

# ARPTalk ( 20 )

## Post-Synod Analysis

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June 25, 2009

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### ARPTalk(20.1)

## 2009 GENERAL SYNOD: AN OVERVIEW

1. Mr. Paul Bell, Executive Director, General Services – Every ARP minister needs to send Mr. Bell a “thank you” card. This is the man who daily looks after the insurance and retirement issues of ARP ministers.
2. The Board of Benefits – The ministers of the ARP Church are fortunate to have the competent people who administer the insurance, retirement, and budget issues of the ARP Church.
3. The Board of Bonclarken – Thank you, Mr. Chip Sherer for the good work that you do. The grounds were shipshape, the lodging immaculate, and the staff welcoming and helpful.
4. The Board of Christian Education Ministries – Thank you, CEM staff, for the valued oversight that you provide for the ARP Church. QUESTION: Did you know that *The Adult Quarterly* of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church is used by non-ARP churches?
5. The Board of Outreach North America – The work of planting churches is going well in the ARP Church. At this time there are 40 church plant ministries, and 6 new church plants are expected to be started this year. Since Synod 2009, five evangelism programs have been started using *Christianity Explored*. Through *ARPCconnect*, people are being equipped to reach Muslim communities in the USA. Dr. Ken Priddy is currently working with 20 churches in the process of renewal and revitalization. Thank you, Dr. Alan Avera, for your faithfulness to the ARP Church.

6. The Board of Stewardship – These are hard times economically. Thank you to those who serve on the Board of Stewardship for being faithful in a thankless task.
7. The Board of *The Associate Reformed Presbyterian* – The PCA no longer has a denominational magazine. The ARP Church does and *The Associate Reformed Presbyterian* has served the ARP Church well. The Editor, Mrs. Delores McDonald, is to be congratulated for her fine work. The challenges of a “hard paper” magazine are myriad in these times of communication innovations. The improvements in layout and contents rests on the groundwork laid by the previous Editor.
8. The Board of Trustees, William H. Dunlap, Inc. – The Editor of ARPTalk has seen the work of Dunlap in the Collins Children Home, Seneca, SC. If this were all that Dunlap did, the work of Dunlap would be a success. However, Dunlap is much more. The ARP Church and many children are blessed by the work of Dunlap.
9. The Board of World Witness – The PC(USA) has 2.25 million members and 200 full-time missionaries on the field. It takes 11,250 PC(USA) congregants to keep a single missionary on the field. The ARP Church has 35,000 members and 28 World Witness missionaries and 11 co-op missionaries for a total of 39 full-time missionaries. It takes 900 ARP congregants to keep a full-time missionary on the field. A big thank you goes to Rev. Frank van Dalen and his staff for the work they do.
10. The Committee on Inter-Church Relations – The big news item was Synod's adoption of the Committee's recommendation to remove the PC(USA) from the list of churches with whom the ARP Church had “fraternal correspondence.” General Synod was following suit with the actions of the PC(USA). The PC(USA) had already removed the ARP Church from the list of churches with whom the PC(USA) was in fellowship/correspondence. The adoption of this motion also made unnecessary the memorial from First Presbytery that asked for severing “all” relationships with the PC(USA).
11. The Investment Committee – These people are faithful in their stewardship to the ARP Church. Their work often gets overlooked. Let us thank them and cheer them for their ministry to the ARP Church.
12. The Committee on Lay Ministry – These people do good work. It is to be noted that the Lay Ministry report calls for the renewal of *Cornerstone* (the Young Adult Conference). To the Committee on Lay

Ministry we say, in the words of Captain Picard of the Starship Enterprise, "Make it so!"

13. The Committee on the Minister and His Work – There were two items of note: (1) The members came up with the observation that our presbyteries should devote considerable time to worship and prayer during their meetings. Thank you! This needs to be implemented. (2) The military chaplains present at General Synod expressed concerns regarding the current endorsing agency and asked for a study to find an endorsing agency more theologically compatible with chaplains of the ARP Church.
14. The Committee on Theological and Social Concerns – We can thank the Committee for its conclusion that the "New Perspective on Paul" and "Federal Vision" are "unacceptable" and "in conflict" with the Standards of the ARP Church.
15. The Committee on Worship – Yes, they are soldiering on and they are to be thanked for their diligence. We look forward to the publication of the *ARP Psalter*.
16. The Moderator's Committee on Memorials – The report of the Committee on Memorials was the BIG NEWS of the 2009 General Synod. The Synod adopted a motion that authorizes the Moderator of General Synod to appoint an Investigatory Commission to look into matters at Erskine College and Seminary and report back no later than the 2010 meeting of General Synod with the Commission's findings and recommendations. The debate was orderly but so intense that the scheduled "break" was postponed twice.
17. The Multi-Cultural Committee – Pray for the members of this committee. Their work is important. If you have not noticed lately, the ARP Church is becoming multi-national. The language and cultural barriers are very high. We need help and new skills in order to negotiate these heights successfully.
18. The Strategic Planning Committee – The work of this Committee is vital to the life of the ARP Church. Your prayers are solicited and appreciated. The Committee asked for an extension of a year.
19. The Erskine College and Theological Seminary Report – The disingenuousness of this report is prima facie evidence for why General Synod voted to create a Commission to investigate matters at Erskine College and Seminary. For example: (1) The Administration takes credit for providing "Christian programs," yet "The Barn" is not funded by the Erskine budget but by the

fundraising efforts of the Chaplain, the "Fellowship for Christian Athletes" is a para-church organization, and "Denominational groups" are not a ministry provided by the Administration. (2) There was no mention of the division on the Board. Though not presented in the debate for a Commission to investigate Erskine, the Editor is aware of and has read a petition that was signed by at least 8 members of the Board in support of the call for an Investigatory Commission. The Administration was also aware of that petition. (3) Once again, an attempt was made to make palatable the views of PC(USA) Barthians Drs. Burnett and Bush on the authority of the Bible. It was stated that they affirm the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible. That's the language of inerrancy. How do they affirm the full inspiration of all the words of the Bible as God's words and STILL reject inerrancy? Something does not connect! Such double-speak that holds contradictory ideas as true is unworthy of seminary theologians and is viewed as deception by many in the ARP Church.

20. Dr. John de Witt – Thank you for the outstanding job that you did as Moderator.
21. Mr. Steve Maye – Congratulations on your election by acclamation as Moderator-elect.

These are my thoughts on the meeting of General Synod,



Charles W. Wilson

**~Scroll down for ARPTalk(20.2)~**

## ARPTalk(20.2)

# LOVE OR INDULGENCE?

Once again, criticisms are voiced about Erskine College and Seminary. Once again, certain defenders of Erskine trot out the “love” passages of the Bible. Why is it necessary to read passage after passage on love to the delegates of General Synod? Why is it necessary to remind the members of General Synod about love? Are the members of General Synod unable to read? Have the members of General Synod forgotten the biblical injunctions regarding love?

Love that does not correct is INDULGENCE. For at least the last 37 years, the General Synod has failed to confront rebellious administrations at Erskine College and Seminary. Truthfully, the General Synod has indulged rather than loved Erskine College and Seminary. Instead of lovingly correcting, the General Synod has allowed our college and seminary to plot a course that is in direct opposition to the ARP Church. Such a course has brought our college and seminary into conflict with the theological ethos of the ARP Church.

In response to reports of many unwise actions that have resulted in conflict between Erskine and the ARP Church, the General Synod has appointed an Investigatory Commission. In spite of what some may think, this is not a loveless or unkind act. It is an act of love that seeks correction—an action that has the unity and the peace of the ARP Church as it goals.

The Editor thinks that Romans 12:6 (KJV) is appropriate at this point: “Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil. Cling to that which is good.” Once again, a love that does not correct that which is amiss is not love but INDULGENCE.

These are my thoughts,



Charles W. Wilson

**~Scroll down for ARPTalk(20.3)~**

# ARPTalk(20.3)

## WEDNESDAY EVENING DEBACLE

Some delegates arrived at General Synod skeptical about concerns that have been voiced about Erskine College and Seminary. The Wednesday evening "Question and Answer" session, now known as Erskine's "Wednesday Evening Debacle," made it much more difficult for "Erskine right or wrong" loyalists to continue pretending that nothing is wrong in Due West. Board Chairman Mr. Chip Smith, who is completing his term of Board service, was granted a pass by the questioners, but President Randy Ruble and Executive Vice President Neely Gaston were not so fortunate, and their performances were not stellar. Their performances were a debacle!

The following are some of the Editor's observations regarding the Wednesday evening "Question and Answer" session.

- President Ruble acknowledged that he does not know what a Christian world and life view is.

Such an acknowledgment was startling! How can this be? Dr. Ruble was the Dean and Vice President of Erskine Theological Seminary for more than 20 years. Seminary curriculums usually deal with developing a Christian world and life view. Dr. Ruble said that he was not the person to define a Christian world and life view. Sensing that the audience wanted at least some substance, Ruble then fumbled about, suggesting that a Christian world and life view involves being willing to pray with students and not being a racist! If the President, a former seminary dean, is not the person to formulate a Christian world and view, something is amiss. Dr. Ruble also stated that since many of the faculty members were graduates of state universities, they were unaware of what a Christian world and life view is. What? Such a statement throws past Boards and Administrations, which were tasked by the Manual of Authorities and Duties with implementing the mission of the institutions, under the bus. If that is true, then not only have the present Board and Administration failed the ARP Church, but past Boards and Administrations have also failed, perhaps knowingly failed, the ARP Church. It is unacceptable that Dr. Ruble, the Board, the Administration, and faculty do not know what a Christian world and life view is. Has Dr. Ruble not read the 1977 *Philosophy of Christian Education*? The Editor remembers

that Dr. Ruble was present when this document was adopted by General Synod. Was Dr. Ruble not on the committee that framed the document?

- President Ruble spoke of being guided by prayer.

The Editor applauds Dr. Ruble for his emphasis on prayer. It was obvious that he has had many conversations with students and faculty that ended in prayer. At this point, there is another matter that needs to be addressed. Erskine College has intentionally sought to attract students who are not Christians. Much was said about Erskine not seeking to attract Christian students only. Since this is certainly the case, how many students has Dr. Ruble presented the Gospel to and have any confessed Christ as Savior? As a Christian college that recruits non-Christians, it is incumbent on the Erskine President, the Administration, and faculty to be intentionally evangelistic. Is this the case at Erskine? Are the Administration and faculty intentionally evangelizing non-Christian students? Is the Administration of Erskine College passionate about the gospel?

- President Ruble is comfortable with a science faculty that teaches evolution as a fact and a Bible faculty that teaches creation as a fact.

Dr. Ruble read a long statement from the science faculty that basically acknowledged evolution as science and creationism as faith. The statement was read to a small chorus of "No!" from the audience. Some delegates sat in stunned silence and amazement. Dr. Ruble seemed surprised by the vocal response from the audience. We do not wish to be unkind, but it was all too clear that Dr. Ruble has no idea what the implications of a Christian world and life view are for Erskine College. This was very troubling for many present.

- President Ruble is clueless in how to deal with recalcitrant faculty members.

Dr. Ruble's mantra was "I have talked . . . I have talked . . . I have talked. . . ." He said, "I try to give faculty the benefit of the doubt. I try to respect my faculty and understand what they are about. It's easy to be judgmental." This is administrative indulgence of rebellious employees. One wonders why Dr. Ruble did not honor the stewardship that has been given to him by the ARP Church by saying something like this: "I tell the Administration and faculty where the ARP Church is and what the ARP Church expects of Erskine College and Seminary. If they cannot comply, I ask them to look for other employment, for their services will not be renewed at the end of the year!" Why is it that Dr. Ruble has such difficulty in honoring the church that ordained

him and has provided him with the ministerial opportunities to be a professor in our seminary, the Vice President and Dean of our seminary, and now the President of our college and seminary?

- On Wednesday evening President Ruble proclaimed that he has always believed in the inerrancy of Scripture in the original autographs. How can this be? Has President Ruble forgotten his own paper trail?

Consider this: (1) In 1977 Dr. Ruble was Professor of Old Testament and Vice President and Dean of Erskine Theological Seminary. That year two articles appeared in the *ARP Magazine* as expressions of the "faculty" of Erskine Theological Seminary. These articles rejected inerrancy and pointed out specific errors in the Bible. Not only was Dr. Ruble on the "faculty" of ETS, but as Vice President and Dean he was in charge of the place! Did Dr. Ruble affirm inerrancy then? It would seem not! (2) At about the same time, the Editor invited Dr. Ruble to speak at the church of which he was pastor. In lengthy conversations, Dr. Ruble told the Editor that he affirmed "infallibility" and not "inerrancy." Did Dr. Ruble believe in inerrancy at that time? It would seem not! (3) The 1979 General Synod adopted a statement on the authority of the Bible that reads that the Scriptures are "without error in all that they teach." In 1980 Dr. Ruble signed the "Covenant of Integrity" that stated that the 1979 statement on the Bible was not a statement that affirmed inerrancy. Did Dr. Ruble affirm inerrancy when he signed the "Covenant of Integrity?" It would seem not! Once again, the Editor asks Dr. Ruble to tell the members of the ARP Church of his conversion to inerrancy and when inerrancy became the position he has "always" affirmed?

- President Ruble claimed that students had not followed proper procedures in expressing their concerns. Is this really the case?

Consider this: (1) While Erskine does have established procedures for students with academic and personal grievances against the school and its employees, there are no procedures for students who believe the school is not fulfilling its mission. So, exactly what "procedures" were not followed by these students? Can Dr. Ruble show us the text governing these procedures? (2) Some students have complained that they have been ignored, and they have also expressed fear of a "culture of intimidation." (3) Some students have raised concerns with Dr. Ruble and others, but their concerns were not forwarded to all the members of the Board. At least three members of the Board at General Synod complained that they knew nothing of the issues that the students were bringing forward. Is the Administration failing to inform the Board of Trustees properly? Has the Erskine Administration



adopted the attitude that “what happens in Due West stays (and had better stay!) in Due West?”

- Executive Vice President Neely Gaston stated that the ETS faculty affirms inerrancy.

Once again Dr. Gaston presented an action at the April 2008 ETS faculty meeting in which the faculty voted to include in the ETS catalogue the language of the General Synod’s statements on Scripture as a unanimous affirmation of inerrancy by the faculty. In fact, as Dr. R. J. Gore, who made the motion in question, has repeatedly pointed out, the faculty passed that motion simply to add the Synod language to the catalog (without an explicit affirmation of the faculty) after it became clear that two members of the faculty (Drs. Bush and Burnett) could not affirm those statements by the General Synod. So how is it that the entire ETS faculty affirms inerrancy, as Dr. Gaston tells us, when Dr. Bush has stated that his piety will not allow him to say the Bible is without error in all that it teaches, and Dr. Burnett says that he does not concur with the 2008 statement of General Synod on inerrancy?

Dr. Gaston also read a portion of a statement on the authority of Scripture by Dr. Burnett, and went to some length to say that Dr. Burnett believed in plenary verbal inspiration. But if Dr. Burnett believes in plenary (“full” or “all”) verbal (“words”) inspiration, how is it that he rejects inerrancy? Dr. Gaston also stated that Dr. Burnett believes in inerrancy so long as standards of inerrancy are not imposed on the Bible from an outside source. What does that mean? Where did that come from? People who affirm inerrancy generally do so because it is the clear teaching of the Bible.

In a portion of Dr. Burnett’s statement that Dr. Gaston DID NOT READ to the General Synod, Dr. Burnett contended: “That no question of truth or falsehood can be appropriately asked or answered apart from the one, central subject matter and theme does not, in any way, limit the kinds of questions that can be raised from the perspective of science or historical-criticism, nor does it render scientific or historical-critical judgments irrelevant.” Dr. Burnett apparently believes that one’s doctrine of Scripture should place no limits on critical conclusions about authorship of biblical books, errors of fact, etc., which was manifestly the position of Karl Barth (whom Dr/ Burnett trumpets as the answer to the “problems” of evangelicalism and liberalism). At least Barth was honest enough to reject the term “inerrancy” decisively. One thing is clear at this point, while Dr. Burnett’s ownership of the term “inerrancy” may be in dispute, his own doctrine of Scripture is manifestly NOT what the ARP Church means by “inerrancy”!

And finally, why are Drs. Burnett and Bush not members of the Evangelical Theological Society? Here are the two qualifications for membership: (1) "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs"; and (2) "God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory." What is the problem here?

- Executive Vice President Neely Gaston was unaware of the number of ARP M.Div. students graduated in the past five years.

The question to Dr. Gaston was how he could justify the amount of money that the ARP Church puts into ETS for such a small return. It was noted that in the last five years that 19 men with ARP credentials have graduated from ETS with a M.Div. degree. Of those 19, only 7 are presently serving the ARP Church. It was also noted that at the 2009 graduation there were three M.Div. graduates. Two of those graduates are headed for the military chaplaincy. The other was serving in a tent-making capacity as "student supply" and expects to continue serving that congregation as an ordained minister who works in a tent-making capacity. In other words, the ETS M.Div. class of 2009 saw a net gain of zero to the ARP Church. Dr. Gaston seemed a bit flustered with this question. His response was to cast doubt on the accuracy of the information. The information can be found on the Erskine web site. The Editor has looked at the numbers. They seem accurate. So, the question remains: How does Dr. Gaston justify such a high expenditure of General Synod's resources for such a small return?

- President Randy Ruble ordered the removal of Dr. Richard Burnett's letter from "Erskine Action," the official ETS blog-site, and he also ordered Dr. Burnett not to attend Synod.

Why? Dr. Ruble said that it was because of the inappropriate manner in which Dr. Burnett attacked the Editor of *ARPTalk*. Well, in a conversation with the Editor, Dr. Ruble was aware that the Editor of *ARPTalk* did not take offense at Dr. Burnett's letter. The Editor was impressed with Dr. Burnett's candor regarding his views on the Bible. Dr. Burnett confirmed what the Editor of *ARPTalk* had been saying for a year. Therefore, why did Dr. Ruble order Dr. Burnett not to attend Synod, as Dr. Burnett said he would? If Dr. Ruble was so appalled by Dr. Burnett's letter, why was he not equally appalled by Dr. Gaston's commendation of that same letter? Why did Dr. Ruble not also order Dr. Gaston not to attend Synod? Dr. Burnett's letter went out on the Erskine blog-site with the imprimatur and recommendation of Dr. Gaston clearly above Dr. Burnett's letter. What is going on here? If anyone

wants to see a copy of Dr. Burnett's letter and Dr. Gaston's endorsement of it, the Editor has copies that he will send to those who request copies.

- President Ruble stated that he privately holds to the ordination of women to the office of elder.

While Dr. Ruble has made no secret of this, a goodly number of people were shocked with that admission. Perhaps that explains why ETS does not promote the position of the ARP Church on the ordination of elders as the biblically correct position.

Interestingly, on that Wednesday evening Dr. Gaston gave the audience the distinct impression that he was not in favor of the ordination of women to the offices of minister and elder. But in such matters we must pay attention to what Dr. Gaston DOES as well as what he SAYS. Readers of *ARPTalk* are probably aware that in the Fall of 2006 Dr. Gaston confronted Dr. Douglas Culver and accused him of failing to support the mission of ETS after Dr. Culver had expressed support in the classroom for the ARP Church's position on the ordination of pastors. Thereafter, Gaston threatened all members of the seminary faculty with dismissal if they failed to support the mission of the Seminary (in Gaston's mind apparently any public expression of support for the position of the ARP Church regarding the role of women is inconsistent with the seminary's commitment to provide seminary-level education to men and women). So, while Dr. Gaston's personal position may be in doubt, ETS is being run in a manner that effectively silences and undercuts the official position of the ARP Church!

- President Ruble acknowledged that he knew of the recommendation of the Memorials Committee to call for a Commission and invited that action and pledged the cooperation of the Administration and faculty.

But of course! The Editor is confident that we can look forward to the same level of cooperation with the Commission that has already been demonstrated by the Administration's and Board's implementation of the General Synod's purposes and mission.

Erskine College is the ARP Church in higher education. Erskine Theological Seminary is the ARP Church in theological education. Therefore, the question to be answered is this: How do Erskine College and Erskine Theological Seminary promote the goals, the doctrines, the growth, and the unity of the ARP Church? Please be specific in the answers!

Some will shout that the Editor of *ARPTalk* is unloving and unkind, but the performances by Drs. Ruble and Gaston at the Wednesday evening

"Question and Answer" session were a debacle. The Editor was embarrassed for Drs. Ruble and Gaston and sad that we in the ARP Church have put up with this sort of mediocrity in multiple administrations. If Erskine College and Seminary were a church, resignations would be on the table. If Erskine College and Seminary were a business, resignations would be on the table. At this meeting of the 2009 General Synod it was abundantly clear that every agency of the ARP Church walks in harmony with the ARP Church with the exception of Erskine College and Erskine Theological Seminary. In fact, our college and seminary are wildly out of step with the ARP Church. Frankly, many in the ARP Church are ashamed of Erskine College and Seminary. The Bible asks, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed" (Amos 1:3, KJV)?

These are my thoughts,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charles W. Wilson". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Charles W. Wilson

**[~Scroll down for ARPTalk\(20.4\)~](#)**

## ARPTalk(20.4)

# WHAT DO OTHERS THINK OF THE MEETING OF GENERAL SYNOD? (20.4.1)

[Editor's Comments](#): Permission has been given by Mr. Warren Smith to reprint the following article in *ARPTalk*.

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### **“Moonlight Revolution” At Erskine College Highlights Theological Divide**

***Annual Meeting Of Associate Reformed Presbyterian  
Church Could Be Dramatic Battle In Theological Wars***

By Warren Cole Smith

(EP News)--Something unusual and interesting is happening in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian (ARP) Church. But to understand just how unusual and interesting, it's best to know a bit about the ARP church and what it has meant to the Christian tradition in America.

First of all, the ARP church is one of the oldest continuously operating Christian denominations in the United States, having been formed in 1782 in Philadelphia. Currently, the church has only about 200 congregations and about 30,000 members, but the ARP's influence on Reformed theology in America has always been out of proportion to its numerical size. The First Presbyterian Church of Columbia, S.C., an ARP congregation, was during the 19th century -- and has since remained -- one of the most influential churches in the South, today with more than 2500 members. The denomination's college, Erskine College, is one of the top-ranked Christian colleges in the country.

But like many Christian denominations, and many Christian colleges, Erskine and the ARP have - some charge -- been going down the road of theological liberalism. So much so that Erskine Seminary, which is supposed to train clergy for the

denomination, now produces few of the denomination's new pastors. Dean Turbeville, a conservative ARP pastor who has served on the board of Erskine College and Seminary, said, "I wouldn't send a young man from my church to Erskine Seminary. It is no longer, theologically speaking, a safe place to learn the truths of the Christian faith and the Reformed tradition." Indeed, one of the interesting developments in the denomination is that most of the young clergy in the denomination are more conservative than the older clergy in the church - and most of them have received their seminary training outside of the ARP.

Which brings us to the unusual and interesting part. In almost every other denomination where this slide into liberalism has occurred, most notably in the Episcopal Church, the liberals have retained the denomination, and the conservatives have been forced to leave or they simply have gotten old and died. But in the ARP, young conservative clergy trained at seminaries other than Erskine are entering the denomination. These mostly young conservatives are fighting back, and one of the most dramatic skirmishes in this theological battle was led by a group of conservative students at Erskine College itself.

The college's annual "Alumni and Accepted Students Day" took place this year on April 25. The event is traditionally a time for Erskine to put its best foot forward, both to impress alumni, who are among the college's most important financial supporters, and the incoming students, who along with their parents are invited to the activities. This year, though, the alumni and prospective students got an alternative view of Erskine. Chuck Wilson, who publishes an independent on-line newsletter about the ARP called "ARPTalk" that has been critical of the Erskine administration, takes up the story of what has come to be called the "Moonlight Revolution":

"The revolution began innocuously at Convocation (something like chapel). The President of Converse College, Dr. Elizabeth A. Fleming, was invited to speak. Dr. R. T. Ruble, President of EC/ETS, introduced Dr. Fleming to the Erskine College student body. At the end of Dr. Ruble's introduction, it is alleged that he remarked that Erskine College is not an 'artsy' college, but he was glad to have the President of an artsy college speak to Erskine students.

"Dr. Ruble must have forgotten that Erskine College has an art department. Art students took Dr. Ruble's remarks as demeaning of them and Professors Jan Walker and Sharon Linnehan. Later, a student in the art history class set up a project of performance art. In front of the Daniel Moultrie Science Center, sidewalk chalk was provided and students were invited to "Say Something." They did. Very quickly the sidewalk was packed with complaints about Erskine College, ranging from criticism about the high cost of tuition, to the inadequacy of housing, to the continuing evolution vs. creation controversy, to the failure of the Administration to implement the mission of the college as Christian and Evangelical."

These chalk protests were quickly washed away in preparation for the "Alumni and

Accepted Students Day. But a group calling itself "Students For Erskine" went into action. Between 1 and 4 a.m. on the Saturday morning of the event, Students For Erskine not only re-wrote most of the erased messages, but also posted what they called - in the spirit of the original Reformation - the "Erskine 95 Theses" on doors and walls around the college.

Among the chalk messages were some related to Erskine's mission statement: "What happened to Gospel driven at EC?" and "Please fulfill the mission statement." Others expressed dismay at the increasingly permissive atmosphere at the college. One chalk message said: "Alcohol - Big trouble next time. Sex in Dorms - We'll let it slide. Christian Commitment - How dare you!"

When Erskine's President Randall T. Ruble was asked to comment on the student protest, he issued the following statement: "Some of our students chose to use their right to freedom of expression by writing chalk messages on sidewalks and other locations on campus. That was not the end of it, however, as student leaders planned a forum to address concerns directly to administration, faculty and staff. A number of people on the Erskine College and Seminary faculty and staff appeared at the forum and answered questions posed by students. I personally met with several of the students individually to ensure their questions were answered."

It is likely that these forums and this statement from Ruble won't be the end of the matter either. The ARP's 205th annual meeting is taking place this week at the denomination's conference center in Flat Rock, N.C. Among the items on the agenda: whether to appoint a commission to examine Erskine College and Seminary. According to the rules that govern the ARP denomination, a committee would merely bring back a report of suggested action items to next year's meeting. A commission, on the other hand, has the power to act immediately if it finds actionable items. Those on both sides of the controversy at Erskine know that the stakes are high, and that more than the future of the college is at issue.

According to Wilson: "This is a war for the soul of the church. Are we going to be a church that holds to the inerrancy of scripture, or are we going to be something else? That is the question."

*Warren Cole Smith is the editor of Evangelical Press News Service.*

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## ( 20 . 4 . 1 )

[Editor's Comments](#): The following article is by Mr. Joel Belz. He has given permission for his article to be reprinted in *ARPTalk*. Mr. Belz's article first appeared in *World Magazine*.

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### ***Looking for a miracle***

***If it happens at Erskine, others will want to know how***

Thursday, June 11, may not go down as an especially noteworthy date in the overall history of Christian higher education. But then again, before it's all over, maybe it should.

On that morning a couple of weeks ago, 300 churchmen representing one of the oldest and smallest denominations in America decided that enough was enough—and that it was time to end the doctrinal drift they sensed at the church's two educational institutions.

Erskine College and Erskine Theological Seminary, you must understand, are no bastions of free-thinking liberalism. Located in Due West, S.C. (population 1208), both schools have since their founding in the 1830s competently filled their role as solid and respectable citizens of the educational world. A radical philosopher like Peter Singer from Princeton or a wild-eyed Ward Churchill from the University of Colorado would hardly be at home here.

But neither does Erskine's leadership seem inclined to call the school anything like "evangelical." On the Erskine website, under "Quick Facts," you'll read about academic standing—but not about Christian commitment. Even under the heading of "curriculum," there's no reference to Erskine's Christian mission. That tension has long been a thorn in the flesh of many in Erskine's parent denomination, the 30,000-member Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.

It's true, of course, that such a prickly relationship between a denomination and its colleges and seminaries is hardly a new thing or a newsworthy matter. But this may be different. There is, for example, no mountain of evidence that the two ARP schools have lurched noticeably leftward in recent years. What's happened instead is that the sponsoring denomination has itself moved decidedly to the right—and now wants to take firm steps to bring its college and seminary with it. That's a rarity in the ecclesiastical and educational history of America.



The big complaint from the ARP at large (and quite noisily from recent alumni and some current students) is that in classroom after classroom, an Erskine education is not demonstrably different from that offered in a typical private secular college—or even a state university. “There’s no integration of faith and learning going on by too many professors,” ARP pastor Bill Marsh told me. Out of 250 congregations (mostly in the Southeast), he’s pastor of one of the ARP’s biggest, in Greensboro, N.C. “The challenge is huge,” he said. “If half the faculty don’t get it, and the other half are hostile to it, we’re well on the road to becoming another Furman or another Davidson. We’ll have a Christian heritage, but not much more than a chapel and a chaplain to show for our effort.”

Although the ARP denomination directly elects Erskine’s board at its annual synod meeting, the church is implicitly saying now that it’s tired of waiting for the board to make things better. Instead, the synod authorized a high-powered commission to investigate the state of things at both Erskine schools, and to report back its findings—and its recommendations—a year from now.

“Now we have momentum,” said John Basie, a 1992 Erskine graduate, one of the younger members of the Erskine board, and one of Erskine’s most outspoken critics. “The problem starts with the board—but I hope the board will see this less as a threat and more as an opportunity. Erskine has the potential to be the premier Christian liberal arts college in the South.”

But between here and there, the reformers have their work cut out for them—especially with faculty and students. Faculty issues include sticky wickets like tenure obligations and accrediting agencies that look askance at any pressure by church bodies on academic institutions. Student issues go to the core of tradition and college culture—and the school’s ability to recruit students interested in serious academics in an evangelical context, when that hasn’t been the profile painted by Erskine for a number of years.

Of Erskine’s 600 present students, 144 signed a passionate petition to the ARP synod this spring to wade in and steer the college back toward its original biblical roots. One of those 144 told me he thinks about a third of the student body are evangelicals, a much smaller group are committed liberals—and the rest are uninterested in the whole discussion.

That, one veteran of the ARP told me, isn’t all that different from the denomination at large just 30 years ago. “Then the ARP rediscovered a high view of scripture,” he said. “We rediscovered a high view of the gospel. A miracle happened with the church at large. Is there anything about academic institutions that makes them impervious to miracles?”

If such a miracle does happen at Erskine, the little town of Due West, S.C., better get ready for an influx of visitors. Folks representing hundreds of other colleges and seminaries throughout the country will want to explore exactly how it was done.

## ARPTalk(20.5)

# FACEBOOK SLANDER

Editor's Comments: Facebook is not a place for private conversations. Facebook is a public forum. The following conversations regarding the Editor of *ARPTalk* appeared on Facebook, June 8, 2009.

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On Facebook, 09' Erskine College graduate Ms. [name deleted by Editor] posted a link to the SAFE web site on June 8 at 12:02 PM. She stated that she “has been totally convinced that the way to please God is by keeping all the non-Christians out of our ARP bubble ... thank you SAFE ... read for a good laugh or a really depressing view of the college from which I'm graduating ...”

Eighteen comments by alumni and students followed. 09' Erskine College graduate Mr. Rob Senn, the son of Mrs. Lisa Senn, Erskine Board member-elect, commented regarding the SAFE site: “I'm literally bleeding from the eyes with rage right now” (June 8, 12:51 PM). Mr. Senn commented again and mentioned the Editor of *ARPTalk*, writing, “It's a messianic cult of personality centered around Chuck Wilson that feeds on guilt, vindictiveness, and jealousy.” On June 8, 12:59 PM, Ms. [name deleted by Editor] commented that “Chuck Wilson is the anti-Christ.” On June 8, 1:02 PM, Mr. Rob Senn responded, “This comment is in no way advocating for Chuck Wilson's assassination.” On June 8, 1:08 PM, Ms. [name deleted by Editor] commented, “Chuck Wilson is the Rev. Charles Wilson, a retired ARP minister and self-appointed lightning rod of the denomination. Actually, I believe he is one of the ministers who took a firm stand on the word of God in the 1970s and helped push back the creeping tide of liberalism that was taking over the ARP [looks as though taken from *Puritan Board* – Editor] ... silly [name deleted by Editor] ... he is not the Anti-Christ ... at least not according to ARP Talk aka “The PURITAN board” ... lol I got a kick out of that one!” (June 8, 1:10 PM). Then at 1:20 PM Mr. Rob Senn wrote the following: **“Fun fact: He was never called to an actual ministry because he got caught cheating on his wife.”** 07' Erskine grad Ms. [name deleted by Editor] then wrote, “I was perusing this blog the other day and thinking we should start a response blog, something to the effect of Students for an Academically Challenging Community ... SACC if you will” (June 8, 2:47 PM). Mr. Rob Senn then quipped, “What about FIIQ ... [expletive deleted by Editor] It, I Quit” (June 8, 3:04 PM).

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[Editor's Comments](#): The following email from Dr. Randy Ruble, President of Erskine College and Seminary, speaks to Mr. Rob Senn's slanderous comment about the Editor of *ARPTalk*.

\* \* \* \*

**Message from Dr. Ruble:**

**June 23, 2009**

**I have personally known Dr. Charles W. "Chuck" Wilson, an Erskine graduate, for approximately 37 years and I can affirm that he has been engaged in Christian ministries as a pastor, presbyter, and member of the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. I can also state that to the best my knowledge Dr. Wilson has never been unfaithful to his wife.**

**<>Randall T. Ruble, President  
Erskine College and Seminary**

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[Editor's Comments](#): Mr. Senn's comment is not a "Fun Fact." There is nothing funny about slander. His comments as a whole disgrace him. If Mr. Senn wishes to respond, the Editor is willing to print his response in its entirety.

*Charles W. Wilson*

**~Thank you for reading ARPTalk (20)~**