

ARPTalk(Extra6)

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EXTRA!

ERSKINE SEMINARY NOW MATRICULATING JEWISH, MORMON, AND ISLAMIC CLERICS INTO THE DMin PROGRAM!

It is now public knowledge in Due West, South Carolina, and on-line on the World Wide Web: Erskine Theological Seminary, the seminary of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, has and is matriculating Jewish, Mormon, and Islamic clerics into the DMin program. This means that Erskine Theological Seminary is now advancing the professional careers of non-Christian religious clerics.

What does this mean?

1. **This means that the administrative leaders of ETS have jettisoned the stated mission of ETS. According to the ETS catalog, p. 6, <http://www.erskineseminary.org/Academics/SeminaryCatalog.pdf>, "The mission of Erskine Theological Seminary is to educate persons for service in the Christian Church." When did Judaism, Mormonism, and Islam become a part of the Christian Church? How does helping**

to advance the careers of Jewish, Mormon, and Muslim clerics work to advance the cause of the Christian Church? How should we respond to this?

2. **This probably means that the academic standards of ETS have been circumvented.** There are specific requirements to get into the DMin program at ETS. Those requirements are specified on p. 81 of the ETS catalog (see <http://www.erskine seminary.org/Academics/SeminaryCatalog.pdf>) and those requirements specify a MDiv from an accredited seminary or the equivalent thereof – and the equivalent courses are specified. One wonders if these non-Christian clerics meet the academic requirements of the ETS catalog. This is a serious matter and potentially threatens the accreditation of ETS. Certainly the training requirements for Muslim imams are quite different from those of Christian ministers. It seems that the mission and the academic standards and protocols that make for a viable and respectable seminary have been jettisoned by the very people who have been called to protect them. How should we respond to this?
3. **This means that the members of the Board have failed in their oversight of ETS on behalf of the ARP Church, or the ETS chief administrators have acted independently of the Board, or both.** Either way, the ministry and witness of the ARP Church have not been well served by the Erskine Board of Trustees and by the ARP ministers who serve in senior administrative posts at Erskine Seminary. By this point, many readers of *ARPTalk* will be aware that this matter involves the DMin program at ETS for Army chaplains. The original program was launched in 1998. At that time, the Editor of *ARPTalk* was a member of the Erskine College and Seminary Board. The Editor had reservations about this relationship and spoke with the former Dean and Vice President of the Seminary. The contract between ETS and the Army that was framed had specifications that protected the mission and academic requirements of ETS. The Army personnel at Fort Jackson who met the purpose statement and the academic requirements of ETS were admitted into the program. In other words, ETS WAS PROTECTED. This document is on file somewhere in Due West. Since that time, other contracts (two or three MEDCOM contracts) have been written. Once again, those contracts are on file somewhere in Due West. Were these documents seen and authorized by the Board? What were the specifications? Who signed the documents? Did someone act on his own initiative in disregard of Board oversight? Was the General Synod of the ARP Church made aware of the specifications of these

contracts? Who authorized the signing of these contracts? Why were the ARP Church and the seminary of the ARP Church not protected? The current Executive Vice President of ETS has often publicly claimed ownership of the MEDCOM program? What has he wrought? How should we respond to this?

4. **This means that the witness of the ARP Church has been put out for public ridicule. This is not a debate on how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. This is not a debate over a fine point of eschatology. This is not even a debate over the not-so-subtle neo-Barthian denials of the full authority of the Bible as God's Word. This is astoundingly simple and clear. The issue is aiding and abetting the cause of false religions. Some may say that these non-Christian clerics are being permitted into the DMin program for the purposes of evangelism. That is lame and silly! The DMin program is not for evangelism of students but career advancement in Christian service, and the mission statement of ETS specifies that ETS exists for the training of persons for ministry in the Christian Church. Indeed, our brothers and sisters in our Reformed and evangelical community see this clearly and are dismayed at us. This is not engaging the culture! This is aiding the enemy! How should we respond to this?**
5. **This means that the educational services of Erskine Theological Seminary have been rented out to the highest bidder. According to Erskine public relations documents, this situation has existed as far back as 2005 (<http://www.erskine.edu/news/01.27.05/chap.01.27.05.htm>). How is it that the Board did not take action then? Despite the fact that the presence of a Jewish chaplain in the DMin program was publicized by Erskine in 2005, were the Trustees even aware of this? In any event, the matter has just now come to a head. Why have the chief administrators of ETS done this thing? Is it because they are theologically inept? No! Is it because they have knowingly and willfully betrayed the Christian faith? I hope not! Is it because they need a bag of money to support the institution? Yes! There it is! Money! They have sold the birthright of the ARP Church for a mess of pottage. How should we respond to this?**

The new motto of ETS is "For Christ and His Church" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erskine_Theological_Seminary). How does advancing the academic and professional careers of Jewish, Mormon, and Islamic clerics affirm "Christ and His Church"? Is this not a form of institutional insanity? The ARP Church has long been sending missionaries to evangelize people of other religions – the very religionists that ETS is

now accepting and training? The ARP Denominational Ministry Fund, supported by the sacrificial gifts of dedicated, committed, devoted Christian men and women, is being used to train Muslim, Mormon, and Jewish clerics! How should we respond to this?

In perplexity we ask, do these inclusive policies that would be more at home at liberal institutions like the Harvard, or Vanderbilt, or Claremont Divinity Schools than at a professedly evangelical institution like ETS bring honor to ETS? Do they bring honor to the ARP Church which owns and supports ETS? Do they bring honor to the Reformed and evangelical community of which we are part through NAPARC? Do they honor the memory of faithful martyrs such as Esther John (a Pakistani ARP who is honored in Westminster Abbey as a Martyr of the Twentieth Century). Most of all, do they bring honor to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who declared, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Does anyone really believe that Dr. Peter Lillback of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, or Dr. Mike Milton of RTS-Charlotte, or Dr. Bryan Chapell of Covenant Theological Seminary would admit non-Christian students into their Doctor of Ministry programs? And if, in an inexplicable fit of insanity, these men were inclined to do so, does anyone believe that their Boards would sit idly by without so much as lifting a finger to stop them? I didn't think so.

As most *ARPTalk* readers are aware, the Editor is a former Erskine Board member, Class of 2004. At the orientation meeting for new members, the Board Chairman and the President informed the new members that their task on the Board was the "Big Picture." The Chairman and President discouraged us from "micro-managing and meddling in day-to-day affairs." A condescending message was sent: the Administration and the Executive Committee of the Board know best and individual Board members should back off. Over the years, Board after Board has bought into that foolish nonsense, and the hands-off policy continues. In fact, the Board of Erskine College and Seminary met on February 18 and 19, 2010. Was the Board apprised of this situation? Yes. Was a petition from the seminary faculty delivered to the Board asking for an investigation of this matter? No! Has the Board responded to redress this matter? Board members when asked said, "NO!" Yes, the matter was discussed and, in the tradition of 40 years of Board failure, nothing was done. How should we respond to this?

Throughout this *ARPTalk Extra* the Editor has repeatedly asked, "How should we respond to this? Yes, there is a place for righteous anger, anger of the sort that the Apostle Paul displayed when the truth of the

gospel and the saving uniqueness of Jesus Christ were being compromised or betrayed. Yes, the time for action will come in God's time, and to that end we must pray for wisdom and courage. But right now the Editor is overcome with an overwhelming sense of sadness over what ETS has become, and remorse over how we in the ARP Church have allowed this to happen. Let us, in due time and with God's help, do what needs to be done. But in the meantime, let us grieve and repent of our failure as a General Synod to oversee this once-proud seminary properly.

How should we respond? Weep.

These are my thoughts,

(Charles W. Wilson)

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