

## Letters to the Editor

### *In reference to the spring 2007 EFCA Today issue*

- I find it interesting that *EFCA Today* seems to be championing North Coast Church's plans to cancel weekend services ("The Church Has Left the Building"). It's very telling that North Coast's leadership saw two main drawbacks: the logistical complications and the *financial hit* the church will take by canceling weekend services.

Preaching of the Word, prayer, singing and the ordinances should be the focus of our Lord's Day meetings. The good deeds should flow from God's work in our life, not vice-versa.

As Michael Horton has pointed out, the World Council of Churches "began as a transdenominational, evangelical missionary movement attempting to wed evangelism to social concern. Along the way, it began to think that the gospel was about deeds, not creeds. Despite its good intentions, the assumption that continually makes evangelicalism a seedbed for liberalism is that doctrine is secondary to life."

— Robert W. McDowell, M.D., *Cornerstone EFC*, Newport, Vt.

*Reference:* Horton, Michael, "Creeds and Deeds: How doctrine leads to doxological living," *Modern Reformation*, November-December 2006.

- As a missionary with the EFCA, I get *EFCA Today* and usually read it straight through. The article "Blessings of Excommunication" was a rare but tremendous disappointment at several levels. I immediately thought it would be about a person excommunicated from the Catholic church who was trapped in a marriage of recurring adultery or physical abuse who found hope and healing through a body of caring believers. I kept looking for something redemptive and the "blessing" part, but to no avail. The choice of wording in the title either reveals a lack of understanding of the connotations, or intentional shock value.

In my own home church, a similar situation occurred, and the elders went through the biblical process of church discipline. It was painful, and a wake-up call to the body that God demands holiness. The situation was a painful lesson about the consequences of sin, but two families were destroyed in the process—nothing in the situation or the article comes close to a blessing.

The biggest disappointment and lack of sensitivity of the whole article was the author's quote that "a treasure of pastoral advice and procedural prudence, and a source of counsel for wise moderation, was John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*." Regardless of how you may personally feel about Calvin, or how much truth there is in his teachings, history is clear that Calvin had another believer tortured and killed, and more than a dozen pastors imprisoned,

because they did not agree with Calvin's theology. This makes me wonder if you would advocate such a practice in your church today. [While I personally believe that some of the writings of Luther and Calvin contain truth, and there is benefit for believers today, I am aware that some of their ways and teachings were also misguided and extreme.] If you are trying to extend grace, and truly want repentance and restoration in your body, then I would suggest not using the word *excommunication*, and maybe not condoning Luther or Calvin as a model of grace or a treasure of pastoral advice.

— *Loren Ozanne, ReachGlobal missionary in Europe*

***In reference to the winter 2006 EFCA Today issue***

- My question was in regard to the Statement of Faith (spring 2007 issue). Why is the EFCA dropping premillennialism as a test of fellowship? What are they going to end up with? For those of us that are dispensational and premillennial, it always seems like we have to accommodate those who do not hold a strong position on premillennialism. It always seems like those from a more reformed covenant system want us to move toward them, but they refuse to move toward us.

I close with one of my favorite quotes: “About the time of the end, a body of men will be raised up who will turn their attention to the prophecies, and insist upon the literal interpretation, in the midst of much clamor and opposition” (Sir Isaac Newton, 1642-1727).

We are here . . . and we will at least “insist.” In a nice way, of course, in the midst of much clamor and opposition.

— *Bob Roman, Redeemer EFC, Milwaukee, Wis.*

- In a religious context, a “boundary” should not be defined without considering how it interfaces other boundaries. Sometime ago, in an anti-trust suit involving IBM, “interface” was defined (in a technical context) as a shared boundary!

I suggest a Statement of Faith ([www.efca.org/about/doctrine](http://www.efca.org/about/doctrine)) cannot be defined exclusively on its own terms without considering how it stands in terms of its context with all Christianity—even considering those sects that profess some belief in Jesus Christ such as Mormons and Islam. I suggest that the Statement of Faith should be a basic summary of what the Scriptures have revealed—even addressing, as an example, the question of supralapsarianism.

The chronicle of the various councils and deliberations through time—guided by His Holy Spirit—provides the foundation for a summary of the Scripture's revelations, besides that of reading and understanding His Word (1 Corinthians 2:12).

— *Otis Page, Grace Church, Arroyo Grande, Calif.*

• I am writing to share a few of my thoughts with reference to the Winter 2006 *EFC Today* and articles by Dr. Michael Andrus and Dr. David Martin. I will try to be concise, direct and, of course, gracious.

Bill Kynes and Greg Strand in their Q & A make the statement, “This discussion of broadening the position on eschatology is a family discussion among premillennialists.” If this statement is true and accurate, why is there only one side being presented within the magazine that favors the alteration to our present premillennial position? Should there not also be major articles disagreeing with what is being proposed?

Dr. Martin writes: “Whenever I teach the class [prospective-members class in the late 1990s], there are usually more questions about the eleventh article than any other, mostly because folks don’t understand it.” So what is his point? The fact that questions arise only indicates that there exists a theological ignorance that can simply be addressed by putting forth sound biblical instruction and exegesis to such questions.

Dr. Martin goes on to state that our present position on the millennium should be a level of importance to be included within the Statement of Faith, setting the boundaries for fellowship with the Free Church. I am puzzled by such a statement. I am presently teaching through 2 Peter and the *parousia* of the Lord Jesus. Peter would place such a matter in “dogma”—to quote Dr. Andrus. In fact, if what is being put forward by the Spiritual Heritage Committee were actually the case, one of the main purposes for 2 Peter being in our canon of sacred writings could be dismissed.

Dr. Andrus states four levels of theological thought: dogma, doctrine, theory and speculation. He goes on to state that “as a theological view decreases [in a four-fold process], it also slides down the pyramid, from dogma toward speculation.” My difficulty with Dr. Andrus’ proposed process (exegetical certainty, theological importance, biblical emphasis and historical agreement in the church) is his final step in the process. “Historical agreement in the church” sounds a great deal like “church tradition” being an authoritative grid through which sound exegesis takes place. I heartily disagree! It can serve as a consideration but certainly not in an authoritative manner. If so, then what separates us from the essence of Roman Catholic process of “tradition,” which is held in equal authority to the Scriptures themselves? Or, being Jewish, I would state that modern Judaism’s lens of Talmudic interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures is not that far off in its authoritative control of the process of exegesis.

The final step in Dr. Andrus’ process does not answer the question of parameters of historical agreement. Which era, age or point of church history takes precedence? And if there is such precedence, upon what basis is it given? This last step, in my opinion, opens the interpretative process to that which is much too subjective. I make these statements recognizing the overwhelming preponderance of writings within the first 300 years of church history that strongly support a premillennial position, which we presently hold.

I am most disturbed by Dr. Andrus’ statement four paragraphs later. He states a goal of “expecting agreement on both dogma and doctrine issues when choosing pastors and elders,

while general membership may require agreement only on matters of dogma”—along with the supporting logic that “some Evangelical Free Churches . . . (require) agreement on only the first six points for new members, but on all 12 for pastors and leaders”—which leaves me with questions of integrity and authority. Such a practice is a dishonest compliance with what we say is essential for being a Free Church!

My next obvious question concerns the authorization for such a two-level of Statement of Faith being implemented. Our President? The National Board of Directors? District Superintendents? District Boards? Should not such churches be held to account and challenged to comply with our present 12- point Statement of Faith in order to be “in proper standing” with our fellowship? To have such a statement made by Dr. Andrus in our national magazine speaks to me of a breakdown of denominational integrity and authority (even if we are congregational).

The spirit of those who oversaw the forming of our denomination may have centered on the essence of what holds evangelicals together within the two former denominations. Those leaders certainly believed that eschatology and premillennialism was, in Dr. Andrus’ system, dogma. I believe that the differences between those who are premillennial in their theology and those who are not represent profound differences with regard to understanding our present world, the church’s place and role in this age, the well-being and regard for the Jewish people themselves, and the Nation of Israel in particular. And I admit that, for me, those latter concerns are deeply personal.

Shalom Aleichem VeY’shua HaMaschiach,  
(Peace to you in Jesus the Messiah)

— *Dave Greenhood, senior pastor, First EFC, Rapid City, S.D.*