

ARPTalk (26)

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January 14, 2010

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ARPTalk(26.1)

APOLOGY AND RETRACTION

In *ARPTalk(25.5)* the Editor misspoke regarding comments made on *Facebook* by Erskine Board member Mr. Steve Southwell in reference to Mr. Southwell's comments regarding egregious statements made by an anonymous blogger, "Ebenezer Erskine," attacking the Investigatory Commission on Erskine. In this episode, Mr. Southwell clicked on the "agree" button in order to comment on the statements. The Editor pointed this out in *ARPTalk* and suggested that an Erskine Trustee had publicly endorsed "Ebenezer Erskine's" viewpoint. The Editor has been in contact with Mr. Southwell via phone, and Mr. Southwell has indicated that when he clicked the "agree" button he did not mean to agree with the substance of "Ebenezer Erskine's" comments. The Editor takes Mr. Southwell at his word and has apologized to Mr. Southwell, and now the Editor wishes to make that apology public.

One thing is for certain at this juncture, neither the Editor nor Mr. Southwell knows how to negotiate the mysteries of *Facebook*. It is probably wise for both of us to avoid *Facebook* communications.

It was more than a delight to speak with Mr. Southwell. He is gracious and kind. Neither one of us has much use for anonymous bloggers. We also discovered that we agreed far more than we disagreed on the issues that are before the ARP Church regarding Erskine College and Seminary.

Once again, the Editor of *ARPTalk* apologizes to Mr. Southwell and regrets the hurt and inconvenience he caused him.

Charles W. Wilson

DABNEY, DARWIN, SCIENCE AND SCRIPTURE

Seth Stark

Editor's Remarks: Mr. Seth Stark is a member of the Communion Presbyterian (ARP) Church in Irvine, California. He is a graduate student at Biola University and is currently working on an M.A. in science and religion from the same university. The Editor thanks Mr. Stark for his fine article.



Introduction

Robert Lewis Dabney (1820-1898) has been called the greatest theologian of the nineteenth century.¹ He was an Old School,² Southern Presbyterian.³ He taught at Union Seminary, a leading Southern seminary of his day.⁴ Yet, sadly, his works have been largely neglected and overlooked, so much so that later reformed theologians, who developed ideas strikingly similar to his, such as B. B. Warfield, John Murray and Cornelius Van Til, did so without interacting with Dabney's works.⁵ This is perhaps the greatest tragedy of all his life; that his brilliance in both theology and philosophy were so unappreciated that by the end of his life he could truthfully say, "I have no audience."⁶

In 1859, Charles Darwin published his monumental work *On the Origin of Species*. Almost immediately, it shook nearly all the accepted scientific theories of its day. It gained popularity in Britain, spread to the northern states in America, but was

¹ Thomas Cary Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 557.

² *The Dictionary of the Reformed and Presbyterian Tradition in America* defines Old School Presbyterianism as strict adherence to the Westminster Confession.

³ Morton Smith, *Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 216

⁴ Andrew C. Zenos, "Presbyterian Churches in the United States of America" in J. N. Ogilvie, *The Presbyterian Churches: Their Place and Power in Modern Christendom*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1897), 118.

⁵ Douglas Kelly, "Robert Lewis Dabney," in David Wells, *Reformed Theology in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 211.

⁶ Robert Dabney, *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, 3 vols (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), 2:558 quoted by Douglas Kelly, "Robert Lewis Dabney."

largely overlooked in the South.⁷ This was due to many reasons, not the least of which was the War Between the States (1861-1865) that came upon the heels of its publication. However, this avoidance of Darwin's theories due to the War could not last, and when it did begin to make inroads in southern institutions, such as Columbia Seminary, it was immediately opposed by leading theologians, such as Dabney. Darwin's theory of evolution required essentially two things to have happened historically in order for it to be considered credible: first, vast periods of time, and second, descent of species with modification. If a sufficiently vast amount of time is presupposed, during which Darwin's laws of natural selection and modification could have worked, the result could be evolution of the highest forms of life.⁸ The most prominent advocate for integration of evolution with Presbyterian theology was James Woodrow (1828-1907), professor of Natural Science in Connection with Revelation at Columbia Seminary. He was an opponent of Dabney for as long as the two men lived.⁹ In this paper, I will analyze Dabney's three-pronged attack against the evolutionism of his day: the first prong biblical, the second philosophical and the third scientific.

Dabney's Biblical Argument

In 1861, Dabney wrote an article for the *Southern Presbyterian* entitled "Geology and the Bible."¹⁰ Though it was written two years after the publication of Darwin's *Origin*, there is no evidence that Dabney intended to interact with that work or had even read it, yet.¹¹ Without knowing it, Dabney was attacking a foundational precept of Darwinian evolution: an old earth. In "Geology" he outlined his view of the "proper 'metes and bounds' of the two sciences" of geology and theology.¹² He did not view the two as contradictory, but believed that "all will agree" if each kept its proper place.¹³

Dabney believed it was not the place of pastors, who had been trained theologically, to enter into technical discussions of physical sciences.¹⁴ However, if geology were to encroach upon the realm of theology, then the pastor must rightfully *defend* the teachings of Scripture.¹⁵ He stated the reason theologians ought to defend Scripture and in so doing engage the geologists, thus: "[Geology] is virtually a theory

⁷ Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, vol. 1, 1607-1861 (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1963), 508.

⁸ Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy of the Nineteenth Century, Considered* (New York: Randolph, 1875), 110.

⁹ T. Watson Street, "The Evolution Controversy in the Southern Presbyterian Church with Attention to the Theological and Ecclesiastical Issues Raised," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 37 (1959): 233.

¹⁰ Dabney, "Geology and the Bible," in *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* (London: Banner of Truth, 1967), 3:127.

¹¹ Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 1:508.

¹² Dabney, "Geology and the Bible," 127.

¹³ David Overy, "Robert Lewis Dabney: Apostle of the Old South" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1967), 246.

¹⁴ Dabney, "Geology and the Bible," 127.

¹⁵ Dabney, "Geology and the Bible," 136.

of cosmogony; and cosmogony is intimately connected with the doctrine of creation, which is one of the modes by which God reveals himself to man, and one of the prime articles of every theology.”¹⁶

In short, when science, so called (in this case geology, later evolution), interfered with the doctrine of creation, it strayed into the realm of theology. “For, creation is not only a physical fact; it is a theological doctrine.”¹⁷ Dabney, being a strict subscriptionist to the Westminster Confession, believed that God had made all things in the space of six ordinary days, roughly 6,000 years ago.¹⁸

More important to Dabney than intrusion upon the doctrine of creation was what modern science did to the authority of Scripture. First, by accommodating the latest scientific theories without regard to accepted biblical doctrine, bad exegesis had to be employed. Those theologians who had thus compromised had “adopted on half-evidence some new-fangled hypothesis of scientific fact, and then invented, on grounds equally insecure, some new-fangled explanations to twist God’s word into seeming agreement with the hypothesis.”¹⁹

Second, because scientific theories are constantly changing, attempts to reconcile theology with them results in a constantly shifting theology, which weakens the authority of Scripture. True science advances slowly and cautiously, Dabney asserted, and even once it has advanced, it is still not complete, as new research will further illuminate the original finding.²⁰ But the science of geology was rapidly changing in Dabney’s day. Therefore, if a pastor were to attempt to reconcile theology with it, his reconciliation, his new way of interpreting Scripture in light of the latest discoveries of science, would only be valid until that theory were overturned by the next great discovery of science. “If they [such pastors] are to be believed, then the word of God is but a sort of clay which may be moulded into any shape required by the purposes of priestcraft.”²¹ What was true of the constantly changing field of geology would prove, in time, to be equally true of the constantly changing theory of evolution. If reinterpreting Scripture to fit the latest theories based on geologic discoveries weakened the authority of God’s Word, how much more would be the case when the Bible is twisted to accommodate the theory of evolution?

The solution to this cycle of constant reinterpretation of Scripture based on the latest scientific discoveries is to “commit the credit and authority of God’s Word to no theory except such as is absolutely established by the laws of sound exegesis.”²² Sound exegesis of the text determines which theories of geology ought to be accepted or not. It was a question of authority: will Scripture set the boundaries of

¹⁶ Dabney, “Geology and the Bible,” 129.

¹⁷ Dabney, “Geology and the Bible,” 133.

¹⁸ *Westminster Confession of Faith* 4.1.

¹⁹ Dabney, “Geology and the Bible,” 130.

²⁰ Dabney, “Geology and the Bible,” 130.

²¹ Dabney, “Geology and the Bible,” 130.

²² Dabney, “Geology and the Bible,” 131.

science or will science dictate to us what parts of Scripture are in need of reinterpretation? Dabney saw the Bible as authoritative of itself, not because human science establishes it as such.²³ Since the exegesis of Scripture demonstrated that creation occurred 6,000 years ago, then the vast periods of time presupposed by the uniformitarian geology of Charles Lyell²⁴ (1797-1875) were incorrect and the entire theory of an old earth false. If the universe was not millions of years old, then Darwin's theory of evolution did not have the time necessary for the accumulation of millions of mutations needed to transmute one species into another, let alone a single cell into man.

Dabney's Philosophical Argument

Dabney was committed to the Scottish Common Sense school of philosophy.²⁵ When discussing the absurdity of evolution, Dabney makes appeal several times to common sense.²⁶ But, though he made this appeal, his philosophical argument against evolution was much stronger than a simple appeal to reasonableness.

In a sermon on Colossians 2:8 preached before the Synod of Virginia in 1871, Dabney warned his fellow ministers against being spoiled "through philosophy and vain deceit."²⁷ Evolution was a false philosophy which endangered the eternal state of the soul.

As a committed, thoroughgoing Calvinist, Dabney acknowledged the affects of sin upon all the faculties of man, including his ability to properly interpret the data of creation which he encounters. Therefore, the first error of the scientist, using his latest interpretation of data to challenge the statements of Scripture, is to assume that he can correctly interpret the data with unaided human reason apart from God's Word and Spirit. "This finite, fallen, imperfect reason is incompetent to invent an infallible method of investigation, or to apply it with unflinching correctness, if it were given to us."²⁸ To assume that the scientific method was infallible was to underestimate the noetic effects of sin.

Dabney posited three processes of logic from which a sound philosophy could infer the existence of an infinite, personal Creator God.²⁹ First, that an effect cannot arise without a cause, *ex nihilo nihil*. Thus, there must be an absolute First Cause.

²³ Dabney, "Geology and the Bible," 134.

²⁴ The full title of Lyell's work was *The Principles of Geology, Being an Attempt to Explain the Former Changes of the Earth's Surface by Reference to Causes now in Operation*. Uniformitarian geology asserted that the processes now at work on earth had always been at work. In order to explain the geologic phenomena around us the earth must be much older than 6,000 years.

²⁵ Smith, *Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology*, 190-1. Common Sense Realism taught that there are facts that can be accepted on the basis of common sense and do not require proof.

²⁶ Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 111 and 130.

²⁷ Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney*, 343.

²⁸ Dabney, "A Caution Against Anti-Christian Science," in *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* (London: Banner of Truth, 1967), 3:160.

²⁹ Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 107.

Second, a plan, of which we see the evidence all around us, must have a Planner. Third, conscience teaches us that we are obliged to certain duties. Obligation implies an Obligor.³⁰ On the contrary, atheism posits that as beings now exist, they must have always existed, “like producing like.” It attempts to brush aside the need for an infinite, personal Creator God as the First Cause, Planner and Obligor.³¹ This presents a problem, for how did the first effect, the first being come into existence? The answer is either an infinite series, which is a logical fallacy, or the atheist must “attempt to prove that, ‘like produces like,’ is not the whole explanation of the series.”³² And this is exactly what evolution seeks to do.

This idea of the eternal existence of physical matter, however, was nothing new to Dabney. It was a revival of the atomistic theory of the ancient Greek philosopher Democritus.³³ Further, it had been proposed by recent naturalists such as La Marck and Robert Chambers and ultimately, Darwin. In Darwin’s theory, “like producing like” was modified by “natural selection” and “survival of the fittest.” Blind chance, working with these laws over vast amounts of time could produce the entire organized universe.³⁴ Common sense, according to Dabney, contradicted this, though, for it “teaches us that blind chance cannot be the cause of an ordered result.”³⁵ Appeals to blind chance were attempts to rob the Christian of the teleological argument.³⁶

Appeals to atomistic philosophy made by advocates of evolution differed from the classic Greek philosophy in one important way: Democritus proposed that man had a soul; whereas, evolutionists posited that “the soul” Democritus referred to was actually the nervous system whose existence was unknown to the ancient Greek.³⁷

Dabney correctly demonstrated that this new atomistic philosophy, based on the evolution of Darwin, was materialistic. It completely did away with all things spiritual, leaving only an inadequate physical explanation. It obliterated all distinction between mind and matter, seeking to explain all things in material terms alone.³⁸ It took the attributes properly ascribed to the non-physical, such as thought, motive and idea and claimed that these were products of chemical reactions.

³⁰ Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 107.

³¹ Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 108.

³² Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 109.

³³ Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 109. Democritus proposed that all things are made of physical atoms, and that only the physical exists.

³⁴ Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 111.

³⁵ Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 111.

³⁶ Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 112. The teleological argument infers on the basis of design a Designer.

³⁷ Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 115.

³⁸ Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 116.

Dabney's Scientific Argument

Often overlooked is the fact that Dabney, in addition to his philosophical and biblical arguments against evolution, appealed to the leading scientific theories of his day, as well. This is important, because it shows that while Dabney valued Scripture and theology above all else, he did not regard science as an enterprise unworthy of a Christian's time and effort.

Dabney repeatedly makes references to Louis Agassiz (1807-1873), a leading scientist of his day and professor of zoology and geology at Harvard.³⁹ Dabney noted also the lack of support Darwin's theory found in the fossil record.⁴⁰ He appealed to observations of hybrid animals unable to produce offspring, such as the mule.⁴¹ He used the science of paleontology to show its lack of support for evolution.⁴² He referenced the observation of cells through the microscope as a proof against Darwin's theory.⁴³ He even noted that a very similar theory to that of Darwin's proposed only a few years earlier in the work *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* had been "rejected as generally by the Sensualistic school as by sound philosophers."⁴⁴

Conclusion

Robert Lewis Dabney has been called the leading theologian of the nineteenth century. He used the full force of his theology to combat encroachment of new, unproven scientific theories into the domain of Scripture. He was a brilliant philosopher and wrote one of the most scathing critiques of nineteenth century thought in his *Sensualistic Philosophy of the Nineteenth Century, Considered*. However, Dabney also saw the benefit of proper science as a handmaid to theology and used the leading scientific theories of his day in his critiques of "science falsely so called."⁴⁵ Scripture, philosophy and true science worked together for Dabney to defend the truth and authority of Scripture against Darwin's theory of evolution.

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³⁹ Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 173.

⁴⁰ Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 173-4.

⁴¹ Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 176.

⁴² Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 178.

⁴³ Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 168.

⁴⁴ Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy*, 165.

⁴⁵ Dabney, "A Caution Against Anti-Christian Science," 152.

DURABLE HYMNS

Five Marks of Excellence that Could End the Worship Wars

Dr. Donald T. Williams

EDITOR'S REMARKS: A few Sundays ago, the Editor and his wife were not watching the clock and we found that it was church-time and we were running very late. The Editor mentioned to his wife that there was a certain Baptist Church nearby and they should attend because it had been a long time since they had sung the gospel songs of *The Baptist Hymnal*. Well, they were disappointed. They endured contemporary Christian songs with inane lyrics and sung badly—or, better to say, not sung at all by those around the Editor and his wife. One of the offerings had these lyrics: “Shout Hallelujah to the Lord! Lift your hands and clap!” The worship leader and his gang of howlers keep this going to exhaustion! When the Editor got home he found that a friend had e-mailed him a copy of the article below by Dr. Donald T. Williams at Toccoa Falls College. The Editor rejoices in the words of Mr. Williams’ article. The article originally appeared in the July/August 2009 issue of *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* (www.touchstonemaq.com) and is reprinted with permission from *Touchstone*.

The “Worship Wars” that rage in the church today are nothing new. St. Ambrose was considered an innovator for writing hymns and teaching his people to sing them. The controversy over emblematic textual elaboration in the Middle Ages was (according to legend) settled by Palestrina’s Pope Marcellus Mass. The Reformation started debates over exclusive psalmody and the use of instruments, debates that continue among Protestants to this day, although they are now overshadowed by heated arguments over contemporary praise and worship music versus traditional hymnody.

Part of the answer to these debates was inscribed over the door to the old Ayres Memorial Library at Taylor University: “What is past is prologue; study the past.” We study the past not because the present is unworthy of our attention but because only by studying the past can we learn the criteria by which to discern what is worthy in the present. No one has explained this principle better than Dr. Johnson:

To works, however, of which the excellence is not absolute and definite, but gradual and comparative; to works not raised on principles demonstrative and scientific, but appealing wholly to observation and experience, no other test can be applied than length of duration and continuance of esteem. What mankind have long possessed they have often examined and compared, and if they persist to value the possession, it is because frequent comparisons have confirmed opinion in its favour. As among the works of nature no man can properly call a river deep or a mountain high without the knowledge of many mountains and many rivers, so in the productions of genius, nothing can be styled excellent till it has been compared with other works of the same kind (Samuel Johnson, *Preface to the Plays of William Shakespeare*, 1765).

How do we apply these principles to the Worship Wars, as pastors, as ministers of music, or as those who train them? We do it partly by recognizing that a great deal of today's music is very poor. Well, that shouldn't be too surprising; some of the music of the past was, too. The difference is that, with the past, the weeding-out process described by Dr. Johnson has already taken place. Therefore, we cannot find, encourage, and preserve the best contemporary music without knowing those marks of excellence that made the best of the past stand out and survive so long.

What are those marks? There are at least five: (1) biblical truth; (2) theological profundity; (3) poetic richness; (4) musical beauty; and (5) the fitting of music to text in ways that enhance, rather than obscure or distort, its meaning.

These are the marks of excellence in any age. They are not arbitrary but are derived from biblical teaching about the nature of worship (it is to be in spirit and in truth, and involves loving God with our whole person, including the mind) and from an understanding of the nature of music and how it can support those biblical goals.

Biblical Truth

The faithful Church has always insisted on biblical truth, and Protestant hymnody started out with a special emphasis on it. The earliest congregational songs for the churches of the Reformation were paraphrased Scripture texts, especially the Psalms. John Hopkins's collection of the metrical Psalms of Thomas Sternhold (1549) was one of the most popular books in Elizabethan England. What these renditions lacked in literary elegance they made up for in biblical faithfulness.

The man is blest that hath not gone
By wicked rede astray,
Ne sat in chair of pestilence,
Nor walked in sinner's way;

But in the law of God the Lord
Doth set his whole delight,

**And in that law doth exercise
Himself both day and night.**

By the eighteenth century, writers such as Isaac Watts, William Cowper, John Newton, and the Wesley brothers felt at liberty to compose words of praise that were not strict paraphrases of Scripture. But they still felt strongly the obligation to make sure that their words were scriptural if not Scripture. The printed versions of their hymns often included the biblical references that justified their content at the end of every verse or even every line.

One of the healthy trends in contemporary Christian music is the revival of the ancient practice of singing Scripture. Unfortunately, this revival is sometimes limited to the mantric repetition of short and simply phrases rather than encompassing a fuller train of biblical thought through longer passages, as was more typically the earlier practice.

Theological Profundity

Theological profundity is also a mark of the best of past hymnody. Even simple laymen did not turn their minds off in worship but praised a majestically transcendent Trinitarian God with a graciously incarnated Son who had saved them by grace through faith. The best texts not only lifted them above themselves in worship but also helped them interpret their own experiences in biblically sound ways.

So they sang to One who is “Immortal, invisible, God only wise, / In light inaccessible hid from our eyes.” They gave their “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation.” Because the Lord is “A Mighty Fortress” whose Son “must win the battle,” they trembled not for the prince of darkness and could “Let goods and kindred go, / This mortal life also.”

Has anyone ever done a better job of applying the specifics of the Atonement to the process and experience of conversion than Charles Wesley in “And Can It Be That I Should Gain?” Recent choruses sometimes limit themselves by being so simplistic and repetitive that theological reflection never has a chance to get started. But without it, how can we love and worship God with our minds, as Christ particularly commanded us?

Poetic Richness

Poetic richness is a virtue that must be pursued carefully, for a text that is too allusive and too difficult for average laymen to unpack will hinder worship rather than enabling and enriching it. Nevertheless, appropriate kinds of literary excellence have a role to play. Examples include gems like the use of the questions in “What Child Is This?” to capture the wonder of the Incarnation; the appropriate military metaphors in that great meditation on spiritual warfare, “A Mighty

Fortress”; and the choice of a simple but evocative word like” wretch” in “Amazing Grace.”

Little touches that make a text more intellectually suggestive or emotionally powerful without making it unnecessarily difficult tend to show up in hymns that have survived the test of time. How many “praise and worship” texts would be worth reading simply as devotional poetry without the music? Many classic hymns rise to that level.

Musical Beauty

Musical beauty might be thought by many to be in the eye of the beholder (or the ear of the hearer), and to a certain extent this is true. Nevertheless, there are certain contours, structures, and cadences that make for a singable melody and certain harmonic felicities that can make the melody more memorable or even haunting. Think of the way “Slane” (“Be Thou My Vision”) rises and falls like an ocean wave or a sine curve; of the gently rolling ABA structure of Ebenezer (“Oh the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus”); the way each phrase of “Gift of Love” (“Though I may speak with bravest fire”) varies the same pattern; the way the men’s voices in Diadem (the “complicated” version of “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name”) punctuate the flowing women’s line in the chorus; or the way the inner parts move against the still melody in the third measure of Nicaea (“Holy, Holy, Holy”).

Though some very beautiful pieces have come out of contemporary Christian music (“El Shaddai,” much of John Michael Talbot’s and Michael Card’s work), too many of the more recent praise choruses seem to ignore all the rules of good composition, giving us not well-shaped melodies but just one note after another. These “tunes” are not very singable, but it often doesn’t matter because the “worship team” plays them so loudly that no one can tell whether the congregation is singing along or not. (I am not against rock-influenced styles or amplified volume as such, but there is a difference between giving a performance and leading a congregation in worship.) And where did so many guitarists get the notion that it is somehow cute to avoid ending a song on the tonic chord (i.e., “home base”)?

Fitness

A good fit between the words and their musical setting is essential to great worship music even when text and tune are both excellent. The most egregious violation of this principle may be A. B. Simpson’s “A Missionary Cry”: “A hundred thousand souls a day / Are marching one by one away. / They’re passing to their doom; / They’re passing to their doom.” If ever there was content demanding a minor key and a mournful, dirge like tempo, this is it. But this song is set to a completely inappropriate snappy march tune, as if we were happy about the damnation of the unsaved!

Examples of a good fit between message and music are the quietly meditative, plainsong-derived melodies of Picardy in the contemplative “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” and *Divinum Mysterium* in “Of the Father’s Love Begotten,” or the sprightly and joyous rhythms of Ariel in “Oh, Could I Speak the Matchless Worth.” A contemporary song with a good fit is Don Francisco’s ballad, “I’ve Got to Tell Somebody.” Michael Card is especially good not only at writing worthwhile texts but also at giving them appropriate settings.

Old Nurtures New

Biblical truth, theological profundity, poetic richness, musical beauty, and fitness of words and music are not matters of style or personal preference, but are the marks of excellence for worship music in any age. But only the comparison of many ages—in other words, a knowledge of musical history—can tell us this. It is therefore shortsighted for a Christian college music department to offer a degree in contemporary worship music that does not require study of the classic hymnody of the past. I do not say this out of hostility to contemporary music, but out of concern for its health and the health of the Church. Only those musicians who are classically and historically (as well as biblically) trained are in a position to help pastors and elders guide the church in a judicious appropriation of the best of the new music as a supplement to the church’s rich musical heritage.

Something old and something new: we need both, but the old has a privileged position because it has already been sifted by time. Thus, the wise cling to the best of the old, not to exclude the new, but to nurture it. Like the early Church, we still need both to be healthy—and to please our Lord.

[Donald T. Williams is Professor of English and Director of Arts and Sciences at Toccoa Falls College in Georgia, and sings baritone with the Toccoa Falls College Singing Men.]

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ARP Talk(26.4)

WESTMINSTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY: POST PETER ENNS

Because of similarities of affairs at Westminster Theological Seminary and Erskine College and Theological Seminary, the Editor reported on the resolution of the difficulties at WTS in *ARPTalk(8.2)*, December 2, 2009. The troubles at WTS centered around the views of Dr. Peter Enns and others on the authority of the Scriptures and the willingness of the Board to uphold the theological standards and the missional integrity of WTS.

The results of the actions at WTS were: (1) The removal of professors who held to non-orthodox views on the authority of the Scriptures; and (2) a shakeup of the Board. As was to be expected, the proceedings were unpleasant. Naysayers predicted a loss of students and recruitment and the financial collapse of the institution.

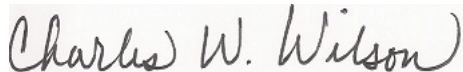
Just the opposite has occurred. WTS is bulging at the seams with students and, even in these hard times, AWASH with money. It is reported that God's people in the Reformed and evangelical community have come to the support of WTS to the tune of over \$8,000,000.

There are naysayers in the ARP Church who caution that any reform by the ARP Church of Erskine College and Theological Seminary will have dire consequences and result in the demise of EC/ETS. The example of Westminster Theological Seminary and the recent experiences of a plethora of other well-known Christian institutions demonstrate that the voice of the naysayers is false. God's people will support those ministries that do not equivocate on the authority of the Scriptures and a God-centered and Christ-exalting mission. Sadly, in the last 40 years, the Reformed and evangelical COMMUNITY inside and outside the ARP Church has viewed EC/ETS as an institution that equivocates on the authority of the Scriptures and is something less than God-centered and Christ-exalting, and therefore has withheld its loyalty and financial support.

Is it a stretch to say that successive EC/ETS administrations, Boards, and faculties have distanced the educational ministry of the ARP Church from the support and generosity of the Reformed and evangelical community inside and outside of the ARP Church? Indeed, the list is long of the college students and seminary candidates in the ARP Church who have given up on and abandoned EC/ETS.

\$8,000,000! Wow! What would happen to all of the miseries at EC/ETS if only half that amount were to be given to EC/ETS in the next two years by God's people? The naysayers moan that it WILL NOT happen! The Editor of *ARPTalk* asks the naysayers this question: HAVE GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE REFORMED AND EVANGELICAL COMMUNITY INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE ARP CHURCH BEEN GIVEN THE NEEDED ASSURANCE OF AND THE NECESSARY CHALLENGE TO GIVE TO A BIBLE-BELIEVING, GOD-CENTERED, CHRIST-EXALTING UNIVERSITY COLLEGE AND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY? No, we have not!

These are my thoughts,

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

Charles W. Wilson

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CALLED MEETING OF SYNOD

On December 29, 2009 the following letter was e-mailed to our Presbyteries by our Moderator of General Synod. A copy of that letters was sent out by the Clerk of Second Presbytery to the members of Second Presbytery.

Dear Moderator or Stated Clerk:

A hard copy of the letter that follows is in the mail and should reach your shortly. The issues before us are of such significance that I wanted to apprise you of the step I have taken by means of the immediacy of the internet as well. Please forgive the impersonal nature of what follows.

I have before me a statement and a request from Mr. George S. Robinson, Jr., Chairman of the Moderator's Commission on Erskine College and Seminary. Mr. Robinson has written as follows:

"The Moderator's Commission on Erskine College and Seminary is near completion of our work. It is unanimously clear to the commission that a called meeting of Synod in late February or early March is necessary. This decision is made more urgent by the presidential search, the academic calendar, and the inertia of the Erskine administration until the commission's work is completed.

"Accordingly, we respectfully request that you convene a called meeting of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church General Synod to receive and act on the findings and recommendations of the Moderator's Commission on Erskine College and Seminary."

As you will know, the 2009 General Synod instructed the Moderator of Synod "to form a special commission to investigate whether the oversight exercised by the Board of Trustees and the Administration of Erskine College and Seminary is in faithful accord with the Standards of the ARP Church and the synod's previously issued directives," and directed the commission "to report back to the General Synod no later than the 2010 meeting of General Synod with a report and the commission's findings and recommendations" (Minutes of the 2009 General Synod, p. 44).

In accordance with the provision in our Form of Government (XIII/C/3), I am requesting the concurrence of your presbytery for the calling of a special meeting of General Synod, to be held in late February or early March. The purpose of the meeting will be to receive and act on the findings and recommendations of the Moderator's Commission on Erskine College and Theological Seminary.

You may be certain that I have not reached this decision without a great deal of thought and prayer to God. I recognize that such a meeting necessarily involves a number of challenges, among them perhaps a called meeting of your presbytery. At the same time, I firmly believe that the issues before us are of sufficient weight as to warrant the unusual step I have taken.

For Christ and his church, I am,

Very truly yours,

John R. de Witt
Moderator of the General Synod

In response to this letter, three of our Presbyteries (Canada, Tennessee-Alabama, and Second) have concurred with the request of the Moderator of General Synod on behalf of the Investigatory Commission on Erskine College and Theological Seminary for a Called Meeting of General Synod. On Thursday, January 14, e-mails were sent out from the ARP Center in Greenville, SC, announcing that the Called Meeting of General Synod would be held at Bonclarken on March 2 and 3.

The voting by the Presbyteries was almost uneventful. The Canadian Presbytery met and voted unanimously to concur with the request of the Moderator of General Synod; the Tennessee-Alabama Presbytery met on January 8 and voted to confirm the call by voice affirmation; and Second Presbytery met on January 11 and voted 23 to 8 for the Moderator's request for a Called Meeting of the General Synod.

In the past, the Editor of *ARPTalk* has accused Erskine administrations, Boards, and faculties of duplicity, disingenuousness, subversion, and obstruction in matters regarding the maintenance of the Christian witness and missional fidelity of EC/ETS. Frankly, the Editor does not believe that EC/ETS functions as a God-honoring, Bible-believing, and Christ-centered ministry of

higher education and theological education for the ARP Church. The opinions of the Editor are public record.

But is a new chapter in duplicity, disingenuousness, subversion, and obstruction in matters regarding the maintenance of the Christian witness and mission of EC/ETS being written? As the Editor stated above, the voting for the Called Meeting of General Synod was mostly uneventful; however, the meeting of the Alabama-Tennessee Presbytery was eventful.

Mr. Scott Mitchell, a layman in the Alabama-Tennessee Presbytery, is the Chairman of the Erskine Board. On 12/31/09 Mr. Mitchell sent out the following e-mail to the members of the Erskine Board and others:

Dear Fellow Board Members,

I wanted to bring you up to date on the latest from the Moderator's Commission. Tuesday, Dr. de Witt sent a letter (copied below) to the moderators and stated clerks of the presbyteries requesting a called meeting of Synod to receive the report of the Commission. A called meeting is a very rare occasion; the last one was for the bicentennial celebration at the Old Brick Church, and I am unaware of a called meeting of Synod to conduct business in modern history.

I feel confident the reason for the called meeting is so that any uncertainty of a pending report will not hinder [sic] the presidential search process as well as to relieve any anxieties of the administration which are naturally high as we are in the midst of a transition of administrations [Editor's emphasis by highlighting].

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

I hope everyone had a Merry Christmas and will have a happy and safe new year.

Thanks,
Scott

Note the highlighted portion of Mr. Mitchell's e-mail. Does it not seem that Mr. Mitchell is on board with the request of the Moderator of General Synod? Indeed, he suggests that a presidential candidate is not going to be found as long as the work of the Investigatory Commission is hanging over Due West.

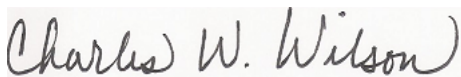
Astonishingly, at the meeting of the Alabama-Tennessee Presbytery, Mr. Mitchell made the first motion – a motion not to concur with the request of the Moderator of General Synod for a Called Meeting of General Synod to deal with the report of the Investigatory Commission. In an incredible turnaround, Mr. Mitchell argued that a Called Meeting of the General Synod would put EC/ETS in a negative light and hinder the Presidential search. Does Mr. Mitchell not realize that EC/ETS is already viewed negatively? In the Reformed and evangelical community of which the ARP Church is a part, could EC/ETS be seen in a more negative light? Does it not seem that the light of EC/ETS has turned to DARKNESS? Is it possible to call a President in this DARKNESS?

Mr. Mitchell’s motion failed 11 to 6. A second motion to concur with the request of the Moderator of General Synod was passed by voice vote.

As stated earlier in this article, in the past the Editor of *ARPTalk* has accused Erskine administrations, Boards, and faculties of duplicity, disingenuousness, subversion, and obstruction in matters regarding the maintenance of the Christian witness and missional fidelity of EC/ETS. These recent actions by Mr. Scott Mitchell, Chairman of the Erskine Board, have done nothing to change the opinion of the Editor. If anything, do Mr. Mitchell’s actions not seem to be the opening pages of another chapter in the long story of doublespeak and contumacy on the part of Erskine leaders toward the ARP Church? Is not this opposition to the request of the Moderator of the General Synod a metaphor for forty years of obfuscation, subversion, and obstruction of the mission of Erskine College and Erskine Theological Seminary by Erskine insiders?

What has the Editor missed?

These are my thoughts,

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

Charles W. Wilson

~Thank you for reading *ARPTalk*(26)~