

ARPTalk

(Extra3)

February 17, 2009

Editor's note: In order to protect privacy of people, all e-mail addresses and CCs have been removed in this issue of *ARPTalk*. The CC list, however, was very long – over 60.

FACULTY “FOOD FIGHT” AT ERSKINE

1st E-mail

From: Crenshaw Bill

Sent: Tuesday, February 03, 2009 9:08 PM

Subject: Is this where we should be advertisting????

I stumbled across this web page today. Embarrassing is putting it mildly. Mortifying comes closer.

How do we attract students to a serious and academically sound liberal arts college when we advertise on anti-science sites???

Here's the

URL: http://www.christianpost.com/Education/Creation_evolution/2009/02/ministry-challenges-darwin-evolution-in-pivotal-year-03/

[Editor's Note: Because of the size of the above document, it has been omitted. The reader is encouraged to go to the site and view it. It seems that the offending point is a discussion that focuses on this question: If Darwin knew what we know today, would he still have developed his theories?]

2nd E-mail

On Feb 5, 2009, at 10:04 AM, Woody O'Cain wrote:

Dr. Crenshaw,

Thanks for bringing this to my attention. Perhaps I'm missing something here but it doesn't seem that The Christian Post, the site where we are advertising, is taking an actual stance against evolution. The Christian Post is merely reporting about what one group, Creation Ministries International, is doing relative to that issue. Our intent in marketing Erskine on The Christian Post Web site is all about trying to reach those students and parents who are interested in a Christian liberal arts college. I have discovered that one of the challenges in representing and marketing a serious and academically sound, Christian liberal arts college is that we are indeed looking for Christian students. But at the same time, we want those students who are open minded in discussing a wide array of ideas and theories in the classroom, including ones dealing with evolution. Rick Hendricks and my entire team welcome all input regarding our recruitment efforts and thank those included in this email for your help and support.

Woody

3rd E-Mail

From: Crenshaw Bill

Sent: Thursday, February 05, 2009 10:56 AM

To: Woody O'Cain

Subject: Again: Is this where we should be adverstising????

Woody — Thanks for your response. I must disagree with your analysis, however. Sorry for the length of my response. This is important

1. Perhaps I'm missing something here but it doesn't seem that The Christian Post, the site where we are advertising, is taking an actual stance against evolution. The Christian Post is merely reporting about what one group, Creation Ministries International, is doing relative to that issue.

They are merely reporting a news story. The article is sympathetic to the CMI position regarding evolution v. creationism, so much so that yours is the first response to see the article as neutral. Indeed, every other response I've received — from faculty, staff, students, and alum — has expressed dismay at the implications. It is clear, I think, that a prospective reading the article would conclude that at Erskine College she would be assured of having a biology department that taught alternatives to evolution. If you do

think that this site is science neutral and not anti-science, all you have to do is poke around a bit. It took me five seconds to find this — not an article, but an editorial by convicted Watergate conspirator Chuck Colson:

The Proper Role of Science

Exposing Scientism

By Chuck Colson

Christian Post Guest Columnist

Tue, Feb. 03 2009 10:39 AM EST

In his inaugural address, President Obama said he would “restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology’s wonders to raise health care’s quality.” By this, many suspect he means to spend taxpayer money on embryonic stem cell research, which destroys humans at the embryonic stage.

Evidently, President Obama has been listening to those who want research funded, some because they are driven by greed but many others driven by a dangerous worldview called scientism.

As Nancy Pearcey and I write in our book, *How Now Shall We Live?*, scientism has its roots in Darwinism. Tufts University professor Daniel Dennett writes that Darwinism, rightly understood, is a “universal acid” that dissolves away all traditional moral, metaphysical, and religious beliefs. For if humans have evolved by a material, purposeless process, then there is no basis for believing in a God who created us and revealed moral truths, or imposing those moral views in any area of life.

Dennett is using a common tactic—using science as a weapon to shoot down religious faith. The standard assumption is that science is objective knowledge, while religion is an expression of subjective need. Religion, therefore, must subordinate its claims about the world to whatever science decrees.

Scientism assumes that science is the controlling reality about life, so anything that can be validated scientifically ought to be done. Other things are subjective fantasy—like love, beauty, good, evil, conscience, ethics.

So science, which originally simply meant the study of the natural world, has in this view been conflated with scientific naturalism, a philosophy that the natural world is all that exists.

Humans are reduced to “objects” that can be inspected, experimented on, and ultimately controlled. In 1922, G.K. Chesterton warned that scientism had become a “creed” taking over our institutions, a “system of thought which began with [Evolution](#) and has ended in Eugenics.”

C.S. Lewis warned that the rise of scientific naturalism would lead to “the abolition of man,” for it denies the reality of those things central to our humanity: a sense of right and wrong, of purpose, of beauty, of God.

And if we deny the things that make us truly human, by definition we create a culture that is inhuman—a culture that, for example, embraces moral horrors like the killing of humans at the earliest stage of life on the spurious grounds that doing so might cure other people’s diseases. Or cloning. Or medical experiments on humans, as the Nazis conducted.

Our task is to expose the flaws in scientific naturalism—not because we are against science but because we want it to fill its proper role as a means of investigating God’s world and alleviating suffering within ethical boundaries. And it’s right that we should be doing this because it was a Christian view of reality that led to the scientific method, investigating all the things God has created.

I hope that the President, in using those words, understood the difference between good science and scientism.

2. Our intent in marketing Erskine on The Christian Post Web site is all about trying to reach those students and parents who are interested in a Christian liberal arts college. I have discovered that one of the challenges in representing and marketing a serious and academically sound, Christian liberal arts college is that we are indeed looking for Christian students.

I have no problem with your goal; however, two other Christian liberal arts colleges advertising on the site are Liberty University (of Jerry Falwell fame) and LeTourneau University who says this about their science programs: "This school encompasses the liberal arts and natural sciences. That means if you love to write, create computer programs, study wildlife or the Bible, this is the school for you. Stretch your wings and try out a variety of courses to see which one fits you. Our natural sciences are taught from a Christian perspective with God as the Intelligent Designer."

These are not schools that we want to be associated with. And don't misread LeTourneau's statement as science neutral. Intelligent design is not science. It is anti-science

3. I have discovered that one of the challenges in representing and marketing a serious and academically sound, Christian liberal arts college is that we are indeed looking for Christian students. But at the same time, we want those students who are open minded in discussing a wide array of ideas and theories in the classroom, including ones dealing with evolution.

Woody, there ARE NO SCIENTIFIC THEORIES COMPETING WITH THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION. I'm a bit shocked if you're saying there is.

Maybe you could bring a report to the faculty on this matter. Our reputations are on the line. Most of us would rather not think our school endorsed pseudo-science by placing our ads in such venues as this one.

Thanks for your attention to this matter. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Bill

4th E-mail

[Editor's Note: The 4th email is from a current Erskine student. Since this student is not an Erskine employee or an employee of another agency of the General Synod, this email has been deleted. All references to this student are listed as "XXXX." The student was in agreement with Dr. Crenshaw's sentiments and asked that the advertising photograph that featured the student be withdrawn from the website of *The Christian Post*.]

5th E-mail

On Feb 5, 2009, at 8:22 PM, Woody O'Cain wrote:

Thanks Bill and XXXX for your feedback and I agree, this is important because everything that we do has an affect on the present state and future of our college. While I respect your right to say what you have said, and understand your reasoning behind it, understanding does not necessarily mean agreement. It is not my intent to represent Erskine as a place that is only specifically for one particular kind of student. That's not the Erskine I knew when I was here and that's not what I have been asked to shape in our future classes. There is obviously a deep history that is part of all this and while I was taught to respect those views which differ from your own, I also must do what I professionally think is right in my role at the college. That is what I was hired to do and that's what I am doing to the best of my ability. If my efforts to effectively market Erskine are in conflict with the true mission of this college, and all that we represent, then I suppose my talents would be best used elsewhere. But I really don't think our marketing approach is in conflict with our mission of being a small, private, academically strong, Christian, liberal arts college. I am not interested in identifying ourselves with schools that have a mission that is completely different from our own. The Christian Post Web site is one of many avenues we are using to get students to learn more about Erskine. We want kids from all walks of life to come visit us and learn what we are all about. My job is to bring in a class of new students who have different talents, characteristics and interests and not to

get into the middle of a political debate. The very fact that my own personal beliefs differ from some of the articles on this Web site does not matter. It's not part of the equation in my job with Erskine. I would appreciate ending this public email forum and if this needs further discussion, then I feel it appropriate for Dr. Weatherman to take the lead with this issue. If having a discussion at the next faculty meeting about this matter is needed, he can decide that and I will be most happy to participate. And XXXX, thanks again for your note and I will contact the site tomorrow about replacing the picture that we have posted.

Thanks.

Woody

6th E-mail

From: Crenshaw Bill

Sent: Thursday, February 05, 2009 9:34 PM

To: Woody O'Cain

Subject: Re: Again: Is this where we should be adverstising????

Woody —

We cannot be academically strong if we undermine our commitment to fact and truth. When we advertise on a site that is so far right that it rejects the findings of science, we will be misleading prospective students and hurting our own reputation. When we respect opinions that are demonstrably false, we undermine academic integrity.

You are setting up a straw man when you say [It is not my intent to represent Erskine as a place that is only specifically for one particular kind of student](#) since I am not advocating that. What I am saying is that we be honest — not too much to ask of a Christian liberal arts college, would you say? Is it dishonest to advertise ourselves in such a way as to imply to fundamentalist students that we are sympathetic to the idea that ID or Creationism are valid alternatives to the theory of evolution? Yes — patently dishonest. That's not what we teach here; that's not what any legitimate academic institution teaches.

You say [If my efforts to effectively market Erskine are in conflict with the true mission of this college, and all that we represent, then I suppose my talents would be best used elsewhere.](#) Are you saying those of us who object to this ad are not supporting the "true mission of the college? That you are?

You say [while I was taught to respect those views which differ from your own, I also must do what I professionally think is right in my role at the college.](#) Woody, I was doing what I professionally think is right for my role at the college before you

were a freshman, when you were a student, after you graduated, when you came back, and now. My concern is for the integrity of the college as a viable academic institution. As is yours, I hope.

You say [I would appreciate ending this public email forum and if this needs further discussion, then I feel it appropriate for Dr. Weatherman to take the lead with this issue. If having a discussion at the next faculty meeting about this matter is needed, he can decide that and I will be most happy to participate.](#) Woody, you expanded my original list and made the discussion even more public. I see no need to narrow the discussion now. Transparency is a good policy, don't you think? Perhaps in the spirit of transparency, you will provide a comprehensive list of all venues in which we advertise. I think the faculty would be interested in seeing how they are represented by public relations, don't you? Seems more than reasonable.

You say [I am not interested in identifying ourselves with schools that have a mission that is completely different from our own.](#) That is exactly what we are doing on this site. Liberty University? I doubt if the faculty would like to reshape this college in the image of Jerry Falwell. The concerns of the faculty should be paramount in any attempt to attract students. As Dean Weatherman and Dr. Ruble both said today, the relationship between students and faculty is at the heart of Erskine's success. What is done out of your office may have more ramifications than have been considered.

We must honest. Not only will we disappoint students who come here expecting a Creationist science faculty — and their number is growing — but we will alienate prospective students who have a sounder grasp of what does and does not constitute science and scientific inquiry. We risk losing the well-informed for the ill-informed. Could this kind of disparity between expectations and reality explain some of our current retention problems.

Bill

SOME OBSERVATIONS

Wow! What an exchange! Dr. Crenshaw is well known as a voice for secular science in the Erskine College community. Woody O'Cain is Vice-President for Enrollment Management whom *ARPTalk* has criticized for seeking the "Furmanization of Erskine" (<http://arptalk.weebly.com/extra-1.html>), They seem to be debating just how "evangelical free" Erskine College should be! Wouldn't you like to be at the next Erskine faculty meeting?

Whatever the outcome of that faculty meeting, Dr. Crenshaw has framed the debates regarding the ARPC and Erskine College in stark and unambiguous terms. There are two competing worldviews.

If what Dr. Crenshaw says about the Erskine College community is true, what are the implications of his words? And I think Dr. Crenshaw has spoken the truth!

Does this mean the following: (1) In spite of thirty-five-plus years of efforts by the General Synod to change the direction of Erskine College, has nothing changed substantively? (2) In spite of comprehensive plans to articulate a view of higher education that is unapologetically Christian and evangelical, have these efforts been successfully thwarted? In spite of window dressings and good-ol'-boy-speak by Erskine Presidents and other administrators, have they misrepresented the actual spiritual and academic environments of Erskine College to the General Synod?

To say the least, this set of questions is sobering!

Bear with me as I point out the following:

- **Dr. Crenshaw is a senior faculty member. He knows the Erskine College community. I'm not going to disrespect him by even hinting that he doesn't know what he's talking about. When he states that communications from "faculty, staff, students, and alum" are in agreement with him, I believe him. I don't think Dr. Crenshaw represents a minority view in the Erskine College community. After years of observation, I say he is RIGHT ON.**
- **The point that Dr. Crenshaw makes about "honesty" and "transparency" is very cogent. Over the years the General Synod has had a view of what Erskine College should be as a Christian college and the Erskine College community has had another view of what Erskine College should be as an academics community. The Administration and those charged with recruiting students have tried to play both sides, one against the other. In so doing, there has been a practice of "bait-and-switch." Students from informed evangelical Christian homes and churches have gone to Erskine College looking for one thing and found another. The "Mirror," the student magazine, has reflected the stridency of this conflict and disappointment. In recent years, students have been so bold and naïve as to challenge the Administration and faculty to live up to the mission of the college as it has been defined by**

the General Synod. If you doubt my words, past issues of the "Mirror" are still online and can be read.

What Dr. Crenshaw does is point out the "bait-and-switch" tactic of recruitment that has been and is still being used. Mr. O'Cain isn't doing something new; rather, he's simply following a long established policy. Dr. Crenshaw says this policy is dishonest. Dr. Crenshaw is correct.

There is another thing that Dr. Crenshaw does. He points out that the Erskine College community isn't an evangelical community of scholars. Dr. Crenshaw points out the secular nature of the Erskine College community.

The General Synod of the ARPC may delude itself with a vision of Erskine College as a distinctively Christian and evangelical academic community. Dr. Crenshaw points out that General Synod's vision and mission for Erskine College isn't the vision and mission of the Erskine College community.

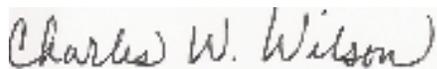
- **Dr. Crenshaw doesn't want Erskine College associating "Intelligent Design" schools such as Liberty University and LeTourneau. I would think that most of the Erskine College community agrees with him. The problem is that most of us in the General Synod of the ARPC are at least advocates of "Intelligent Design," if not creationists, and we see Liberty University and LeTourneau as successful and more representative of our views that our denominational college, to which we pour precious financial resources. Liberty and LeTourneau count students in the thousands, they are rich, and they are nationally and internationally well-known. We see Erskine College as counting her students in the few hundreds, with an uncertain financial future, and known only in a small region. Many of us would also use the words "pitiful" and "mediocre" to describe our denominational college.**
- **I hope I don't misrepresent Dr. Crenshaw, but, as I see it, Dr. Crenshaw has a view that dichotomizes faith and science. As an English professor by vocation and a student of science by avocation, he is doubtless aware that there are many of us in the ARPC who reject that dichotomization. This is the point of conflict. He knows it. We know it. Dr. Crenshaw is forthright and aggressive in his views. We ARPs talk about our views and talk about our views and talk about our views and talk about our views**

and talk about our views. . . . In a word, Dr. Crenshaw has the courage of his convictions and we as a General Synod don't!

- **Sadly, this incident represents a lack of leadership at Erskine College in Belk Hall. At the 2007 General Synod meeting Dr. Ruble promised the General Synod that under his administration the implementation of the General Synod's mission for Erskine College was his mandate. He asked the General Synod to hold him responsible for the things that happened under his stewardship. Well, Dr. Ruble, should you be held responsible?**
- **Finally, this incident reveals a climate of chaos in the Erskine College community. Dr. Crenshaw is of the opinion that the task of defining the mission of Erskine College is the work of the Erskine faculty. The General Synod holds that Erskine College is THE ASSOCIATE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN EDUCATION. The General Synod holds that it is the responsibility of the General Synod to define the mission of Erskine College and the work of the Administration and the faculty is the implementation of that mission. There is no place for compromise in these competing views!**

Thank you, Dr. Crenshaw, for your candor.

These are my thoughts,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charles W. Wilson".

Charles W. Wilson