknowledge, and God's purpose in creation and redemption (Article 1), the inerrant and authoritative Scriptures (Article 2), God's creation of Adam and Eve in his image, who sinned and are under God's wrath, and that it is only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed (Article 3), Jesus' atoning death and victorious resurrection (Article 5), and unbelievers experiencing condemnation and eternal conscious punishment (Article 10). These are all biblical truths and strong doctrinal affirmations included in our SOF. These are both explicit statements of doctrinal affirmation and implicit hedges/fences to keep out those who deny biblical and theological truth espoused in our SOF. No theological liberal would affirm these biblical truths in our SOF. And if they did, they would not be a theological liberal, but an Evangelical.

If we remove premillennialism, is the next step to remove eternal conscious punishment?

Even though one may have concerns with what is done with premillennialism and what might be done with other doctrines, it is important that one of the very arguments/reasons we recommend broadening our view of the millennium is the very same argument/reason we retain our view of "eternal conscious punishment" (Article 10). In our discerning of dogmatic rank, one of the items in our taxonomy is the historical consensus of the church. It is one of 6 issues, grounded in the absolute authority of God's Word. The Bible alone, *sola Scriptura*, is the final and absolute authority. And yet, theology and historical theology, even though it is not absolute, does play a ministerial role that cannot simply be set aside or ignored. In many ways, the historical consensus of the church becomes the first commentary we consult when we approach interpretation of the Scripture.

So, bearing this in mind, and in light of what we are recommending regarding premillennialism and the concerns raised related to denying eternal conscious punishment, the same argument is used to affirm expanding our millennial view and to retain our view of eternal conscious punishment. In sum, the very consensus against retaining premillennialism is the same

consensus for continuing to affirm our view of eternal conscious punishment. Historical consensus is not the only thing to consider as we seek to exegete the Scriptures, the absolute authority, but it is one of the important things to consider. In fact, a helpful way to consider the history of Christian doctrine and historical theology is that of a commentary on the Scriptures.

There is one more important thing to say about this. Just as no parent can guarantee that their children will become Christians, neither can anyone absolutely guarantee that a local church or a denomination will not change on some of these essential doctrines. But we must do all we can to be faithful to teach and model/live by these essentials so that the next generation does “get it” with both head and heart. As we have done in various settings in giving an historical overview of the millennial views through history, there is no absolute consensus. For that reason, if historical theology is to play the role of a commentary on Scripture, there are some absolutes regarding eschatology that must be affirmed. Premillennialism which focuses on the temporary specificity of Christ’s return is not an aspect of eschatology that falls into an absolute category. On the other hand, if one looks at historical theology on the doctrine of “eternal conscious punishment,” there is a strong consensus among the commentary through time, which is the orthodox view. So, historical theology plays a ministerial role, to the magisterial role of the Scriptures. *Sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone, Scripture supremely, is the absolute authority. But that is not to deny there are other supports to the absolute authority of the Scriptures, similar to what the Reformers meant when they affirmed *sola Scriptura*.

Is this an attempt to become more inclusive of Evangelicals more broadly?

If you read the Rationale carefully, you will see the motivation is not to “be more inclusive and tolerant.” Rather, it is an attempt to be more consistent with who we say we are – we focus on the essentials of the gospel and we grant liberty/charity on those issues that are non-essentials of the gospel. Another way to state this is that we major on major biblical and doctrinal matters, while we acknowledge those biblical and doctrinal matters that are minor. In other words, we emphasize and focus on those biblical doctrines that are “of first importance” (1 Cor. 15:3), while we also acknowledge those matters that are considered “disputable matters” (Rom. 14:1), over which we will not quarrel or divide.” Another way to state this is that our purpose was not to “be more inclusive and tolerant,” but rather to emphasize the essentials of the gospel, and our unity centered in the gospel of Jesus Christ. A result might be that it would have been “more inclusive” for other evangelicals of like belief, heart and commitment to become a part of the EFCA. But we must not confuse purpose, a focus on the essentials of the gospel, with the result, more openness to evangelicals more broadly. We believe this motion to broaden our statement on eschatology will broaden where Scripture teaches us to be broad and remain narrow where Scripture mandates to be narrow. We do not want to broaden where Scripture exhorts to be narrow (liberalism), or narrow where the Scripture teachers to be broader (separatism).

This is the second revision to our Statement of Faith in ten years. What is next?

Some have raised a concern that this is now the second time we are revising our Statement of Faith in ten years (2005-2008 and now 2017-2019). What is next? However, a more accurate way to describe this, which is how the Board of Directors approaches this, is that this is really a

part 2 of a single process begun in 2005. In fact, the discussion at the Conference at which we adopted the 2008 Statement of Faith reflected this issue would be addressed again at some point in the future. Not to have brought it up again would have indicated we as leaders had not listened and responded to the discussion and sentiment of the delegates at that time. In reality, this is the completion of a single SOF review and revision process begun in 2005. With this history in mind, some expected this discussion to happen much sooner than 11 years.

Is this a move away from our hermeneutic?

There is not a singular hermeneutic in the EFCA which results in a singular understanding of premillennialism. There are several understandings of premillennialism that are already acceptable within the EFCA. Within the broader Premillennial view there consists Dispensationalism, Progressive Dispensationalism, and Historic Premillennialism. All of these views are presently acceptable in the EFCA. With various views of the tribulation allowed, and with the various views of premillennialism allowed, there are differences in how the inspired and inerrant and authoritative Scriptures are interpreted now. That is to say, while we clearly agree on many important hermeneutical principles, there is no single hermeneutic in the EFCA. Furthermore, as we have stated in many district SOF Q&As, when we affirm the authority of the Scriptures we do so with the conviction and practice of understanding our hermeneutic sits underneath Scripture, not above it. Granted, those who affirm a Dispensational premillennial understanding of the Scriptures and those who affirm an Historic premillennial view of the Scriptures, both views acceptable in the EFCA, follow different hermeneutical principles. But, importantly, they both affirm the Bible is “without error” and the “ultimate authority.” If there is a single line explaining our hermeneutic it is the expression “Jesus – Israel’s promised Messiah” (Article 4).

What this would mean is that this matter would be placed in the same category as the issues young earth or old earth, Covenantal or Dispensational, Calvinist or Arminian, baptistic or paedobaptistic, cessationist or charismatic. And there are hermeneutical differences among those views of various theological issues. The millennium would be placed in that same category. We truly are together for the gospel of Jesus Christ, such that we gather in our churches around the truth of the gospel, even if there are differences on secondary or tertiary matters, believing this oneness in truth and unity grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ is a partial recognition and fulfillment of the oneness for which Jesus prayed, and the oneness his death purchased/created.

What does a “consensus hermeneutic” mean?

By “consensus hermeneutic,” we mean the hermeneutic which is *grounded in* the Trinitarian God who speaks (Article 1), which is *governed by* the inspired, inerrant and authoritative Scriptures (Article 2), which is *reflected in* the doctrinal truths espoused in our whole Statement of Faith, which has been *approved by* the EFCA Conference."

If this motion passes, and we are no longer exclusively premillennial, what can we say about eschatology?

This is asked as if the decision is made to broaden our statement on eschatology, we have little or nothing to say. However, if you read Article 9 carefully, you will realize there is much that can and must be said about Christ's return. If the motion passes, here is what one can and must say, briefly, to one who asks what the EFCA believes on eschatology: "We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission." That, actually, is quite a bit. It reflects the central and essential truths espoused in Scripture, and also our own history as it also echoes the Norwegian-Danish Free Church Association Statement of Faith (Article IX): "We believe that Jesus Christ, who ascended into heaven, shall come again in great power and glory." Even more importantly than our history, we believe it emphasizes the key cosmic eschatological truths from the Scriptures.