

## **EFCA Motion to Amend Article 9 of the Statement of Faith Responses Related to Seven Key Issues Spiritual Heritage Committee**



Over the course of the past two years, a member of the Board of Directors and a member of the Spiritual Heritage Committee have engaged in 20 different Statement of Faith Question and Answer (Q&A) times related to the [motion to amend](#) Article 9 of the Statement of Faith. There will be one more Q&A held during EFCA One prior to the [Business Session](#), at which time the motion to amend will be discussed and determined.

This document is a form of a FAQ. The issues are delineated in seven categories: History, Rationale, Structure, Process, Hermeneutics, Distinctives and Ethos, Slippery Slope. Under each category, some of the items are stand-alone, while other items build on one another. All points under each of the categories are in some way cumulative in an attempt to respond to questions in a statement form.

In addition to this document, please see other helpful documents to aid in your processing of and preparation for the discussion and decision of the motion to amend Article 9 at our upcoming Business Session. You will find those documents at [Resources and References](#).

### **History**

1. 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: 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries: Premillennial (Chiliasm) (Justin Martyr) and Amillennial (Cyprian); 5<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries: Amillennial (Augustine, Luther, Calvin); 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries: Postmillennial (Jonathan Edwards [Puritan and Anglo-American]); 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries: Premillennial (Darby [Dispensational]); 21<sup>st</sup> century: Premillennial (Ladd [Historic]) and Amillennial (Hoekema).
2. Although the premillennial view has been in our Statement of Faith (SOF) since 1950, it is not reflective of all of our history.
3. In 1912 the SOF adopted at the merger of the Norwegian-Danish Free Church Association stated the following regarding eschatology: “9. We believe that Jesus Christ who ascended into heaven, shall come again in great power and glory.”
4. The Ministerial Association of the Evangelical Free Church of America (Swedish) (1947, Article VII) and the merger SOF of the EFCA (1950, Article 11) is the same and affirms the following: “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.”
5. In 1957 Arnold T. Olson, president of the EFCA, approved Stan Conrad as an EFCA ordained missionary to Japan while affirming a posttribulational view.
6. In 1977 the Committee on Ministerial Standing (now referred to as the Board of Ministerial Standing [BOMS]), under Tom McDill’s leadership, affirmed that the various tribulational positions (pre-, mid-, post-) were acceptable in the Free Church for those being credentialed, while requiring one must be premillennial.
7. In 1985 the Conference discussed and approved Douglas J. Moo and D. A. Carson for tenure, with both affirming an historic premillennial, posttribulational position.
8. The key implication from the 1977 and 1985 decisions, most significantly the latter decision by the Conference, was to broaden the interpretative understandings (hermeneutics) of the inerrant and authoritative Scriptures. Although still premillennial, an historic premillennial view

(posttribulational) shares much in common hermeneutically with an amillennial view in the interpretation of the Bible.

9. In 2005-2007 three draft revisions of the EFCA SOF did not include premillennialism: First Draft, December 2005; Second Draft, February 2006; Third Draft, February 2007.
10. In 2007 premillennialism was reinserted into the proposed revision presented to the Conference, which was affirmed in 2008 by 86% of the delegates. In adopting the [SOF](#), Article 9, Christ's Return, affirms the following: "9. We believe in the personal, bodily and premillennial 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."
11. Because the whole SOF was a pass or fail motion to amend, the Board of Directors' (BOD) decision to reinsert premillennialism was because they did not want to lose all of the other strengths included in the SOF. However, the Conference discussion reflected that even though this was the best decision for now, at some point in the future premillennialism ought to be addressed again.
12. The [motion to amend Article 9](#), Christ's Return, consists of the following: "9. We believe in the personal, bodily and ~~premillennial~~ **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."

### Rationale

1. This amendment better reflects what we say about ourselves. We believe one of the most positive features of our movement is that we are centered in the inerrant Scriptures and on the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in those Scriptures, and that we aspire to be an association of churches of believers only, but of all believers who can join with us in affirming those truths integral to the authoritative Scriptures, the biblical gospel, and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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.
2. This amendment will improve our SOF 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. The "glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" is our "blessed hope."
3. This amendment will help to strengthen the integrity of our SOF as it operates in our churches, as some do not require an affirmation of premillennialism in their churches and even by their pastors. The proposed change is by no means a concession to a weakened view of biblical truth. It is rather a recognition that not dealing with the widely held discrepancy between our commitment to uniting around the central truths of the gospel and our inclusion of premillennialism as a required theological position may, in fact, undermine the authority of our SOF in our churches.
4. This amendment will not diminish our adherence to biblical inerrancy nor change our framework for interpreting the Bible. This change is fully consistent with our unwavering adherence to biblical inerrancy and to our shared framework for interpreting the Bible which entails discerning the intended meaning of the biblical writers understood in the context of the whole of the canonical Scriptures which ultimately point us to Jesus as "Israel's promised Messiah" (Article 4). (Some may conclude it will, but that is based on the inaccurate notion that there is a singular hermeneutic at the present time in the EFCA.)
5. This amendment will be in the best interest of the future of our movement. The SOF decision in 2008 looked to the past – now we want to look to the future, grounded in the Scriptures, with awareness of our past. We need to allow the EFCA to be who we always were, but in the present

circumstances in which we are more engaged with a broader swath of born-again, Bible-believing, orthodox Evangelicals. In a culture that is becoming more hostile to the Bible and biblical truth, we need to unite more than ever around the essentials of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and articulate essentialist doctrine in our SOF that sets forth “sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God” which he has entrusted to us.

6. In light of all the other theological issues on which we seek to be doctrinal essentialist (not doctrinal minimalist), while granting charity of view within acceptable parameters, the discussion and decision before the Conference is whether or not premillennialism ought to remain in our SOF and be the exclusive millennial view, or if it ought to be one of a number of acceptable views on the millennium, similar to other issues.
7. Here is the heart of the issue. The insistence in the EFCA that you must be premillennial is in conflict with our strong value of unity in the gospel in which we major on the majors. And what is central to the gospel—and ought to be central in our SOF—is that the coming of Christ will be glorious. Our SOF reflects a desire for unity in the fundamental tenets of the gospel. We are silent on those doctrines which through the centuries have divided Christians of equal dedication, Biblical knowledge, spiritual maturity and love for Christ. We are silent except in this one place—where we come down on one particular view—and we require that only those who are premillennialists can be full members of our association, and in many cases, of our churches. Many see a significant conflict here. You can be young earth or old earth, you can be Covenantal or Dispensational, you can be Calvinist or Arminian, you can be credobaptistic or paedobaptistic, you can be cessationist or charismatic, but you must be premillennial. For many, this is a tension that ought to be addressed—we must either quit saying that we major on the majors or we must quit requiring premillennialism as the one eschatological position that is allowed among us. This amendment is designed to discuss and seek to resolve this conflict.
8. In the earlier discussion (2005-2008), the BOD decided to remove premillennialism before presenting the final document to revise the SOF to the Conference. This time the BOD decided it was best for the Conference to decide whether or not premillennialism should remain in our SOF, since this best reflects our congregational polity. Furthermore, during the earlier discussion and decision although there was an awareness of the present and the future ministry of the EFCA, the emphasis was looking back to the past. With this in mind, the question asked was “who might we lose?” This time, while being aware of the past, the emphasis is evidenced in the question, “who might we not gain?”

## **Structure**

1. Because the major doctrinal point of discussion during the SOF revision process (2005-2008) addressed premillennialism, we believe it important to address that single issue, which is reflected in the replacement of the word/doctrine “premillennial” with the term “glorious.”
2. The gospel headings used in earlier draft revisions without the term premillennial were removed when premillennialism was reinserted. Although many considered these headings a strength of the SOF, we believe it is best for the Conference to make a decision about the single issue of “premillennialism,” without adding the gospel headings.

## **Process**

1. During the previous SOF revision, it was stated during the Conference discussion when the SOF revision was approved (2008) that premillennialism would come up again. There was no date given, but considering the Conference discussion, there was a sense in which our accountability to the Conference warranted this discussion. Following this closely, the Spiritual Heritage Committee (SHC) brought this proposal to the BOD in 2016. After a year of pondering, praying

and discussing, the BOD determined now was the time this motion to amend to the Conference for discussion and a decision.

2. During the last SOF discussion, the BOD made the decision to reinsert premillennialism into Article 9. The BOD determined this time the Conference should discuss and make a decision about premillennialism, believing this values our congregational polity.
3. The motion to amend Article 9 of our SOF was presented to the Conference in June 2017, and since it entails a change to the EFCA Articles of Incorporation, it could not be discussed or voted upon by the Conference for two years, which will be June 2019 at our [Business Session](#).
4. Since the motion to amend was presented in June 2017, time has been given for questions and answers at every district conference, and also at the Theology Conference in February 2019. This has resulted in 20 different SOF Q&As throughout the country. There is one final SOF Q&A scheduled in conjunction with EFCA One (June 18) prior to the discussion and decision made by the Conference on June 19.
5. Like the previous adoption of the SOF in 2008, if the Conference affirms the motion to amend Article 9 of our Statement of Faith, there are both [Special Rules](#) and [Transitional Rules](#) (TR), which will also be adopted by the Conference. Those existing EFC churches who already affirm either the 1950 or 2008 SOF will have the option of retaining one of those SOFs. This same TR would apply to those already credentialed. Those becoming EFC churches after the adoption would be required to affirm the 2019 SOF. The expectation would be the same for those pursuing credentialing.

## **Hermeneutics**

1. Undergirding our understanding and interpretation of the Bible is that this is God's Words, spoken by the Trinitarian God. This truth is fundamental to everything we believe about the Bible, and why our SOF begins with God (Article 1).
2. We affirm the Bible is "without error," God's "complete revelation," and the "ultimate authority" (Article 2).
3. The Bible is the ultimate authority, which determines everything we believe. This includes our hermeneutic. Hermeneutics does not sit on top of Scripture and force the meaning through a specific interpretative grid. Rather, hermeneutics sits underneath Scripture and is governed and reformed by it, the ultimate authority.
4. There is no single hermeneutic in the EFCA. 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. Added to this is are those who affirm a Progressive Dispensational understanding of the Scriptures, a position between the other two views. But, importantly, they all affirm the Bible is "without error" and the "ultimate authority." If there is a single line explaining our hermeneutic in our SOF it is the expression "Jesus – Israel's promised Messiah" (Article 4).
5. The historic premillennial view shares many of the hermeneutical principles of the amillennial position, one of the major differences being the interpretation of Revelation 20.
6. There is no single understanding of the fulfillment of the promises/prophecies given to Israel, what the coming of Christ entails in the fulfillment of these prophecies, how to understand Israel and the Church, the land, among other issues. Please see the chart at the end of this document delineating the various hermeneutical understandings of premillennialism.
7. There are already various hermeneutical views in the EFCA that result in various premillennial understandings. If the motion to amend is affirmed by the Conference, it will not require anyone to change their own personal view on the millennium. However, it will allow for different views of the millennium, which means the EFCA would no longer be exclusively premillennial.

8. 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".
9. 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 (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries), Martin Luther (16<sup>th</sup> century), John Calvin (16<sup>th</sup> century), Jonathan Edwards (18<sup>th</sup> century), Charles Hodge (19<sup>th</sup> century), B. B. Warfield (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries), J. Gresham Machen (20<sup>th</sup> century), Greg Beale (21<sup>st</sup> century).
10. 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. In fact, in the present day, some professing Evangelicals do not affirm these truths.

### **Distinctives and Ethos**

1. The EFCA has numerous distinctives, which determine our ethos. In this case, two distinctives appear to be in conflict with one another.
2. On the one hand, we affirm we major on the majors and we minor on the minors. We affirm our unity in the essentials of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and grant liberty/charity on those matters that are considered minor doctrinal matters. On the other hand, we require belief in a premillennial return of Christ, which many believe is a minor. The essential belief related to the gospel is reflected in what we are recommending in this proposal regarding our SOF, that Christ's return will be personal, bodily, and glorious, and this return has a vital bearing on both our doctrine and lives. This will enable us to be consistent with our fundamental distinctive, unity in the essentials of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which more consistently reflects our doctrinal essentialist (not doctrinal minimalist) focus and commitment in our SOF.
3. This tension finds expression in our SOF, which consists mostly of doctrinal majors or essentials. However, our SOF also contains a doctrinal minor, or what is often considered or referred to as a non-essential, a premillennial return of Christ. We believe our SOF is a place for doctrinal essentials, not distinctives. This proposal makes that change so that our SOF will truly consist of doctrinal essentials or majors.
4. We affirm our distinctives and ethos are important, but we do not believe these "identity markers" ought to be included in our SOF. In fact, this motion to amend is intended to reflect more accurately our unique distinctive and ethos.
5. We believe our recommendation to broaden our eschatological view on the millennium is consistent with the biblical teaching, and we place the emphasis where Scripture places it, which is also recognized in the history of the church, and our own EFCA history.
6. If the motion to amend Article is adopted, there is much that can and must be said about Christ's return. Here is what can and must be said, 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 statement says a great deal about what the EFCA believes about Christ’s return and the impact his return has on Christians and the church. As noted earlier, it also reflects our earlier history as it reflects the Norwegian-Danish Free Church Association SOF: “We believe that Jesus Christ, who ascended into heaven, shall come again in great power and glory.” Article IX

## **Slippery Slope**

1. Often a concern raised is that the removal of the premillennial view will lead to a denial of inerrancy or the slippery slope to the denial of inerrancy. However, although the premillennial view is not likely to deny the view of inerrancy, it is not a guarantee of orthodoxy.
2. Throughout the history of the church many strong defenders of inerrancy (whether the actual word is used or not) have held views other than that of premillennialism.
3. There is not a causal connection between a denial of inerrancy and eschatology, more broadly, or premillennialism, more specifically.
4. Some of those denominations who have become liberal affirm an amillennial view. But their theological liberal shift/view is through a denial of inerrancy and the authority of the Bible, and the deity of Christ, not eschatology, more particularly the temporal specificity of the return of Christ.
5. 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 are important, as far as those can be known. However, the slippery slope argument is a logical fallacy, which is often used to close or shut 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. In this instance, it would mean that having any other view than premillennialism causes and results in a denial of inerrancy. This cannot be absolutely validated.
6. It is important to remember that anyone who affirms the EFCA Article on eschatology must also affirm the complete SOF “without mental reservation.” Although some who embrace a theological liberal view may be able to affirm our statement on eschatology (minus premillennialism), no theological liberal would affirm the rest of the SOF. Please see above, Hermeneutics, 10.

**Premillennialism in the EFCA**  
**Three Major Approaches with General Characteristics**

<i>Classic Dispensationalism</i>	<i>Progressive Dispensationalism</i>	<i>Historic Premillennialism</i>
1. Christ's return in two phases (for the church then to the world).	1. Christ's return in two phases (for the church then to the world).	1. Christ's return in a single phase (with the church to the world).
2. Pre-tribulational rapture, (though some mid-trib, pre-wrath, and even post-trib).	2. Pre-tribulational rapture (though some mid-trib, pre-wrath, and even post-trib).	2. Post-tribulational rapture.
3. Remaining promises to Israel from the Old Testament fulfilled to Israel in the Millennium.	3. Remaining promises to Israel from the Old Testament fulfilled to Israel in Millennium (though some promises may also be expanded in the New Testament to the Church).	3. Remaining promises to Israel from the Old Testament fulfilled in Christ, in the Church, in the Millennium, in the New Heavens and New Earth. (Some also expect some promises to be fulfilled in ethnic and/or national Israel.)
4. Emphasis on "literal" interpretation of the Bible, focused on the original author's intent.	4. Focus on "literal" interpretation of the Bible, focused on the original author's intent (though there may also be more canonical meaning than the original author envisioned).	4. Focus on canonical interpretation of the Bible faithful to the original author's intent while also sensitive to the fuller (deeper, extended, and even transformed) meaning developed from seeing the parts in light of the whole.
5. Emphasis on discontinuity between the testaments, and between Israel and the Church.	5. Recognizes both significant discontinuity and continuity between the testaments and between Israel and the Church.	5. Emphasis on the continuity between the testaments, and between Israel and the Church.
6. Emphasis on the Millennium being the end of the present age.	6. Recognizes the Millennium as being both the end of the present age and the beginning of the age to come.	6. Emphasis on the Millennium being the beginning of the age to come.