

The Presbyterian Guardian

March 27, 1937

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 12

One Dollar a Year

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Editor

Published semi-monthly by
THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
1212 Commonwealth Building, Philadelphia, Pa.

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THE MESSAGE OF GOOD FRIDAY AND EASTER

GOOD FRIDAY and Easter have a single message—the message of salvation by the acts of Jesus Christ. The Christ of the cross and the Christ of the empty tomb are one Christ with one purpose, the redemption of His people. Unless we see the grand unity of these acts and the singleness of the message of the crucified and risen Saviour, the message which is the only hope of lost men, we shall certainly miss the meaning of Christianity. Our meditation in this season should remind us that we ought *always* to contemplate Christ as our crucified and risen Saviour and Lord, and should cause us to rededicate ourselves to the *perennial* task of witnessing to Him who, through His death on the cross and resurrection on the third day, has placed on our lips the good tidings of salvation.

The spirit of our age puts a great gulf between Good Friday and Easter. A money-mad, self-seeking world, increasingly commercializing and prostituting the sacred things to its own advantage, has set the pace. And a worldly church, conforming to the spirit of our age, is rapidly turning Easter into a festival of springtime and fashion. Good Friday is quite a different matter. As a symbol of the coldness and restraints of winter apparently it serves principally as a background on which the warmth and freedom of the new season may appear in sharp relief.

THE INFLUENCE OF MODERNISM

The modern theology has greatly contributed towards this sad end, for it distinguishes ultimately between two Christs—the Christ of the cross and the Christ of Easter. This distinction is necessary because of its denial of the historical character of the resurrection on the third day, and this denial in turn is rooted in the philosophy that

will not allow that miracles ever happen. Modernism agrees with us when we affirm that Christ really died; it parts company when it affirms that He did not really rise from the dead. The real Jesus of history, according to this view, may be fully explained as a child of His Jewish fathers and of His times, a mere man who was born and who died as other men are born and die. But heredity and environment cannot account for a resurrection. So, on this view, the Christ of Nazareth and of Golgotha is not the Christ of the Easter faith. Only the first Christ is historical; the second is the product of mythology. The stories of His miraculous birth and of His resurrection are legends which arose through the imagination of those who came to believe that He was more than a man.

We can derive small comfort indeed from the Modernist's recognition of the historical character of Christ's death. In failing to accompany us to the empty tomb on Easter morning, he forfeits his right to watch with us on Friday afternoon. For the death of Christ as an historical event has lost its precious meaning for us apart from the fact that He who went to the cross could not be holden of death. The meaning of the cross is no longer properly redemptive, as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, if the resurrection never occurred. We may contemplate the death of Christ as that of a mere man, as the Modernist does, and be stirred by it as a symbol of self-sacrifice or discover in it a philosophy of suffering. But as sinners who are guilty and estranged from God we need far more than the story of the death of a great and good man—we need the gospel of redeeming grace through the crucified and risen Saviour.

MODERNISM AND THE RESURRECTION

Our dissatisfaction with the Modernist's preaching on

What Is Amillennialism?

By JOHN MURRAY

EDITOR'S NOTE: *In answer to many requests, particularly from premillennarians, we are publishing this outline of the view which has come to be known as amillennialism. We trust that our readers will bear in mind our editorial policy as outlined in the last issue. Amillennarians, to our knowledge, have never challenged the right, to a place in the ministry and fellowship of a truly Presbyterian church, of those who hold to the other views mentioned in this article.*



Mr. Murray

IN RECENT times there has been a rather insistent demand for a statement of the amillennial view of our Lord's return. In some quarters the notion is current that the amillennial view is a novelty of eschatological belief, perhaps indeed an invention that has had its genesis in Westminster Seminary. This is, of course, a very grave mistake.

It is true that the term "amillennial" may not have been widely used until comparatively recent times. And it is further true that in many of the debates that have been conducted in times past, in this country at least, the amillennial position did not figure to any appreciable extent. But the view that it denotes is no novelty in the Christian Church. From every angle, then, the demand for a statement of the position is wholesome and timely.

Three Views

Among evangelicals there are, broadly speaking, three views with respect to the millennium held today. They are the postmillennial, the premillennial and the amillennial views. The postmillenarian believes that in the history of this world a millennium will precede the coming of the Lord, that is to say, that a protracted period in which truth and righteousness will be dominant and the world virtually a converted world will intervene prior to the advent of the Lord. The premillenarian teaches, on the other hand, that no millennium will precede the

coming of the Lord but that after the Lord's return there will be a millennial reign of righteousness of Christ over this earth. Now the amillennial view, as the name suggests, simply means that the amillenarian does not believe that he can find warrant in Scripture for a millennium either before or after the advent of the Lord. He parts company, therefore, with both the postmillenarian and the premillenarian.

Amillennialism and Postmillennialism

His difference with the postmillenarian is simply that he does not find warrant in Scripture for teaching that there will be a protracted period of universal and all-pervasive prosperity for the church of God prior to the second advent. The amillenarian does not take upon himself to deny but that in the purpose and providence of God there may be a period of unprecedented prosperity for the church of God upon earth prior to the Lord's advent. What he says is that he does not find in Scripture evidence sufficient to warrant his believing in a millennium before the end of the world.

The amillenarian, nevertheless, does believe that certain predicted events must be fulfilled prior to the Lord's advent. He believes, for example, in accordance with the promise of the Lord, that there must first be the preaching of the gospel to all nations (cf. Matt. 24:14). He believes, in accordance with II Thess. 2, that there must also be the appearance of the man of sin and son of perdition whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His advent. And he also believes there will be the fulfillment of the prophecy of Rom. 11 with respect to the conversion of Israel.*

This belief in the occurrence of certain predicted events does not, he thinks, interfere in any way with his watching and waiting for the Lord's return because he finds that our Lord

*There is some difference of opinion among amillennarians with respect to the import of this passage.

and His apostles, who so consistently and insistently enjoined such watching and waiting, at the same time taught that certain well-defined events must occur before the advent. So, if it was not impossible for the disciples of the Lord and the readers of the New Testament to watch and wait, while at the same time believing that certain other events must occur first, it cannot be impossible or inconsistent for us to do the same thing.

The amillenarian, however, does not find warrant for believing that one of those events that must occur before the Lord's advent is a millennium of universal prosperity for the church of God. And so on that particular point he differs from the postmillenarian.

Amillennialism and Premillennialism

The amillenarian *denies* a millennium after the second advent. In this denial he holds common ground with the postmillenarian. The amillenarian, in common with the postmillenarian, teaches that when Christ comes again His coming will signalize the end of the world. Christ comes, he says, to judge the world. At His coming all the dead will be raised and all, both living and dead, judged. The righteous will enter into everlasting life and the wicked will be consigned to everlasting doom. At His coming the heavens and the earth which now are will be burned, and they will give place to the "new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness" (cf. II Pet. 3:10-13). "The creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). This age will give place to the age to come, the eternal age, when the kingdom of God will have been consummated and when, in the majestic language of the Revelation, it will be true: "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor

crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (21:3, 4). "And there shall be no more curse but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever" (22:3-5).

Now the question might well be asked: Why does the amillenarian deny a millennium after the Lord's return? To give all the reasons would require a book. But in brief his reason is very simple. It is just that he does not believe that the teaching of the New Testament allows such a belief. He says two things: first, that the evidence does not warrant such a belief and, second, that the evidence is opposed to such a belief. He believes that the events which are bound up with the coming of the Lord are of a consummatory character and, therefore, do not comport with an earthly millennium. In other words, he believes that the final judgment and the end of the world so coincide with the coming of the Lord that there is no room left for a millennium after the Lord's return.

We can give now but one example of his argument. It is the passage in II Pet. 3:4-13. The "coming" of the Lord spoken of in v. 4 is surely synonymous with "the day of the Lord" spoken of in v. 10. Or, at least, they both refer to the same event viewed perhaps from slightly different aspects. But this "day of the Lord" referred to in v. 10 is the day in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements melt with fervent heat. And again this day in which the heavens shall be dissolved and the elements melt with fervent heat is, in v. 12, called "the coming of the day of God." Thus we have the "coming" of the Lord, "the day of the Lord" and "the day of God" as coincident with one another and coincident with the dissolution of the present heavens and earth.*

But in v. 7 of the same chapter

*We are not now attempting to set forth what precisely is involved in the dissolution of the present heavens and earth. We are simply stating the fact in the language of the passage concerned.

we are told that the heavens and the earth which now exist are kept in store reserved unto fire *unto* the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. And so the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men is also assigned as the day in which the present heavens and earth will be dissolved. We have already found that the dissolution of the present heavens and earth is coincident with "the day of the Lord" and "the day of God." Therefore the "coming" of the Lord, "the day of the Lord," "the day of God," the dissolution of the present heavens and earth, and "the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" are all brought into the closest conjunction. In a word, the "coming" of the Lord and what we call the end of the world are brought together. In view of this how can a millennium be intruded between the "coming" of the Lord and the end of the world? The plain import of the passage is against it.

The premillenarian may say: But "the day of the Lord," though it begins with the advent, includes the millennium and the final judgment. It designates, he would say, an extended period inclusive of all these events. The amillenarian replies: What evidence can you, the premillenarian, produce from the New Testament to show that "the day of the Lord" includes such a millennium? You will not find in the New Testament, the amillenarian says, any such teaching with respect to "the day of the Lord," and so you have no right to impose it upon this passage. In other words, you have no right to make an unwarranted importation to upset the straightforward force of such a passage.

But again the premillenarian may reply: Are we not told in this very passage that the day spoken of is a thousand years (v. 8)? No, answers the amillenarian. We are told in v. 8 that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." This does not define for us the temporal length of "the day of the Lord." It says not that "the

*We have not space to enter into the premillenarian appeal to Rev. 20:1-9, nor into the amillenarian exegesis of this important passage. We do hope that THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN will some day offer its readers an adequate treatment of it.

day of the Lord" is a thousand years. No, not at all, but that *one day* is *with the Lord* as a thousand years. The sentiment is apparent. It is that of Psalm 90:4: "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." The elapse of a thousand years no more interferes with the certainty of His promise than does the brief period of a day. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness." What promise? The promise of His coming.

Amillennialism and the Old Testament

But the objection has been and will be raised: Does not the amillenarian do violence to the prophecies of the Old Testament? Does he not discard the prophecies with respect to the Messianic kingdom and the prophecies which so graphically depict for us a rule of righteousness, peace and glory? The answer is emphatically no.

Many of the prophecies with respect to the Messianic kingdom, he believes, find fulfillment in the reign that Christ exercises now as mediatorial King in virtue of His resurrection and exaltation. For Jesus is now set at God's right hand "far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that to come" (Eph. 1:21). "God hath highly exalted him, and given him the name that is above every name" (Phil. 2:9). It was Jesus Himself who said, just prior to His exaltation, "All authority in heaven and on earth hath been given unto me" (Matt. 28:18). And are we not to regard Peter as affirming the fulfillment of the promise given to David—that of the fruit of his loins He (God) would make one to sit upon his throne—when he says in his Pentecost sermon, "He [David] seeing this beforehand spake of the resurrection of Christ" (Acts 2:31)? "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made Him, this Jesus whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

The Old Testament prophecies which portray the perfect rule of righteousness and peace find, the amillenarian believes, their complete and consummate fulfillment in the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness (cf.

II Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). He recognizes, indeed, that the portraiture is cast in the language of conditions familiar to those to whom the prophecies were given, and he recognizes furthermore that the language is sometimes figurative and symbolic.* But the literary form in which the prophecy is given does not in any way do prejudice to the reality of the prophecy nor to the reality of its fulfillment. The graphic and figurative language of the vision of the new heaven and new earth in Rev. 21, for example, should not prevent us from understanding its significance, nor does it in any way impair the reality of the fulfillment. "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven prepared as a bride, adorned for her husband" (v. 2). "And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it" (vv. 24-26).

We turn to the book of Isaiah and we find there the Old Testament prophecy that corresponds to the new heavens and the new earth spoken of by Peter and to the vision of the new heaven and new earth in Rev. 21. "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. . . . The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 65:17, 18, 25. Cf. Chap. 66:22). When the amillenarian believes that prophetic scenes of righteousness and peace have real and consummate fulfillment in the new heavens and the new earth he is standing on solid Biblical ground. Let it not be said, therefore, that the amillenarian has no place for such Old Testament prophecy. He glories in such prophecy, for it leads him triumphantly within the gates of the new Jerusalem.

*For an able treatment cf. Patrick Fairbairn, *Prophecy*, pp. 155-176.

Amillennialism and the Lord's Return

The notion is apparently widespread that the amillenarian does not believe in or hope for the coming of the Lord, that he does not have the blessed hope. This is a grave error. He believes ardently in the blessed hope because the blessed hope for him is the appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, the glorious, visible, personal return of the Lord. He truly does not attach to that an earthly millennium ending in the loosing of Satan and a brief period of apostasy. Oh, no! But is he impoverished by that fact? By no means. He attaches to the blessed hope something very much

greater. He looks for and hastens unto the coming of the Lord as the coming of the day of God when, with the dissolution of the present heavens and earth, he will enter into the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. He looks for the Lord's coming, and that encloses in its bosom the consummation of hope and blessedness, glory unspeakable never again to be marred by the presence of sin or death, never to be dimmed by the assault of the enemy. "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev. 7:17).

Valiant for Truth

A Meditation on the Eleventh Psalm

By the REV. DAVID FREEMAN



Mr. Freeman

MAN is given to despair when his affairs seem to be hopeless. There are few who trust in God at all times. True faith is that which still hopes in God even when all is lost. It is easy enough to trust in God when all is well.

What timid and fearful souls there are in the world! At the first sign of danger to their persons they are ready, with the swiftness of a bird, to flee from duty. When the struggle looks hard they abandon the good fight of faith. And at the suggestion of the least pain they are prepared to surrender to the enemy of souls and to silence their testimony for God and His Word.

Timid or Firm

Who has not seen this in the land of the living? Many there are who have shut themselves up in their mountain. Men consider only their earthly well-being and not the cause of God. The reason is they have not identified themselves with God. They abide not in Him and therefore cannot bring forth the fruits of righteousness. Even those whom men have considered strong and mighty in former times often hide in a place out

of the way of battle. There they are inactive. They do neither harm nor good.

To yield to circumstances is to obey the voice of the natural heart, which is a selfish, cowardly and wicked thing. The perverse heart of man asks not what is right in God's sight, but what is safe and to personal advantage. He who thus thinks and acts may be likened to the man who put his hand to the plough and then looked back. Our Lord said of such a one that he is not worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Heavenly or Worldly Wisdom

Human prudence is not the wisdom of God. Even "the foolishness of God is wiser than men." Then why should a soul be unfaithful to heavenly commands and obligations in order to serve some fleshly purpose? It is the path of the highest wisdom to obey when God says, "This is the way, walk ye in it."

In yielding to worldly-wise policies that are based on the fears of men, do not even unbelievers see that such have not faith in God? Do not our actions speak louder than our words? The path of duty is plain when our disobedience causes even unbelievers to wonder at us. If the foundations of truth and honor be destroyed, thus cutting off every hope of security, the