

ARPTalk (24)

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ARPTalk(24.1)

LETTERS AND THINGS

(24.1.1)

Letter from Matt Richardson

I am a 1995 graduate of Erskine College. I also grew up in the ARP church. I have just discovered your website. My wife [Erskine class of 1996] and I have been reading *ARPTalk* all day – and growing very frustrated at what we are discovering has been happening at Erskine. Is it true that there has been a movement to secularize the college and break with the ARP tradition? Is the seminary still struggling over issues of biblical inerrancy? Are students being intimidated for speaking out, and are Christian voices becoming more and more "cries in the wilderness" in Due West? The loss of EBK scholarships and accounts of professors screeching about Erskine advertisements on Creationist websites make for a surreal version of the Erskine College I used to know and love.

Please know that we will be praying for the students, faculty, and the efforts of men such as yourself who have laid out the plan of battle here.

From what I see, as Erskine is now, if my two sons were of age, they would not be attending Erskine. I sincerely hope that this will not be the case when the time comes for them to attend college.

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DENIAL IS NOT JUST A RIVER IN EGYPT!

The Editor of *ARPTalk* is sure that there are those who mightily disagree with his assessment of Erskine College and Seminary. Well, consider the news items below. They are painful to reveal. Yes, denial is not just a river in Egypt!

1. Gid Alston's memo on the integration of faith and science:

Dr. Gid Alston, Professor of Physical Education and Health, is now the Interim Academic Dean of Erskine College. On October 7, 2009, the following e-mail memo was sent out by Dr. Alston to Erskine College faculty and students regarding the integration of faith and science:

Erskine College faculty, staff, and students:

Some people claim that science and Christian faith are at odds. I firmly disagree. I'd like for you to consider the following account, taken from the memoirs of Buzz Aldrin and the Tom Hanks Emmy-winning HBO mini-series. As you read, keep in mind that astronauts are dedicated scientists.

The first food and drink consumed on the moon was the reserved sacrament of communion. At first, this fact was kept secret. To mark the 40th anniversary of the first Apollo moon landing, Bosco Peters has posted the details of this Christian act of worship 235,000 miles from the earth. The First Communion on the Moon is now one of The Episcopal Church's 'lesser feasts and fasts', he writes.

On Sunday July 20, 1969 the first people landed on the moon. Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were in the lunar lander which touched down at 3:17 Eastern Standard Time. Buzz Aldrin had with him the Reserved Sacrament. He radioed: "Houston, this is Eagle. This is the LM pilot speaking. I would like to request a few moments of silence. I would like to invite each person listening in, whoever or wherever he may be, to contemplate for a moment the events of the last few hours, and to give thanks in his own individual way."

Later he wrote: "In the radio blackout, I opened the little plastic packages which contained the bread and the wine. I poured the wine into the chalice our church had given me. In the one-sixth gravity of the moon, the wine slowly curled and gracefully came up the side of the cup. Then I read the Scripture, I am the vine, you are the branches... Whosoever abides in me will bring forth much fruit. I had intended to read my communion passage back to earth, but at the last minute Deke Slayton had requested that I not do this. NASA was already embroiled in a legal

battle with Madelyn Murray O'Hare, the infamous opponent of religion, over the Apollo 8 crew reading from Genesis while orbiting the moon at Christmas. I agreed reluctantly Eagle metal body creaked. I ate the tiny Host and swallowed the wine. I gave thanks for the intelligence and spirit that had brought two young pilots to the Sea of tranquility. It was interesting for me to think: the very first liquid ever poured on the moon, and the very first food eaten there, were the Sacred Communion elements."

NASA kept this secret for two decades. The memoirs of Buzz Aldrin and the Tom Hanks Emmy-winning HBO mini-series, *From the Earth to the Moon* (1998), made people aware of this act of Christian worship 235,000 miles from Earth.

Those who believe that science and Christian faith are in conflict are thinking at an extremely shallow level. When you understand that all that exists and all that occurs on earth, throughout the universe, and in Heaven is of God, you will not place limits on His dominion or His power to provide.

It is thrilling to be reminded of the landing on the moon and of Buzz Aldrin's Christian faith, but in the words of Charlie Brown of *Peanuts*, "Good Grief!" Is Coach Alston serious? Is this a joke? Is this memo his idea of the integration of faith and science!? It is ludicrous. This is embarrassing. The Editor does not know whether to laugh or cry. Unfortunately, to the extent that this sort of banal thinking represents the majority of the Erskine College faculty on the integration of faith and science, to that extent they do not have the slightest idea of what integration of faith and science is. Buzz Aldrin's "moon communion" is a reflection of his piety; this is not a statement regarding the integration of faith and science. Indeed, Coach Alston's memo is prima facie evidence why a new Academic Dean needs to be secured ASAP!

2. Returning Sophomore Class: Nearly 40% attrition rate.

President Ruble speaks glowingly of 182 new Freshmen and 25 transfer students, but what about the nearly 40% attrition in last year's Freshman Class. This does not sound like an academically elite college, but a college that has an open enrollment policy. Colleges with an open enrollment policy are, by definition, not highly ranked institutions. Does a nearly 40% attrition rate in the present Sophomore Class speak well for next year's ranking? However, that is not retiring President Ruble's problem. This will be yet another burden for a new President to deal with.

3. Mandatory Study Hall: For young scholars?

The following was sent out by Erskine *NetNews* on September 30, 2009:

Student Success Center makes a strong start at Erskine

New to Erskine College this term is the Student Success Center (SSC), directed by Carole Hill, who also serves as Residence Hall Director at Robinson.

"The idea for the Student Success Center was batted around in years past but never accepted," Interim Vice President and Dean of the College Dr. Gid Alston said. "I always thought it was a great idea, and when I became dean I immediately sought funding for it."

Freshmen most likely to benefit from the program were selected by Erskine's Academic Committee, and faculty members or coaches have referred additional students.

Vice President for Enrollment Woody O'Cain said he participated in a similar program at Erskine when he was a student, but the new program is "designed with the current-day student in mind."

"It's the kind of thing that I feel makes Erskine different from many schools," O'Cain said. "Had it not been for a similar program when I was a student, I would not be here today."

Students sign a contract making attendance at the Student Success Center mandatory, and Hill offers sessions five nights a week, Sunday through Thursday. The program is currently limited to 50 students, and Hill said she would not be surprised to hit the maximum number by midterm.

"We meet in the Bowie Arts Center classroom, where we open with prayer and break out for small group work on assignments and test preparation," said Hill, who is assisted by five student coaches.

Sessions are scheduled from 8-10 p.m. on Sundays and from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday. "The later time on Sundays allows students to go home without having to return so early," Hill said, adding that it also conflicts with fewer campus activities.

"The times during the week seem to work well with practices and other campus activities," she said. "With everything that goes on at Erskine, it's impossible to find the perfect time."

Despite mandatory attendance and other requirements of the SSC contract, flexibility, variety and individual attention are all part of its focus on assisting students.

As part of its flexibility, SSC works in close connection with another academic

assistance program at Erskine, Supplemental Instruction (SI), directed by Jeanne Bell.

SI offers sessions geared to particular courses, generally those with a high percentage of freshmen enrolled.

Class material is reviewed by an SI leader, an upperclassman who has succeeded in the course and sits in on the current class, taking notes and completing assigned readings.

SSC students receive individual help, work in small groups or work independently. A variety of approaches help meet students' needs. "We've had small-group math going on upstairs, people working on maps for history in the library, people out at the reception desk taking online tests, and a group working independently in the classroom, all at the same time," Hill said.

Students come and go, sometimes leaving early for sports practices or other campus events, working in their hours over the course of the week. "It's usually a very fluid process," Hill said. "We've got to be flexible to meet students' needs. If we're not meeting needs, we're useless."

Hill is excited about the Student Success Center and hopes for even more participation by both students and faculty. "I'm such a believer in this program, I could talk about it for hours," she admits.

Professor of History Dr. Sandra Chaney recently conducted a session on "Taking Essay Tests, and Hill has had offers of similar assistance from other faculty and staff members. "We will be offering sessions on taking notes, study skills and time management," she said. "These sessions are open to anyone in the Erskine community. I hope lots of students will take advantage of what we have to offer."

Alston, who said he believes SSC is one of the best programs Erskine College has ever introduced, shares Hill's enthusiasm.

"This program is strongly supported by coaches, faculty, the Enrollment Division, the Retention Committee, and the president. The Student Success Center is one more example of how Erskine College cares about its students and supports their success."

Let's cut through all the self-congratulatory nonsense to the chase: Erskine College now has a mandatory study hall for marginal students – in other words, Freshmen who are athletes and others who were admitted despite strong indications they would not succeed academically at Erskine College. How is it that a "Top Ranked" college has a mandatory study hall program?

Ten years ago the Erskine College student body was about 600 and there were about 100 student athletes. Today, Erskine College has about 600 students and there are about 220 student

athletes. Percentage wise, Erskine College is now more of a “jock school” than Clemson University. The Randy Ruble strategy for growing the school with athletics is paying off in spades, isn’t it! Just imagine what the percentage of athletes would be if he were successful in bringing football to Erskine. It is, however, good to see that, with nearly an attrition level of 40% of last year’s Freshman Class, an attempt is now being made to help students.

Mr. O’Cain’s comment that this program makes Erskine College different is interesting. He must not know much about other colleges. One wonders if he knows anything about the tutorial programs and study halls for athletes at schools like Clemson University. At Bob Jones University there is a “Quiet Hour” from 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM, Monday through Thursday, which encourages students to study. Interestingly, Erskine College is now imitating some of the practices of Bob Jones University.

Dean Alston says this is one of the best programs that Erskine College has ever instituted. Well, of course; the COACH is protecting his athletes!!

4. Students’ being “bought” again.

It is reported to the Editor that the Admissions Department under the leadership of Vice President Woody O’Cain continues the problematic policy of “buying students.” This was a problem when the Editor was on the Erskine Board and a member of the Board’s Finance Committee. A budget would be set and the Admissions Department would ignore the budget and expand the discount rate. The word out of Due West is that Mr. O’Cain has significantly overspent to get 182 new freshmen students and 25 transfers. Obviously, this is a problem for the Endowment – that is the place from which the money comes. A number of years ago, former Dean Don Weatherman was forced by the Board to renege on scholarship awards. One wonders how the present Board is going to respond to this good news: ANOTHER BOUGHT CLASS. No, the Editor is not making this up!

There is a motto among college administrators that goes like this: “If you’re going to buy a class, you had better buy a good one!” With a so-called “voluntary” mandatory study hall being established for a significant portion of the Freshman Class, Mr. O’Cain and Coach Alston must not think too much of this purchase.

5. The “Culture of Intimidation” continues.

According to student sources, the “culture of intimidation” continues at Erskine College. According to other sources, e-mails and letters have been written and phone calls made regarding a Freshman class on critical thinking. Once again, an English professor (name withheld) is pushing a debate on evolution and creationism/Intelligent Design. In a class on literature, it is reported that the professor (name withheld) stated that “the gospels are in vile disagreement.” Why is it that an English professor thinks that he is proficient enough to speak on issues of both science and textual criticism of the New Testament?

6. The Calvin Colloquium: NOT A GOOD IDEA.

The following is a copy of a letter sent out on September 20, 2009 by Drs. Richard Burnett and Michael Bush:

We are pleased to announce the Fourteenth Biennial Colloquium on Calvin Studies January 30 & 31, 2010. The Colloquium will once again be hosted here at Erskine Theological Seminary, in Due West, South Carolina, the hometown of the Colloquium’s founder, Dr. John H. Leith.

In keeping with the tradition of the Calvin Colloquium and with Dr. Leith’s vision, scholars and pastors will again come together in the Colloquium to share their recent thinking about Calvin and the Reformed tradition. The conviction that scholars and teachers meeting together in this way can help invigorate both scholarship and ministry is a foundation stone of the Colloquium.

Calvin scholars of the highest distinction from America and Europe and from across the Reformed family will have the opportunity to interact and to think together. The papers for this fourteenth colloquium will focus on Calvin’s legacy in light of the quincentenary of his birth this past year. Herman Selderhuis, Professor of Church History, Theological University, Apeldoorn, Netherlands, who has recently published, *John Calvin: A Pilgrim’s Life*, will be our keynote speaker and will address the theme, “The End of Calvinism? The Harvest of the Calvin Year.”

This year’s colloquium will also look to the future as we consider Calvin and the role of education. Speakers will include: Karin Maag, H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies, Calvin College; John Hesselink, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan; Anthony Lane, London School of Theology, England; Arnold Huijgen, Theological University, Appeldoorn, Netherlands.

Enclosed you will find a list of hotels in the area. Online registration will be available shortly at www.reformedworship.com. The registration fee, which includes both Friday and Saturday, is \$50; after January 1, 2010, \$60. We have limited housing available on campus, on a first come, first serve basis. If you have questions, please contact Randa Mammarella at randam@erskine.edu or call her at (864) 379-6630.

We are looking forward to this event and hope to see you then. Please plan to attend.

As the Editor understands it, Davidson College and Columbia Theological Seminary did not want the Calvin Colloquium. ETS got the Calvin Colloquium by default – no one else wanted it. The colloquium is basically a gathering of semi-conservative PC(USA) pastors and scholars (many of them sympathetic to Barth) who come together and talk about Calvin and other matters. Judging from past participants and papers read, one wonders if Calvin himself would have attended. The Editor suspects that Calvin would have sent a blistering letter of regret asking why the agenda is centered on Calvin and not Christ.

The PC(USA) is theologically adrift in a sea of apostasy and is hemorrhaging churches and members at a rate that looks something like death throes, and ETS, whose leadership wants to draw near to the PC(USA) in hopes of attracting students, is hosting a PC(USA)-dominated colloquium on Calvin. The ARP Church is aging and is desperately in need of renewal and church planting and ETS, the seminary of the ARP Church, which is charged with the theological and ministerial care of the ARP Church, is hosting a PC(USA)-dominated colloquium on Calvin.

Good grief! This looks something like people polishing the brass on the *Titanic* just after the collision with the iceberg.

Just in case the reader does not know or has simply forgotten, it was the goings on, and especially the pervasive Barthianism, at the last Calvin Colloquium that was the impetus for the organization of *ARPTalk*. I am sure hundreds of ARPs will attend.

7. Degree-mill credentialed “scholar” teaching at ETS.

A look at the ETS catalog reveals that a professor with a doctorate from a degree-mill is teaching Systematic Theology at the off-campus site in Charleston. The following is from the ETS off-campus schedule:

<http://www.erskineseminary.org/Academics/CharlestonMSchedule.html>.

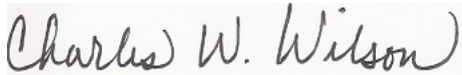
The professor in question has a doctorate from Florida Christian University. If the reader is interested, the following locations from the website are more than just a little interesting:

<http://www.fcuonline.com:8080/fcu/Template03.jsp#> and <http://www.fcuonline.com:8080/fcu/Content.do?method=build&ty>

[pe=ativo&lang=enus&mId=252](#). You will want to read what FCU says about academic accreditation, or the lack thereof.

In an institution that is heavy with professors who are trained in Systematic Theology, was there no qualified professor to send? One is also left wondering how ATS will look on this when ETS is audited next.

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

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ARPTalk(24.3)

THE MINISTRY OF THE ERSKINE CHAPLAIN: OUTSTANDING!

Editor's Remarks: Too often the remarks of the Editor regarding Erskine College and Seminary have been critical. Well, check out the ministry of the Erskine Chaplain, Rev. Paul Patrick. The Editor cannot find one thing negative to say about this ministry. The word to describe this ministry is **OUTSTANDING**. Remember, the ministry of the Chaplain to *The Barn* is not funded by the Erskine budget. Chaplain Patrick has to raise support. This ministry is well worth the financial support of *ARPTalk* readers. The article is taken from the Erskine *NetNews*, 10/7/09.



From left: Laura Funke, Paul Patrick, Marie Partrick and Cam Smith.

Campus Ministry serves up fall activities for students

Campus Ministry at Erskine has started the fall semester with a new intern and a fresh slate of opportunities for students.

Erskine Chaplain Paul Patrick is now assisted by newcomer Laura Funke as well as returning intern Cam Smith.

Funke, a 2009 graduate of Bryan College, succeeds Hannah Casey, a 2007 Erskine graduate who offered leadership and support for women students. Casey left to pursue graduate work in St. Louis, preparing for a career in deaf education. Smith, a graduate of Penn State, is continuing the work he began at Erskine in 2008.

It was during her final semester at Bryan College, Funke said, that she applied for an internship with Reformed University Fellowship. Word of her search for an internship soon reached her home church in Greenwood, and when Smith, who was attending the church, learned of her interest, he passed the word along to Patrick.

"The opportunity was ideal in many ways, as it returned me close to my support base," Funke said. "Since the internship at Erskine requires that we raise our own salary, benefits and expenses, I thought it was especially good to be near my church."

Thanks to Erskine's coordination of the internship with a place to live in Carnegie, the freshman women's residence hall, the challenge of raising her support was a little less daunting for Funke.

Now, a few weeks into the fall semester, Funke is fully engaged with Campus Ministry at Erskine. "I have loved getting to know the girls on campus through one-on-one interactions, Bible studies, the large group fellowship, and the fall conference with RUF," she said.

Funke said she, Patrick's wife Marie, and Bonner Resident Director Ashley Sell are leading a Bible study for women students, "a great time of growth and fellowship."

Also this fall, as part of "Erskine Fellowship at the Barn," conducted on the Patricks' property near the Erskine campus, Patrick is speaking each Sunday evening on "The Seven Sins of the Wounded Heart," a look at the traditional "seven deadly sins" from a Reformed perspective. Funke said the series has been "both convicting and encouraging."

"The Barn," as the Sunday night ministry is popularly called, has made a strong start this semester, with more than 150 students at the initial meeting. The Barn begins at 5:30 p.m. with a meal.

A Reformed University Fellowship (RUF) weekend conference in September saw Erskine represented by a group of more than 50, a substantial number given the size of Erskine's student body. But for Funke and others at the conference, its essence was not in the numbers but rather its impact on students' lives.

The Rev. Richie Sessions, featured speaker for the conference, "presented the Gospel truths to us throughout the weekend," Funke said, and she reports, "I have been able to hear from many of the girls how God worked in their lives through the messages and worship services."

She said the speaker stressed "the truth that deep love for Jesus comes from knowing deep forgiveness."

"The take-home message was that no matter how hard we attempt to hide our need for Jesus, whether through pretending we are good people because of our reputation, our traditions, or our outward appearance of cleanliness, we desperately need Jesus," junior Zack Keuthan said.

"I brought back a renewed sense of God's love and goodness," he added. "The teaching and fellowship encouraged me to take God's command that his people are to live gospel-centered lives seriously. I know several students came back on campus with a sincere desire to love God and people in response to Christ's message of good news."

Keuthan said special events like the RUF weekend, which take place once or twice a year, highlight the importance of Campus Ministry, with its daily and weekly opportunities for growth. "The RUF conference and Erskine's Campus Ministry both desire to see people mature as whole persons in light of the gospel," he said.

Funke looks forward to the rest of Patrick's series at the Barn as well as the continuation of Bible studies and "relationship building with the girls," and Patrick notes another special event scheduled for Sunday, Nov. 1, at the Barn.

"The big event still on the calendar for the fall semester is 'An Evening of Hymns and Songs with Jeremy Casella,'" Patrick said. "We'll have a barbecue catered by Skinners Chicken, then a combination of what will feel like a hymn sing-concert.

"Jeremy is one of many musicians who are part of Indelible Grace, RUF alums who have tinkered with hymns, writing new tunes to historic lyrics."

Casella, who has just released a new CD, will teach the Erskine group some of his new songs and will also lead them in some familiar ones. A similar event last fall with Red Mountain Music drew 225 people, and Patrick said he expects an even bigger crowd this year.

Meanwhile, the impact made by Campus Ministry at Erskine continues daily, with Funke, the newest member of the team, adding her enthusiasm to the mix.

"I have seen firsthand how God is working in the lives of the students through this ministry," she said. "I am excited to be a part of God's work here at Erskine."

For information about small groups and Bible studies sponsored by Campus Ministry at Erskine, contact Paul Patrick (ppatrick@erskine.edu), Cam Smith (camsmith@erskine.edu) or Laura Funke (funke@erskine.edu).

A note from the chaplain: “Both interns and all campus ministry activities — Bible studies, books, ministry resources, events, retreats, etc. — are unbudgeted at Erskine and are dependent upon gifts from churches and individuals. Anyone who would like to support the interns or the campus ministry budget may send a tax-deductible gift designated to Campus Ministry at Erskine, P.O. Box 338, Two Washington Street, Due West, SC 29639.”



~Thank you for reading ARPTalk(24)~