

The Presbyterian Guardian

November 14, 1936

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 3

One Dollar a Year

J. GRESHAM MACHEN *Editors*
NED B. STONEHOUSE

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

THOMAS R. BIRCH,
Managing Editor

THE SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AMERICA

WE ARE looking forward to the second General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church of America with profound thankfulness to almighty God. Very wonderful has been His goodness to us during the past months. When we think of the loyal groups of Christian people who are keeping aloft the banner of the Cross in many places throughout the length and breadth of our country, when we think of the loyal pastors who have for the sake of Christ faced the loss of all that the world holds dear, we thank our God for His favor so wonderfully given to His children. He has brought us through many troubles, and has placed before us a door of glorious opportunity. We call upon all that is within us to bless His excellent name.

A DANGER TO OUR CHURCH

At the same time we are perfectly aware of the fact that a danger faces our Church. That such dangers should arise is only what was to be expected. They have often arisen in similar situations. Ask anyone who is familiar with the early days of the reform movement under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper in the Netherlands, and I think he will tell you that there were violent disputes among those who at first came with the orthodox and truly Reformed church. But God brought that church through all those early troubles. Those who were not really heart and soul with the movement did not finally go with it; the others put petty jealousies aside and were used of God in the building up of a great church. So we trust that it will be with these early troubles in The Presbyterian Church of America.

THE ROOT OF THE TROUBLE

The root of our present trouble is found in those ancient enemies of Christian fellowship—misrepresentation and consequent suspicion. It is the purpose of the present editorial to correct the misrepresentation and allay the suspicion. We shall not be content with doing that in any partial fashion. This misrepresentation must be eliminated *radically*. The last vestiges of it must be removed if our Church is to go forward with full blessing and joy to the accomplishment of its great task.

What is the misrepresentation of which we speak? We can answer that question very simply. It is the misrepresentation that there are some persons at Westminster Theological Seminary or in The Presbyterian Church of America or on the editorial staff of **THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN** who are unwilling to concede the right of their brethren who hold the Premillennial view of the return of our Lord to a place in the ministry of The Presbyterian Church of America.

This misrepresentation has been spread particularly by an editorial which appeared in the October 1st number of the *Christian Beacon*, a paper edited by the Rev. Carl McIntire, who is a member of the Presbytery of New Jersey in The Presbyterian Church of America. The editorial attacked in very vigorous language the Rev. Professor R. B. Kuiper, Professor of Practical Theology in Westminster Theological Seminary, and asserted that in his article published originally in *The Banner* of the Christian Reformed Church and reprinted in **THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN** of September 12, 1936, he had declared or implied that the Premillennial view of the return of our Lord is contrary to the Reformed Faith.

There was nothing whatever in Professor Kuiper's

The Presbyterian Guardian is published twice a month by The Presbyterian Guardian Publishing Company, at the following rates, payable in advance, for either old or new subscribers in any part of the world, postage prepaid: \$1.00 per year; five or more copies, either to separate addresses or in a package to one address, 80c each per year; introductory rate, for new subscribers only: Two and a half months for 25c; 10c per copy. Address all editorial correspondence to: The Rev. Ned B. Stonehouse, Th.D. No responsibility is assumed for unsolicited manuscripts. Editorial and Business Offices: 1212 Commonwealth Building, Philadelphia, Penna.

A Premillennialist's View

By the REV. J. OLIVER BUSWELL, Jr., D.D.

President of Wheaton College

[EDITOR'S NOTE: *We are happy to publish this article from the pen of Dr. Buswell. While some of the opinions which are expressed in it, including the general estimate of the Scofield Bible, are not shared by us, we rejoice in its defense of the Reformed Faith against many of the teachings of Modern Dispensationalism.*]



Dr. Buswell

I AM a premillennialist and am happy to have the privilege of saying so in the liberty allowed within the Reformed faith in the columns of THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN. I have not always experienced this liberty in other publications. Some years ago I wrote for *The Presbyterian* an article opposing certain extremes in allegorical interpretation. The errors were not confined to the premillennial camp, but I thought it best in writing against what some premillennialists taught, to state that I am a premillennialist. The editor, without my knowledge or consent, cut out my premillennial statement. I protested, but was not allowed to state over my own name that I was a premillennialist. I am glad that THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN has a more truly Presbyterian policy.

Dangerous Terms

I. "Eschatological Liberty"

While I am thankful for freedom to be a premillenarian in The Presbyterian Church of America, and to say so in THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN, yet the term "eschatological liberty" is too inclusive for any of us. This might be construed to include such anti-evangelical doctrines as conditional immortality or universalism, though of course this term has not been so interpreted by any in our movement. In fact, articles in THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN of May 4, 1936 (pages 44 and 52) and August 3, 1936 (page 203) limit the term to the millennial question.

I believe that the Bible clearly teaches a Messianic kingdom, a period of time on this earth in which God will vindicate His creative purpose in the

temporal consummation of His redemptive program. Very able scholars have argued to the contrary. I have prepared for my classes a little book on Eschatology. I give a considerable amount of space to the views of Vos and Warfield. This little work, the last of five small volumes in a series entitled "The Lamb of God," will soon be published by the Zondervan Publishing House of Grand Rapids, Michigan. I mention it only because Biblical evidence for the millennium is too extensive for a summary here. (Volume IV of this series deals with the dispensational question.)

Dangerous Terms

II. "Dispensationalism"

Another term which is in need of limitation is "dispensationalism." Although articles in THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN of February 3 and May 18 limit this term and point out that it has a correct use in the Confession of Faith, chapter VII, and in Professor Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology*, yet the term has unfortunately been construed as including that very doctrine of dispensations which is taught in the Confession of Faith. Furthermore, the attack upon "dispensationalism" has very unfortunately been understood as an attack upon the doctrine of a dispensation or economy of things corresponding to the Messianic age or the thousand years, construed as occurring after the return of Christ. We believe that what THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN and certain writers contributing to it really object to is not the idea that there is to be a future kingdom period in God's economy as taught by premillennialists, in which, in addition to the fact that Christ now reigns supreme as sovereign Lord and King over the church and over all the universe, sitting "on the right hand of the Majesty on high," he will then reign in a visible kingdom over all the earth. Some do and some do not hold to that view. We believe that what is objected to is a denial of the unity of the covenant of grace. I wish to register my testimony emphatically for the teaching of the Westminster Confession upon this point. I do not believe

that there are any in The Presbyterian Church of America or in our true constituency who really deny the unity of God's redemptive plan ("the scarlet thread," as we call it, running through Scripture).

Among those who call themselves premillennialists there are many who also call themselves dispensationalists but among this premillennialist-dispensationalist group there has come to be a very strong reaction against the form of dispensational teaching which denies the unity of the covenant of grace. Bullingerism and hyper-dispensationalism are in thorough disrepute among the great majority of so-called dispensationalist-premillennialists. (See *The Foundations of Dispensational Truth*, 1930, by the Rev. Ethelbert W. Bullinger, D.D., a British theologian of the recent past. This is a posthumous work consisting largely of articles written in the years 1911-1913.)

There being this reaction against wrongfully dismembering the Word of truth, many premillennial-dispensationalists have also reacted against certain notes in the Scofield Reference Edition of the Bible, for example, the note to Matthew 6:12 and all notes which place any part of the Scripture "on legal ground" (legal in the sense of human merit through works of the law). I must not claim, however, that all those who reject Bullingerism are awake to the danger of these particular Scofield notes.

Whereas I am ardently a premillennialist, my own personal views are quite extremely opposed to what is commonly called dispensationalism. I thoroughly agree with Charles Hodge, Volume II, page 122, to the effect that the covenant of works completely terminated with the fall. I cannot agree, however, with Hodge's view that there were "two methods of attaining eternal life" (*ibid.* page 117). It is true that the covenant of works is called a "covenant of life" in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, but I understand that to mean a covenant whereby man could have *retained* such spiritual life as he had, not a covenant whereby man could have *attained* anything beyond

that which he possessed. Hodge interprets the words of the Lord, "This do and thou shalt live," exactly as the Scofield notes interpret them, with the comment, "If any man can present himself before the bar of God and prove that he is free from sin . . . he will not be condemned," but will inherit eternal life (*ibid.* page 122). But upon the basis of the Lord's parable of the unprofitable servant, I insist that there is only one way in any age whereby God has even hypothetically offered to give eternal life to anyone who did not possess it, namely, through the covenant of grace.

It is my personal feeling that the general "system of doctrine" underlying the dispensationalism of the Scofield Reference Edition of the Bible does not deny the unity of the covenant of grace any more than Hodge denies it. The Scofield note on page five indicates that the dispensations are various systems of economy whereby God has demonstrated the human race to be a failure. This failure is said to be just as great in the age of the Gospel as in the age of the Mosaic law. In every age man demonstrates himself to be the failure which he became in Adam, but it is generally understood to be implied in the Scofield notes that those who put their trust in God in any age are saved by grace.

One sentence in the Scofield notes to which I particularly object reads as follows: "The dispensation of promise ended when Israel rashly accepted the law (Exodus 19:8)." But even here in this very same note (the note on Genesis 12:1) we find an important distinction: "The *dispensation* must be distinguished from the *covenant* (of promise). The former is a mode of testing. The latter is everlasting because unconditional."

The Scofield notes do teach that the Mosaic order was fundamentally legalistic. This teaching I reject, but I do not believe that those of my friends who regard the Mosaic system as purely a legal system are necessarily heretical. The great majority of them teach that underlying all the dealings of God there is the covenant of grace and that no one ever was or could be saved except by faith. These moderate dispensationalists (with whom I disagree) regard the Mosaic system as demonstrative of the fact that man could not be saved by the law. The Mosaic system (as Hodge actually teaches), hypothetically offered a way

of eternal life in order to show that man was not able to attain salvation by this hypothetical means. This dispensation of law, the moderate dispensationalists say, is not contrary to but consonant with the underlying principle of grace. It is heretical to teach that the covenant of grace was broken off between Sinai and Calvary. It is not heretical, strongly as we may disagree with the teaching, to hold that between Sinai and Calvary there was superimposed over the covenant of grace a legalistic system of hypothetical but impossible salvation by works.

The quotations from a leading dispensationalist in THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN for May 18th, 1936, do not in my judgment fairly represent the system of doctrine taught in the notes of the Scofield Reference Edition of the Bible. Ask almost any ordinary pastor, evangelist, or Bible teacher who calls himself a "Scofield Bible-premillennialist-dispensationalist" and he will say very emphatically that the opinion expressed by my good friend, quoted by Professor Murray, is extreme, and inconsistent with the unity of the covenant of grace. I have argued with this friend hours and days at a time on this very point. I admire his evangelical earnestness but I believe there is a deep inconsistency in his teaching. I understand his books and his conversation to imply that the covenant of grace was suspended in its operation at Sinai. If I misunderstand him on this point, I shall be happy to be corrected, but I must confess that Professor Murray's opinion on that particular part of this friend's teaching is my opinion, and the opinion of many of his closest friends and admirers. However, we ought to remember that this man does actually believe both sides of his inconsistency. He does believe that Isaiah was saved and that salvation is by grace alone.

Now, as to the moderate form of dispensationalism which holds that law and grace are supplementary, but which regards the Mosaic system not as a means of grace but as a legalistic economy, it seems to me that that view of things is manifest in many of the arguments of our amillennial friends. I speak only for myself in arguing that in the successive stages of revelation the various elements of spirituality, law, temporality, etc., run on absolutely horizontal lines. I do not mean that the people are always on the same level, but I cannot regard the Old

Testament revelation as in itself one whit lower than the New. The difference between the two is a difference of degree of fullness of revelation. Isaiah being utterly dependent upon the grace of God through the atonement which was to be accomplished, is, I think, upon just as high a plane of spirituality as Paul in his state of dependence upon the atonement which has been accomplished. There is, of course, a difference of economy but no difference in principle. The moral law in Exodus has the same relation to a man of faith which the moral law in Ephesians has to the Christian. Spirituality and temporality are both found in the Old and New Testaments, in different economies, but not on different levels. For most dispensationalists the idea that the Mosaic system was essentially different from the covenant of grace grows out of the very strong statements of the Apostle Paul in regard to the transition from being "under the law" to being "under grace." If being "under the law" means being in the spiritual state of a godly man in the Old Testament, then Paul's teaching as to the violence of the transition implies a fundamental difference.

I personally believe that the transition so vigorously described by Paul does not refer to the change from the condition of a godly man of faith in the Old Testament to the condition of a Christian. It is the change from the condition of a blind self-righteous Pharisee, ignorant of the true meaning of the Old Testament, to the condition of true godly faith. Habakkuk, and Simeon, and Anna "were not under the law" before Christ came but the Christian church as a whole was under the law before the Protestant Reformation.

I feel that to regard the moral law in the Old Testament as in any sense more rigid or more binding upon God's people than it is in the New Testament, opens the way for antinomianism, which view I have found at least as prevalent among amillennialists as among premillennialists.

In insisting that the Mosaic system was an economy of grace, and denying that it was a system of mere legalism, I believe we open the way to the argument for a literal millennium in opposition to that system which over-temporalizes the Old Testament and then etherealizes New Testament eschatology into a final state of abstraction without sequence.