

# ARPTalk(21)

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July 22, 2009

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*ARPTalk(21.1)*

## LETTERS AND THINGS

*(21.1.1)*

### Letter from Miss Karis Tucker

**Editor's Remarks:** A copy of the following letter from Miss Karis Tucker to Dr. Randy Ruble, President, Erskine College and Theological Seminary, was sent to the Editor by Miss Tucker. Miss Tucker is an ARP, and she is the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. John Tucker. Dr. Tucker is an ARP minister, and he is the pastor of the Graceview Presbyterian Church (ARP) in Southaven, Mississippi. Miss Tucker has given the Editor permission to use her letter.

Dear Dr. Ruble,

My name is Karis Tucker and I am a Senior at Belhaven College in Jackson, MS and am also a life-long ARP member and pastor's kid. I am saddened at the recent news of Erskine College and the trouble that you are having. You see, EC was my dream college in high school. It was the only place where I wanted to be. I applied to Erskine and went through the E.B.K. scholarship interview process and made it to the semi-finals. I was ecstatic that my dream was going to become a reality. I paid my deposit and was signed up to be a part of the Freshman class of 2010. My family and I were hoping to receive some more scholarship money, but that did not happen. It became quite obvious that Erskine was not where God wanted me. In the spring I had applied to go to Belhaven as back up. My parents and I prayed about it and it only made sense for me to go to Belhaven, seeing that I am from Mississippi. The reason I had wanted so desperately to go to Erskine was because of its excellence in Christian education, and I loved the feeling of a small campus. I had met some incredible people from Erskine through Bonclarken as well.

Anyway, I say all this because now that I am at Belhaven I am so thankful that God has brought me here because of the excellent Christian worldview program they have. My father told me that you had said that you thought a Christian worldview was merely praying in the classroom. Well, I believe that it is far more than that. Let me tell you a little bit more about BC's commitment to having a Christian worldview. The idea of a Christian worldview at BC is not taken lightly but is the central aspect of every course. The core worldview program lasts your first 2 years of college. There are 4 classes that are required in the worldview program Literature, Civilization, Form and Meaning (Art and Music appreciation) and Christian Perspectives. Each class starts with the Romans and Greeks and ends with present day Terrorism. As you are studying the literature of the Greeks you are also studying the art that they made and learning about their history. Each class is connected and is taught as a cause and effect instead of teaching separate ideas and movements. Christian Perspective is a philosophy class that only lasts 2 semesters. In the first semester you learn about the different types of beliefs such as theism, deism, post-modern. In the second semester you learn why the Bible is true and how we can prove that historically without using the Bible itself. Finally you also learn how the Bible applies to present day issues such as abortion and marriage. All of these principles are taught from a philosophical perspective. These courses teach you how to think and how to appreciate good art, music and literature. You learn how to see God's beauty in everything including the arts. Besides having worldview classes, the Christian worldview program integrates the Christian worldview into the classroom beyond praying at the beginning of class. BC offers a distinctly Christian education. So that means Christian ethics are intertwined in every part of the learning process. For example, just look at our mission statement. It states, "Belhaven College prepares students academically and spiritually to serve Christ Jesus in their careers, in human relationships, and in the world of ideas.

Belhaven College affirms the Lordship of Christ over all aspects of life, acknowledges the Bible as the foundational authority for the development of a personal worldview, and recognizes each individual's career as a calling from God. Each academic department is committed to high academic goals for its students and clarifies the implications of biblical truth for its discipline. Belhaven upholds these commitments in offering undergraduate or graduate programs, by conventional or technological delivery modes, and in local, national, and international venues. The College requires a liberal arts foundation in each undergraduate degree program in order to best prepare students to contribute to a diverse, complex and fast-changing world.

By developing servant leaders who value integrity, compassion, and justice in all aspects of their lives, the College prepares people to serve, not to be served." Furthermore, our new motto is "Our standard is Christ". Belhaven really truly cares about preparing students to serve Christ in their future careers as dancers, business executives, writers, doctors and so on. Their main goal is not to increase

enrollment or giving but to see students discover their God given gifts and then use those to serve Him in their careers. I have gotten to know my president Roger Parrott quite well over my 3 years at Belhaven and I can tell you that he is personally committed to all that I have told you about Belhaven. He provides us leadership that is unwavering and not willing to give into the desires of this world. The statement of faith that all staff and faculty are required to sign is taken very seriously. If it is found that they are not abiding by it, or the standard that the college has set forth they are immediately dealt with. I am saddened to hear that Erskine has professors that deny basic Biblical principles. How do you expect to teach creation in Bible class and evolution in Biology and not confuse students as to what is Truth? God's Truth stands forever and is not relevant like the world's truth. You cannot contradict yourself like that. You have a duty as a college of the ARP to teach Truth that is consistent by the Bible. Because the Bible is the ultimate Truth it will withstand any scrutiny and be found to be right ALWAYS. Furthermore, it is inevitable that there are unbelievers at Erskine and therefore you have a duty to preach the gospel and present them with the Truth. By teaching evolution and having liberal professors you are confusing these unbelievers and giving Christianity, Reformed theology and the ARP a bad name.

I am not saying that Belhaven is perfect and does not have any problems. We are sinful people and therefore are prone to not be perfect. I urge you to take immediate action concerning these issues. My heart is breaking for Erskine right now. I pray that you will have the integrity to do the right thing.

If you would like more information about Belhaven or our worldview program please contact Dr. Roger Parrott at [president@belhaven.edu](mailto:president@belhaven.edu). I am sure that he would be more than happy to help you and Erskine in this transition period. I also would be happy to be of any assistance.

Thank you for your time and reading my email.

Sincerely,

Karis Tucker

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## **Article by Dr. Jay Adams**

**Editor's Remarks:** Dr. Jay Adams, a retired minister in the ARP Church, is well-known. Dr. Adams has taught at both Westminster Philadelphia and West, and he has also been a church planter and pastor. Dr. Adams is internationally known for his books on counseling and his many commentaries. He has given his permission to use this article.

### **Stand Alone?**

by Jay Adams

Some of us who began our ministry in the late forties and early fifties know what it was like. Christians, today, have no idea. The liberals ruled! They had stolen all the key churches in the major denominations, along with their colleges and seminaries. The Federal Council (now the National Council) of Churches had even gained control of the media—you couldn't get on the air, except through them! It was a time when those who believed something were cast aside and ridiculed. It was a day when conservative preachers were forced to meet in storefronts since they were no longer welcome in the mainline denominations. I remember it well.

Today, the roles have been reversed—the conservatives have it all; the liberals are trying to keep their heads above water. It wasn't all bad though back then—you knew who was who. If you believed anything, you would be ostracized. So, you knew who the true believers were. Like you, they were starting all over again with their small congregations. There was no mixing with those who denied the Word of God—except to evangelize them. The two camps were apart out of the realities of the situation.

Surely, Bible-believers would never have thought of attending a meeting of liberals, Muslims, Catholics, Mormons in order to suggest that we work together! Horrendous—perish the thought! The only reason for appearing at all would have been to preach the Gospel and urge the lost in attendance to believe and be saved. Can you picture J. Gresham Machen in Rick Warren's shoes, standing where he was, saying what he said?

Times have changed—not all for the better. We live in a Michael Jackson age, in which Christians—even preachers—have been driven by this generation to adopt as much of what he stood for as will not be too offensive. The times are not ripe for negotiations with Roman Catholics, who still believe that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was insufficient to save, as a number think, for mixing with religious bodies

that took up the sword against our forefathers in N. Africa and wiped out the church of Augustine, or for bringing into question the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Yet, we hear such things, and us old guys shudder.

Rather than these things, it's time to stand—if alone—for God's truth. Stand with those who brought the prosperity you now enjoy. Study history. You'll see that those "learned academics" in our seminaries who wanted to play footsy with the German liberals gave up the ship. It could happen again. Indeed, in some places, it seems that it is happening. Don't let it. Stand for the truth; stand!

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## **Article by Dr. Fred Carr**

**Editor's Remarks:** Dr. Fred Carr is the Associate Pastor of our Church of the Atonement, Silver Spring, MD, and he is also a member of the Erskine Board. This article is taken from his blog and is used with his permission.

### **God-Sent Revival at Erskine**

by Fred Carr

World Magazine reported that “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.” When I read that I wanted to go meet those 144 students, first to thank them for their spiritual concern; second to discuss in detail their experiences and observations; and third, to assure them that the Synod, “now wants to take firm steps to bring its college and seminary with it...” -- as World put it – “decidedly to the right.” (World)

I thought about the experience of students – on campus for four years (more or less) – and about how these 144 students, no doubt, want to see action now! Change now! Understandably! After all, four years is a short period of time. These four years are their college experience! (I remember the student demonstrations of the 1960’s. “What do you want?” “Peace!” “When do you want it?” “NOW!”)

I’m new to the Erskine Board of Trustees, but I am certain that changing a college is like turning the Titanic. It’s going to take time and wise fore-thought. I’m only beginning to understand the “tenure obligations and accrediting agencies that look askance at any pressure by church bodies on academic institutions.” I’m afraid I only vaguely understand the delicate interplay between donor funding, student recruitment, scholarships, etc. But, like steering the Titanic, it is essential that we change directions. I want the 144 students to know about Synod’s action in establishing an Investigatory Commission. I want the 144 students to see that this is a significant action, and though it may seem very slow to them, a year of investigation is fast for institutional change. It’s essential that leaders of the ARP communicate to these students! We must encourage them in spite of what may appear to them to be a sluggish timetable.

But – and here is an exciting thought to me – what does happen fast is the reviving work of God’s Holy Spirit. I am reading everything I can get my hands on about revivals on college campuses. For example, one blog reported how “One morning in

1970, without warning, all heaven broke loose during Asbury College's 10 a.m. chapel service...The service, a routine meeting, was scheduled for 50 minutes. Instead, it lasted 185 hours non-stop, 24 hours a day. Intermittently, it continued for weeks. Ultimately, it spread across the United States and into foreign countries. Some say it is being felt even today." Apparently some similar work of the Spirit happened in the 1950's. Or consider how the Spirit moved at Wheaton College from March 19 to March 23, 1995 -- my daughter was there at the time. Another blog page reports that "...there was a communal experience of the Holy Spirit on the campus of Wheaton College that has become known as the 1995 Wheaton revival, one of several that occurred on college campuses or in churches at about this time."

The first thing I want to do as a new member of Erskine's Board of Trustees is to pray for change-bringing, Holy Spirit revival! I want to find others who will pray with me for God's work in students, administrators, faculty, alumni and Synod. I can't think of anything that would fill me with more joy, than God would revive us all as we begin to "steer the college back toward its original biblical roots."

In God's good providence, this year's pre-Synod Conference included Rev. Iain H. Murray known in many circles for his work with Banner of Truth. In his classical book The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy, he writes, "the Puritan movement in England believed so firmly in revivals of religion as the great means by which the Church advances in the world...When the Holy Spirit is poured out in a day of power the result is bound to affect whole communities and even nations. Conviction of sin, and anxiety to possess the Word of God, and dependence upon those truths which glorify God in man's salvation, are inevitable consequences." (3)

Could it be that in God's providence he is calling us to pray and hope for a God-sent revival at Erskine?

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## **DON'T EXPECT ANOTHER WEATHERMAN AT ERSKINE!**

**Who is going to replace Dr. Don Weatherman as Vice President and Academic Dean of Erskine College?**

**It is reported that the Search Committee, Chaired by Dr. Howard Thomas, includes Dr. Brad Christie and Dr. Shannon Jeffreys from the college and Mr. Bill Cain and Dr. Parker Young from the Erskine Board. Indeed, there are individuals on this Search Committee who are faithful to the Erskine Mission, but it is no great secret that Dr. Thomas, a PC(USA) elder, does not support the evangelical Christian Mission of Erskine. President Randy Ruble's appointment of a Chairman who is opposed to the Erskine Mission is disappointing but not unexpected. This is not the kind of Search Committee that is going to recruit a candidate who will promote the Erskine Mission. This is not the kind of Search Committee that is going to recruit a candidate who will actively seek to bring Erskine College in step with the theological ethos of the ARP Church. This is not the kind of Search Committee that is going to recruit a candidate who is decidedly evangelical. Most likely, the divide between Erskine College and the ARP Church is going to be widened. The question is whether Dr. Ruble will be held accountable for yet another attempt to subvert the Erskine Mission.**

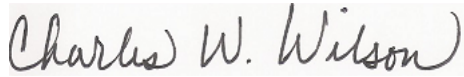
**Dr. Weatherman's parting words to both Erskine College and the ARP Church were "embrace the mission." The Editor is not optimistic that this Search Committee will recruit a candidate for Vice President and Academic Dean of Erskine College who will "embrace the mission." In the opinion of the Editor, this Search Committee will attempt to recruit a candidate who will ignore and abandon the Erskine Mission. This Committee is not going to seek out another Dr. Don Weatherman.**

**There are those at Erskine College who have expressed shock that the General Synod of the ARP Church has appointed an Investigatory Commission to look into matters at Erskine College. What did they expect to take place? The actions of the Erskine Administration and faculty have long been out of step and out of touch with the ARP**



**Church. Dr. Ruble's appointment of Dr. Thomas as the Chairman of this important Search Committee illustrates just how far removed he is from the ARP Church. This is yet another instance of the Erskine Administration's arrogant disregard of the theological sensibilities and mandates of the ARP Church.**

**These are my thoughts,**

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

**Charles W. Wilson**

***~Scroll down for ARPTalk(21.3)~***

# **THE REALITY, THE SMOKESCREEN, AND THE ASPIRATIONS**

## **1. THE REALITY.**

**The reality of the relationship between Erskine College and the ARP Church is that there is a struggle for the soul of the college. The first option: Is Erskine going to be the college of the ARP Church that is decidedly an evangelical institution that boldly proclaims Jesus Christ as the only Savior of sinners and studiously attempts to integrate Christian faith and learning to the glory of God—as Erskine is advertised? The second option: Is Erskine going to be merely a reflection of a faithless PC(USA) college that is, at heart, decidedly secular and that views religious faith as a cultural heritage and an irrelevant appendage of life rather than a life-transforming encounter with the living Christ that demands Christ's sovereignty in every area of life?**

**The following two quotes below were found on "Facebook." These young people call for an Erskine that is secular and gives only lip service to the college's religious heritage. It is the opinion of the Editor that the form of Christianity they found at Erskine has not challenged them to the claims of Christ.**

**Erskine was a great college, expensive but great. Good times and good friends. Yes, we knew it was a Christian college, especially because of convo and chapel. There are also many groups at Erskine to work with certain belief systems. I could handle these things, they were just there, not forced on you. However, I find it ridiculous that some students want to turn Erskine into Bob Jones. College is for learning, especially the sciences. We are not going to halt the march of progress because these SAFE students are more infatuated with a fairy tale. Some of us who attended Erskine were not Christian, and now they would like to limit our acceptance? What next,**

public stoning because you failed to attend chapel? These groups need to find a school that matches their systems, because Erskine is not it.”  
-(name withheld by the Editor)

“You can't reason with people like [name withheld by the Editor], or the other "students for Erskine." Erskine will never be Christian enough for these folks and they will never be able to appreciate the so called "Atheist" professors who are teaching them more than they realize. We only grow by being challenged. How will your faith mature if it is never questioned? It is pretty easy for a Bible professor to incorporate Christ into every class, but not so much for a history or biology professor who has a duty to present the most contemporary information for his or her students. These guys don't view anything as separate [sic] irrelevant to religion because their religion dictates that it must be the center of everything they do. Nothing will ever be Christian enough for them because it is impossible to meet their standards while also pursuing academic excellence.”  
-(name withheld by the Editor)

**Sadly, each of these young people are either students or graduates of Erskine College. Erskine College claims to be both the college of the ARP Church and evangelically Christian. According to the testimony of these two young people, Erskine College did not have an evangelical Christian impact on their lives. As a matter of fact, they describe Erskine College in secular terms. They recoil at the Christian world and life view that acknowledges faith in Christ as the “center of everything,” describing it as infatuation “with a fairy tale.”**

**The point that *ARPTalk* has been making and continues to make is that Erskine has failed and is failing its evangelical Christian mission. This point is abundantly demonstrated and verified in the above “Facebook” quotes. The Erskine experience did not lead these young people to an unapologetic Christian world and life view—the Erskine experience did not even lead them to Christ. The Erskine experience led them in another direction. The idea of a Christian world and life view is foreign and repulsive to these young people.**

**If these two young people are the only ones who have been impacted by their Erskine experience in the non-Christian manner that it seems they have, we ARPs have much for which to be ashamed. If Erskine College is the ARP Church in higher education, we have greatly failed these two young people. We have much for which we will give an account before Jesus on the day of His coming. There are those who are going to give account**

**for Matthew 18:6: “But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”**

**Twenty-five percent of the budget of General Synod goes to fund Erskine. Just think, this is the work of our tithes and offering at Erskine—and not to the glory of God!**

**The following quote by J. Gresham Machen is appropriate. It is also sobering.**

We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion (“Christianity and Culture,” *Princeton Theological Review* 11 (1913), p. 7).

## **2. THE SMOKESCREEN.**

**Well, that old canard—the “Bob Jones University boogieman”—is being trotted out once again by the blindly loyal Erskinites. They whine that the concerned evangelical students and the ARP Church want “to turn Erskine into Bob Jones University.”**

**One wonders why these people cannot be more creative. Why do they need to create such a “straw man?” Bob Jones University has nothing to do with this discussion. This discussion is about Erskine College and the direction of the educational institution of the ARP Church.**

**And why this odd and unnatural fixation with Bob Jones University? Is BJU the only Christian institution they have heard of? Are they really that provincial? Why not mention other schools such as Wheaton College, Taylor University, Gordon College, Belhaven College, Westmont College, and Grove City College—all institutions that are serious about their evangelical Christian mission, that have stellar and well-published faculties, and that do not seem to have much difficulty attracting and retaining good students. In fact, if we use the standard yardsticks for measuring the quality of academic institutions, these fine Christian institutions are superior to Erskine College. So what is the point of this bizarre preoccupation with Bob Jones**

**University? Is it to distract ARPs from schools that might serve as a model for a revitalization of Erskine?**

**Or, more plausibly, is the Bob Jones University ploy nothing but a smokescreen to hide Erskine's failure and rebellion?**

**Conservatives such as the Editor and the "S.A.F.E." students are not seeking to turn Erskine into Bob Jones University, or any other Christian college/university, for that matter. Conservatives such as the Editor and others simply want Erskine College to reflect the spiritual and theological values of the ARP Church in higher education by embracing the Erskine mission.**

**Erskine College exists because of the vision of the ARP Church for Christian higher education. The motto of Erskine College (*Scientia cum Moribus Conjuncta* – "Knowledge joined with Morals") combines faith and learning. The heritage of Erskine College is Reformed and evangelical Christianity. *The Philosophy of Higher Christian Education* calls for Erskine College to be evangelically Christian. The definition of "evangelical" that is held by the ARP Church calls for Erskine College to be decidedly and intentionally evangelically Christian. Therefore, why is it that Erskine College is in open opposition to the directives and desires of the ARP Church?**

**No, this is not about Bob Jones University; it is about Erskine College. The statements by so many Erskine students, alumni, faculty, and friends who envision Erskine College as a watered-down denominational school with a religious past that exalts so-called "academic excellence" as an idol confirms the Erskine failure and demonstrates an anti-Christian bias at Erskine.**

### **3. THE ASPIRATIONS.**

**What are the aspirations of those of us who desire to see reformation at Erskine? The Erskine loyalists who cry "Erskine, right or wrong, Erskine" paint their critics as uneducated and illiterate troglodytes who live in caves, eat raw meat, and worship fire. Well, perhaps the Editor has painted the discussion a bit too dramatically, but the criticisms of "anti-academic" and "Bible-thumpers" and "witch hunt" are used widely. So, what are the aspirations of so many ARPs for Erskine? Consider the following:**

- **An Erskine College and Theological Seminary that is faithful to her history and the Mission as spelled out in Synod's *The Philosophy of Higher Christian Education*.**

**This aspiration is not one that has been tried and found wanting. For the last 40 years, this aspiration of the General Synod of the ARP Church has been assiduously ignored by the Erskine Administration and faculty. Why? The answer is simple. They cannot be and do something that they are not! This is the sad truth!**

- **An Erskine College and Theological Seminary that promotes the goals, the welfare, the growth, and the unity of the ARP Church.**

**What does the ARP Church get out of Erskine College? Is Erskine College the college that our high school seniors are flocking to attend? You have never heard that Erskine had to turn away ARP students because there were too many of them.**

**What does the ARP Church get out of Erskine Theological Seminary? Is this the seminary where our new ministers are being educated for the ministry? Is this the seminary we trust? Are our ministerial candidates flocking to ETS or to other seminaries? Over and over we hear from ARP ministerial students who attend ETS that they only did so because it is cheaper. In other words, ETS has to "buy students."**

**What do we ARPs get out of Erskine? Do we get the pride that comes from knowing that Erskine is a decidedly Christian College that upholds the sovereign claims of Christ and is impacting the Southeast for Christ? Do we get the joy of knowing that Erskine is a Christian college that allows non-Christians to attend so that the claims of Christ may be presented to them—a place where non-Christians are challenged to know the Savior?**

**No! No! We ARPs get none of this! What we get is the drudgery of giving Erskine \$600,000 to \$700,000 a year. For what? So that the kingdom of unbelief may be advanced?!? Look, there is no place for neutrality here. Either one is for Christ and His Kingdom or one is against Christ and His Kingdom. The Christ of the Bible does not allow for neutrality!**

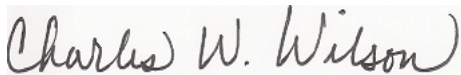
- **An Erskine College and Theological Seminary that understands that the ARP Church owns the land upon which the institution sits.**

**It is not a falsehood or an exaggeration to say that the ARP Church is not held highly in the Erskine community. Often the question is asked "Who is the ARP Church that we should listen to them?"**

**Since they give to Erskine, the alumni groups seem to think they own Erskine. The faculty seems to think they own Erskine. Indeed, the Erskine Board is entrusted with the affairs of the Erskine and oversight and responsibility for the corporation resides with the Board. However, the landowner is the ARP Church. In its great generosity and sense of mission, the ARP Church has allowed Erskine to use the land on which Erskine College sits, and the ARP Church has also been the largest donor of Erskine College.**

**Do you not think it is time that the leadership of Erskine College recognize and respond to the aspirations of the ARP Church?**

**These are my thoughts,**

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

**Charles W. Wilson**

***~Scroll down for ARPTalk(21.4)~***

## ARP Talk(21.4)

**Editor's Remarks: The following is a copy of the sermon that Dr. R. J. Gore preached at the Pre-Synod Conference this past June.**

### **THE POWERFUL WORD**

By R. J. Gore

In a 1935 exchange with former seminarian and then Soviet dictator, Joseph Stalin, the French Foreign Minister encouraged Stalin not to repress Roman Catholics “in order to propitiate the Pope.” Stalin’s reply, “The Pope? How many divisions has he got?” Well, none. During World War II, the Red Army had over 400 divisions and conscripted a total of 34 million soldiers. In 1953, Joseph Stalin died, reportedly from ingesting rat poison. In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed. The last time I checked, the Pope was alive and well and the Roman Catholic Church shows no signs of demise. It has long been observed that the pen is mightier than the sword. Words are often the most powerful of weapons. And no words are more powerful than the Word of God.

Hebrews 4:12 says, in the English Standard Version, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” The New King James Version says “the word of God is living and powerful.” The word, “active,” or “powerful” comes from a Greek word that is the root of our words “energy,” or “energetic.” The exact same word is used in two other places in the New Testament. In 1 Cor. 16:9, Paul says a “wide door for effective work” has opened to him. In Philemon 1:6, Paul writes to Philemon, praying that “the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.” Effective, energetic, active, powerful! As F.F. Bruce says, “God’s Word . . . is not like the word of man; it is living, effective, and self-fulfilling.”

Over thirty years ago, in the article, “The Bible’s View of Its Own Authority,” the Faculty of Erskine Theological Seminary wrote:

In our judgment the evidence shows that the Bible provides strong testimony to its own authority and divine inspiration but nowhere claims to be verbally inerrant, nor does the Bible provide a substantial basis for the verbal inerrancy theory of inspiration.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “The Bible’s View of Its Own Authority,” *The Associate Reformed Presbyterian* (December 1977): 12.



And then the article provides line upon line, precept upon precept to demonstrate that your Bible is not the verbally inspired, inerrant Word of God. The 1977 faculty distinguished between the “central saving purpose” of the Bible, and the “peripheral matters of science, arithmetic, and geography.” And, after telling the reader that “in one sense, it is foolish to mention” the mistakes in the Bible, they proceeded “to point out a few of the problems” to help those poor unenlightened souls who believed there are no mistakes in the Bible (my words, not theirs).<sup>2</sup> After demonstrating some of the errors in the Bible, they concluded with the rousing affirmation that Jesus Christ is the Word of God. “This Word become flesh (John 1:14) is Jesus as the Word by which all other words are to be judged . . . even the words of Scripture.”<sup>3</sup> This sounds pious enough, but it is full of deadly error, for it places distance between the Christ of the Word and the Words of the Christ. Let me ask you: where do we learn about the incarnate Word—if not in the written Word? To appeal to the incarnate Christ over against Scripture is to misunderstand the nature of God’s Powerful Word—and make fundamental errors in Christology. Yes, Jesus took upon himself full humanity—excepting sin! And if we are to use the incarnation analogy with Scripture, as do Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, we should follow their lead, believing that because the eternal Logos is the person of the God-Man, the incarnate Word always spoke the truth of God and the Powerful Word that comes to us in the servant-form of Scripture likewise always speaks the truth of God.<sup>4</sup>

I am supposed to talk to you about the Powerful Word, so let us leave aside, for the moment, these powerless words from the 1977 Faculty of Erskine Theological Seminary and turn to the Powerful Word. One reason that the Word of God is powerful is this: it is the God-breathed Word. II Timothy 3:16-17 says: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” To be breathed out by God is to be the immediate effect of his creative causality. Due to mistranslations of the text such as “All Scripture is inspired by God” or “given by inspiration of God,” it is possible to miss the direct connection between the divine activity and the product. Note that the human authors of Scripture are not in view in this text. The text says nothing about any divine influence on the authors. Instead, the text affirms that every Scripture, *pa/sa grafh.*, was *qeo,pneustoj*, is “breathed-out by God.” Bavinck notes that the Holy Spirit does not abandon the Powerful Word, but says it “is still God-breathed and as such God-breathing.”<sup>5</sup>

The context indicates Paul is referring to the Old Testament canon, verse 15, and every word is breathed out by God and profitable for “teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” There are no unprofitable words for every Word of “the sacred writings” was breathed out by God. This affirmation flies

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Gaffin, *God’s Word in Servant Form*, 22-23.

<sup>5</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 439.

in the face of the lifeless alternatives offered by those who have led the church into the desert of biblical uncertainty and moral relativity. And, yes, it is true that “the expression ‘word of God’ has various senses in Scripture: the power of God, the content of special revelation, the gospel, Christ. Only once does it refer to a portion of Scripture (Ps. 119:105), and never to Scripture as a whole.”<sup>6</sup> In fact, as Bavinck notes, the expression “the ‘word of God’” in our text for tonight, “is not identical with Scripture.” Nevertheless, Bavinck argues that the “NT in fact regards the books of the OT as nothing other than the ‘word of God.’”<sup>7</sup> And so I am on sound theological grounds, even if the exegetical basis is indirect.

Have you ever thought about how the Bible speaks of the breath of God? Psalm 33:6 says “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.” Indeed, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth by the power of his Word! It is fascinating to read how scientists describe the origin of the universe. The “All About Science” website says this about the Big Bang Theory of Origins.

According to the standard theory, our universe sprang into existence as “singularity” around 13.7 billion years ago. What is a “singularity” and where does it come from? Well, to be honest, we don't know for sure. Singularities are zones which defy our current understanding of physics. They are thought to exist at the core of “black holes.” Black holes are areas of intense gravitational pressure. The pressure is thought to be so intense that finite matter is actually squished into infinite density (a mathematical concept which truly boggles the mind). These zones of infinite density are called “singularities.” Our universe is thought to have begun as an infinitesimally small, infinitely hot, infinitely dense, something - a singularity. Where did it come from? We don't know. Why did it appear? We don't know.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps I can help. There was, indeed, a “singularity” and the Scriptures declare that said “singularity” was the “Powerful Word” that brought all things into existence. In the beginning, in a moment unlike anything before, after, or ever, matter came into existence, packed into an infinitely dense point, and in a moment expanded, rushing outwards at the speed of light with the heat of a thousand suns. Indeed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, by the Powerful Word of God, nothing became something, and something became everything. That everything is our expanding universe, with its residual background heat and ambient radiation that still testifies to this powerful beginning.

In the beginning, however, the earth was formless and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the deep. This formless mass of newly created matter was wrapped in darkness and visible only to the eyes of God. But the creation was not

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>7</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 402.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.big-bang-theory.com/> .

alone. For the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters and God breathed out another Powerful Word, “Let there be light.” And instantly, every speck of this new creation shined with light from Almighty God himself. The primordial darkness of inchoate creation gave way to the brilliance that only comes from One who, himself, dwells in light inaccessible. As we sing in Haydn’s great hymn,

The spacious firmament on high,  
With all the blue ethereal sky,  
And spangled heavens, a shining frame  
Their great Original proclaim.  
The unwearied sun, from day to day,  
Does his Creator's powers display,  
And publishes to every land  
The work of an Almighty Hand.

Then the God who spoke this Powerful Word of creation, breathed out an even greater miracle. Genesis 2:7 says “the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” And so began the story of all men and women, all Sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. God who breathed-out the Powerful Word of creation now breathed life into his image-bearers and gave them dominion over the creation. They were the living embodiment, the breathing, thinking, speaking, loving, image-bearers, the king and queen of creation, subject only to the Lordship of the Great King Himself. Their world was God-intoxicated; every fact and facet of their environment testified to its divine origin. Yet the revelation of God—in the image-bearer and in all creation—was never intended to be a sufficient revelation. Indeed, as our Confession of Faith says,

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church. (1.1)

More was needed and so God complemented his mighty deeds of revelation by speaking a Powerful Word of revelation to establish union and communion with his image-bearers. Our Larger Catechism describes God’s kind provision and communication:

The providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created, was the placing him in paradise, appointing him to dress it, giving him liberty to eat of the fruit of the earth; putting the creatures under his dominion, and ordaining marriage for his help; affording him communion with himself; instituting the Sabbath; entering into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, of which

**the tree of life was a pledge; and forbidding to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death. Q.20**

**Bathed in the golden brilliance of the newly created sun, and under the mandate given them by the Great King, the man and the woman tended the garden. The creation was a gift from the Creator, the Great King, their covenant partner—and their every need was met. As if that were not enough, in the evening, in the cool of the day, the Great King would meet with them and they relished those meetings, for God had created them, according to our Confession:**

**with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it: and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures. (4.2)**

**The divine provision and prohibition were Powerful Words of revelation from without. God breathed-out these words, speaking them into the created order. They were not identical with the general revelation of God in creation or in the image-bearer. They were not the words of Adam that, in a moment of divine influence, became for him the word of God. No, these were the very words of God, spoken by God, as a special revelation of his will. These words were necessary; there were no “caution” or “danger zone” signs posted around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. These revelatory words were sufficient, not to satisfy every question that might pop into Adam’s mind, but to distinguish between the path of life and the path that led to certain death. These words were clear; God said: “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Adam did not need a crash course in post-Kantian thought; he did not have to build a bridge across Lessing’s ditch; he did not need to “Listen for the Word of God” in the hope that a witness to revelation might become for him the revelation of God. No. He heard these words as the authoritative revelation of God and they were understandable. God spoke these Powerful Words as a gracious gift to his covenant partners.**

**They were words of blessing that should have led to wise choices, to life—indeed, as indicated sacramentally by the Tree of Life, to Eternal Life. But, one evening as the sun drooped low in the sky and the shadows grew long, the man and woman did not appear to fellowship with the Great King. Earlier, that day, in the warmth of the sun and the full light of day, our first parents had discovered the meaning of darkness. They both knew the word of the Lord. The Psalmist said, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.” They had no excuse. The**

night sky with its heavenly blanket of sparkling stars, undimmed by the light pollution of today's urban sprawl, declared the glory of God. The sun racing across the blue sky, unfettered by smog or suspended particulates, shouted out the glory of God. This was enough to render them without excuse. But, they had more! They also had God's spoken revelation, his Powerful Word, offering blessing for trust and faithfulness, and warning of death and destruction if they would not hear and obey.

There was another party present and therein lies the explanation of this cosmic tragedy. With the hissing of sibilants and the superficial attractiveness that is the constant concomitant of sin, the serpent asked the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" The old King James Version puts it this way, "Yea, hath God said?" Not content to allow the light of God, alone, to illumine their souls, the image-bearers sought to become as gods. Not content to hear and believe the Powerful Word of the Lord, they sought to create their own words of power—only to see those words, not take wing from their lips and soar with power, but drop stillborn to the ground. Their words were not Powerful Words of life, but powerless, lying words of death. Not only were they unable to become a source of light for themselves, they now found that the reflected light in their souls had gone dim. In place of the shining image of God was something distorted, dark, and horribly unsettling. They could see well enough with their physical eyes, for they knew they were naked. But there was a blindness in their souls, a darkness so deep they could no longer clearly see the evidence of the Creator that surrounded them. It was as though they had put out their own eyes.

"Adam, where are you?" They heard the voice of the Great King. Hesitantly, they answered that they were naked, and so hid themselves. As the sun drew near the horizon and shadows began to fall, Adam stood with Eve, his wife. In the presence of God, their darkness magnified many times over. With heads bowed and shoulders stooped beneath the burden of their guilt, God pronounced Powerful Words that sentenced them to death, even as he hinted at a promised Redeemer who would undo the curse of sin.. They had denied the Powerful Words of blessing, and such unbelief has ever been the onramp to the highway to hell. In this regard, nothing much has changed. From Cain who would not hear God's warning of sin at the door; to Pharaoh who would not heed God's call to let his people go; to the High Priest Caiphas who tore his robes and declared of Jesus, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need?"

And what of the great intellectual critics? From Reimarus and Strauss who denied the Gospels and the miracles; to Graf, Wellhausen, Kuenen, and von Rad who denied that Moses was the primary author of the Pentateuch and declared much of the Old Testament to be a pious novel—badly edited, at that. To Briggs, Brunner, Bultmann, and Barth who would speak of the word of God, but not identify revelation with canonical text, and especially objected to the idea that the text comes to us without human error. There have always been those who criticize the Scriptures, who sit in judgment on the text and ask, "Yea, hath God said?" What is remarkable is that such creatures once were content to dwell outside the church and throw rocks against the stained glass windows. But unbelief is no longer

attacking from the outside. Over the last century or so these critics have moved into the manse, donned clerical collars and academic gowns, and signed up for church pensions and benefits even as they stepped into pulpits and hissed, “Hath God said?”

The resounding answer of Scripture is, indeed God hath said, for he has breathed-out his Powerful Word “at many times and in many ways through the prophets,” Heb. 1:1. Now there is a second reason why the Word of God is a Powerful Word. 2 Peter 1:21 says that “no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” This passage contains a denial—prophecy did not come from a human origin; and an affirmation—prophets spoke as they were moved or carried by the Holy Spirit. The present passive participle indicates this was an ongoing activity. A great illustration of this “being carried” is found in Acts 27:15, 17, when another form of the verb [*phero*] is used to describe the ship being driven along by the wind, completely at the mercy of the elements. As the Lutheran commentator, R.C.H. Lenski, explains: “God and the Spirit are the real speakers.” No one denies the human element in Scripture, but the focus of Scripture is not on the secondary author but the primary author. The focus is “*Deus Dixit*,” God has spoken.

To state it simply, our God-breathed book, the Bible, is a Powerful Word because it is also Spirit-borne. And the prophetic word that has been given birth by the Holy Spirit, is more certain, Peter says, than even what he has seen with his own eyes. In verse 16 Peter refers to his own, eyewitness experience of the Transfiguration—and then tells us that the prophetic word is more certain than what he saw with his own eyes! The Powerful Prophetic Word came by dreams and visions, by theophanies and conversations. Indeed, on occasion, by the very finger of God, his Powerful Word was made known to the patriarchs and the prophets. Wayne Grudem says “the Old Testament frequently portrays God as communicating with people by using actual spoken words, not simply by communicating ideas or thoughts somehow apart from individual words.”<sup>9</sup> One of the most familiar examples in the Old Testament is the prologue to the Ten Commandments where we read, “And God spoke all these words, saying. . . .”

The Old Testament abounds with many more examples of God’s direct speech to Abraham, to Moses, to Jonah. It also is filled with references to the prophets speaking on behalf of God. In Deuteronomy 18, there is this wonderful section that details the Powerful Word that God speaks through his servant, Moses:

**Deut. 18:18- I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.**

**20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that**

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<sup>9</sup> Wayne Grudem, “Scripture’s Self Attestation,” in *Scripture an Truth*, edited by D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 20.

same prophet shall die.' 21 And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?'- 22 when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

Here the test of a true prophet is tied not to some general thought or “whatever the Bible teaches,” but to specific words, some of which directly addressed matters of faith, others indirectly matters of history, politics, or economics.

But the test for all these words was stringent—only the Powerful Word of the Lord is able, unerringly, to accomplish what it promises. The word that fails, the word that errs—that word does not come from the Lord. It comes from a false prophet. Here the Old Testament affirms verbal, plenary inspiration without a hint of equivocation—and the word that failed was then, as it is now, a powerless word of death and not a Powerful Word of life. Moreover, as Richard B. Gaffin writes, “the Spirit’s work in the inspiration of Scripture, strictly considered, presupposes the activity of the Father in preparing the organs of revelation for their task, by virtue of factors like their backgrounds, upbringing, personal development, and the work of the Son as Logos and Revealer.”<sup>10</sup> Or, as Warfield explained, the Spirit of God “spontaneously produce[d] under the Divine directions the writings appointed to them.”<sup>11</sup> Inspiration, then, is a focused point of the Reformed doctrine of Predestination.

Hundreds of times in the Old Testament, we find the phrase “Thus says the Lord” to introduce the words of the prophets and there are a host of references in the Old Testament “of men writing down words that God told them to write, words that are then understood as God’s words.”<sup>12</sup> For example, in Exodus 17:14, “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this as a memorial in a book’” and in Exodus 24:4, “And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord.” As our Confession states:

for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people being now ceased. (1.1)

The patriarchs and prophets all wrote with the expectation that God’s Powerful Word would accomplish the redemption he first promised in the garden. While they wrote of many things, the most important, indeed the central theme of Scripture was this promise of the coming Redeemer. Throughout the centuries, the hope of Messiah burned brightly in the hearts of the people of Israel. Through slavery in Egypt to exile in Babylon, the people of God faced the darkness of

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<sup>10</sup> Gaffin, 71.

<sup>11</sup> Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, in *Works*, 1:104.

<sup>12</sup> Grudem, 25.

paganism without, and unfaithfulness within. They did this with the confidence that what God promised was the Powerful Word of One who is always faithful—and always does what he says.

Isaiah the prophet spoke in a time of great darkness. The shadow of the Assyrian Empire lay over the land of Israel and the certainty of God's judgment was unmistakable. But Isaiah spoke words of comfort,

Nevertheless there will no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan. "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned."

He spoke of a time when the Incarnate Word would come and push back the darkness by the light of his presence, a time when righteousness would cover the earth and the people of God would dwell in peace.

The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. . . . The Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end.

In the fullness of time, God did send the Messiah, the Christ. Not only is this Powerful Word God-breathed and Spirit-borne, it is the witness of Christ. Now those of you who have done a little work with grammar know that to speak of the witness of Christ is to raise the question: is this a subjective genitive, or an objective genitive? Or, to frame this simply, am I asserting that the Scripture witnesses to Christ? Or that the Scripture is Christ's witness to us? The answer is "Yes!" Scripture is both witness to Christ and his witness to us. Now one important caveat: I am not using witness in the neo-Orthodox sense. John Leith, for example, used the neo-Orthodox formula in a number of his writings, saying that "the Scriptures provided a witness to revelation and by the power of the Holy Spirit they become revelation themselves."<sup>13</sup> Rather, I am using the word "witness," [*martaria*] as it is used in Revelation 19:10 which equates the "testimony (witness) of Jesus Christ with the word of prophecy." His witness is revelation.

First, consider what the Scripture says about Christ. John's gospel says, "In the beginning was the WORD, and the WORD was with God and the WORD was God . . . . In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it." Now, some thought John the Baptist to be the light of God—but he said "I am only a witness to the light." Nevertheless, the true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. Jesus was that light, the WORD who became flesh and dwelled among us. And he was a Powerful Word indeed. John said, "we have seen his glory, the glory of the

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, his *Crisis in the Churches*, 47.



only begotten who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Paul tells us in Christ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3) and “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col. 2:9). The writer to the Hebrews tells us: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”

Second, consider what Jesus, the Powerful incarnate Word, testifies about Scripture. On many occasions, Jesus appealed to the Old Testament Scriptures with the words, “It is written.” When challenged by Satan in the wilderness testing, Jesus responded by appealing to “every word which proceeds from the mouth of God.” Though he was the Incarnate Word, he appealed to the written Scriptures in response to the tempter. Jesus repeatedly indicated that he shared the view of his contemporaries that the Old Testament was the Powerful Word of God and was true in all that it affirmed. Jesus said that “until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” In one of his many exchanges with the religious leaders, Jesus appealed to the Old Testament, affirming that “the Scripture cannot be broken.” In his High Priestly prayer, Jesus asked the Father to sanctify all believers through God’s Word, adding, “Your word is truth.”

Let’s be clear about this. The strongest witness to the absolute truth and entire trustworthiness of Scripture is our Lord himself. No unbiased reader who picks up the Bible and seeks to discover what Jesus believed about Scripture would ever confuse the view of Jesus with that of Briggs, Bultmann, Brunner, or Barth. Notice one final thing about Jesus and the Word of God. Jesus says what the Father has given him to say. That is, the witness of Christ is identical to the God-breathed Word. Remember what Deuteronomy 18:18 said? “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.”

And this is exactly what Jesus claimed for himself. He claimed to be that prophet. John 8:27, “I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.” John 12:49,50 “For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.” John 14:10, “The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.” John 17:6, “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world.” John 17:8, “I have given them the words that you gave me.” John 17:14, “I have given them your word.” The Incarnate Word, it does not place himself over against the God-breathed Word, but identifies his words with God’s Words.

Furthermore, the witness of Christ is identical with the Spirit-born Word. 1 Peter 1:10-12, Peter writes:

**Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.**

**In this text Peter makes two crucial identifications: first, he identifies the work of the Old Testament prophets, the work that he describes in 2 Peter 1:21 as Spirit-born, as the product of the Spirit of Christ! The witness of the Incarnate Word is also the Spirit-borne Word. Second, he connects the prophecies of the Old Testament with the New Testament gospel fulfillment which has been preached by the power and working of the Holy Spirit—who has been sent from heaven by the Father and the Son. To sum up, he identifies the witness of Christ with the Spirit-born Word, and draws a direct parallel between the prophecy of Old Testament Scripture and the fulfillment of New Testament gospel. They are both the Powerful Word of God. The Powerful Word is God-breathed, Spirit-born, and the witness of Christ.**

**We started out tonight with a story about the Soviet Union and an article from the Faculty of Erskine Theological Seminary. As for the article, we are over 30 years removed from it and we now have a statement, adopted by the 2008 General Synod, that clearly repudiates the position espoused by the 1977 faculty of Erskine Theological Seminary. I rejoice that last synod took this momentous step back towards the historic, Church doctrine of Scripture. But I tremble at the thought that the vote was only two to one. That means that approximately one-third of the leaders of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, for whatever reason, chose not to affirm the inerrancy of Scripture. That means there is yet much work to be done.**

**Moreover, the last 50 years have taught us something else. The churches where the doctrines of Briggs, Bultmann, Brunner, and Barth have triumphed are ecclesiastical deserts. The churches of Europe that embraced their doctrines have not grown stronger over the last half-century. They have diminished. The mainline churches of North America that lionized these theologians have steadily hemorrhaged members as faithful pastors and laymen have shaken the dust off and voted with their feet. I may be wrong on this, but by my accounting, every mainline denomination that has rejected the inerrancy of Scripture has not only suffered devastating losses in membership, but has abandoned other truths and moral requirements of Scripture—or is poised to do so soon.**

**We have much work to do. And, as Presbyterians, we believe there is a decent and orderly way to do everything. We also believe in accountability. That means we will have to find ways to live with those who are in our number and yet voted against the synod statement on inerrancy. To be sure, an affirmation of**

inerrancy is now part of the ordination vows, and this will clearly shape the complexion of the church in years to come. For the time being, however, we have embraced the historic Church doctrine of Scripture, even as for a time we must accommodate different points of view in our presbyteries even as we seek for greater unity.

And that leads us back to the Soviet Union. Actually, to Russia, since the Soviet Union is gone. Well the story is still being written, and there are conflicting reports. But here is one story from 2006 that shows what God is doing.

Another evidence of God's presence in the [Kabardino- Balkaria Republic] region is Gennady Terkun, once a powerful gang leader and black magician who used to have people assassinated and spent a total of 18 years in prison. Or, as he now calls himself, “a wolf whom God is making into a lamb.” It was thanks to *perestroika* that prison doors were flung open to all kinds of religious groups. In Krasnodar in 1988, a Russian Baptist group was allowed to minister to recidivist criminals at a maximum-security prison. Terkun, who says he could communicate with the dead, predict the future “100 percent accurately”—for example, telling prisoners when guards would be away long enough to make moonshine—and was in command of the prisoners, was infuriated. He took the missionaries' visit as an intrusion on his spiritual territory.

As he tells this story, Terkun, a man of few words whose eyes, even today, seem to penetrate anyone they fall on, doesn't go into sensational details. I have been briefed, so I pry them out of him. “After they [the Christians] left, I wrote them a very long letter—eight or nine typed pages,” he says. “I was trying to prove in this letter that they were dark, uneducated, without any intellect.”

The letter reached an older man in a nearby Baptist church, who replied, and the two started corresponding. Their correspondence lasted two and a half years. “He had an amazing patience,” Terkun says, “responding to all my questions.”

Finally, “some kind of power got broken” in Terkun's heart. When the national coup occurred in 1991, prison guards took the especially dangerous inmates to a special confinement area to prevent a rebellion. “It was a hole in the ground with bars on top, through which the guards spread gas, which over time could act as poison,” Terkun recalls. It was there that he called on Jesus. Soon, after the prisoners were pulled out, he “felt the power go out of him.” But a higher power was working in him. In spite of weak health—he had lost one lung and doctors said he was about to die of tuberculosis—over the next five years he started several churches in various prisons where he was incarcerated.

**He now works as a pastor of an evangelical church in the Caucasus region. Remarkably, even though as my translator informs me, “it's very hard for [the locals called] Ossetians to accept the authority of Russians here,” 80 or 85 percent of people who attend his church are Ossetians.<sup>14</sup>**

**How do you explain something like this? How do you explain Ossetians, who have historic enmity with Russia, joining together with this Russian pastor to worship and serve God? From a human perspective, you can't. It would be tantamount to a converted David Duke pastoring the local AME Zion congregation. But there is an explanation that alone is adequate. Here we see what happens when the Holy Spirit applies the Powerful Word to the lives of believers. It is the Powerful Word that confronts our theological errors and our sins of pride and rebellion. It is the Powerful Word that is profitable “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” It is the Powerful Word that gives direction to this synod so that our faith and practice, our deliberations and our votes, will be acceptable to the Great King of the Church. It is the Powerful Word that will one day present the Church as a spotless bride before the Bridegroom. And until that day, Russians, Ossetians, and Associate Reformed Presbyterians—all need the Powerful Word to work in our midst, to change hearts, and direct us on paths of faithfulness. Fathers and Brethren, we are of all men most blessed, for we have the Powerful Word and the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. We have great challenges before us, but we are not without resources! Thanks be to God!**

**~Thank you for reading ARPTalk(21)~**

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/november/37.32.html?start=6>.