

(1)

Love That Has Had Enough of Gradualism

Do I Love Erskine?

I have been asked the following question: “WHY DO YOU HATE ERSKINE COLLEGE AND ETS?” Wow! That’s a question! I cannot ignore such a question.

I do not hate Erskine College or ETS. I’m not an enemy. I love Erskine.

During the years of my ministry I have encouraged and seen sixteen (16) men attend seminary from the churches of my influence. Fifteen (15) of those men have attended ETS. The one exception spurned my advice and attended another seminary. Included in these fifteen (15) are my son-in-law and myself (D.Min., 2002). These fifteen (15) men represent twelve (12) earned degrees from ETS. A number of these men are now serving productively in the ARPC. Let it also be noted that of the young men who have recently left Erskine College to attend seminaries other than ETS, I encouraged two of them to attend ETS—my memory fades, perhaps three. I concede that my efforts have mainly been directed at the seminary, but I have also recommended three (3) young people to Erskine College and they have attended and graduated.

For you who are ARP ministers, do you remember the letter I sent out about four years ago asking for money for ETS’s ARP scholarship fund? No one asked me to do that. I initiated that on my own. And since I am talking about money, I give to ETS. DO YOU, other than through your church’s denominational giving? I think our parsimony toward ETS is one of the reasons for the present troubles—ETS is looking for revenue sources because our support is other than generous. I’m for giving more money to Erskine—a lot more!

I am also very proud to say that I served a six-year term on the Erskine Board. I display all my Erskine credentials proudly. I love the ARPC. I love Erskine.

However, genuine love should not be confused with indulgence that willfully ignores theological declension and turns a blind eye to administrative foolishness that obstructs the mission the ARPC has set for Erskine College and ETS. Real love, in this case, calls for the theological best, not theological inexactitude, and loyal churchmanship on the part of the Administration that honors and seeks to follow the church that gave and continues to give the institution life.

Why Do So Many Of You NOT Love Erskine?

The question I ask is: WHY DO SO MANY OF YOU NOT LOVE ERSKINE?

Back in the early 1970s, in a conversation about Erskine with a well-known ARP Pastor friend he concluded our talk by saying, "Erskine smurfskine, who cares!" That shocked me. It still does. That sort of churchmanship is fundamentally wrong.

In another conversation with a pastor friend he said: "Chuck, you can't change that place. I know. I was there for XXXX years. The powers-that-be have a stranglehold on the place. They're not going to allow change."

In another conversation: "What can we do? It will be an awful mess! What is to be done with the Board? In our ARP culture we're too nice to fire people. We put up with the smell and hope for a soon retirement or death. I'm not going to worry about Erskine College and ETS. I'll send my high school seniors to XXXX College/University and I'll send my preacher-boys to XXXX Seminary."

And one more conversation: "I don't care! I didn't attend Erskine College or ETS. I'm an outsider. My concern is my congregation. Let the 'Due West Mess' sink under its own weight."

THESE CONVERSATIONS ARE NOT FICTITIOUS! They are frightening to me! They are evidences of a culture that is conflicted about her educational institutions and has become apathetic toward her and WITHOUT LOVE FOR ERSKINE.

Yet it is difficult to fault the attitudes of these people with whom I spoke. Their complaints ring all too true:

- a. A greater concern for the intellect than the soul;**
- b. A greater concern for other constituencies than the ARPC;**

- c. **A faculty that instead of celebrating the ARPC is resentful toward, suspicious of, and disloyal to the ARPC;**
- d. **A growing theological bifurcation between the Erskine institutions and the ARPC;**
- e. **An Administration that seems more and more to ignore the input from and the directives of the General Synod;**
- f. **A Board that has demonstrated over the years that their first loyalty is to Erskine and not the General Synod that empowered them with their stewardship; and**
- g. **An institutional attitude of “Who is the ARPC to butt into what we’re doing?”**

I could go on if it were not so painful. I have attempted to frame these complaints in broad terms, but, in so doing, even without highlighting the particulars, I can see how people become discouraged, give up, and lose their love.

BUT WE MUSTN'T DO THAT! We must try something else. Let's try the discipline of love. Why are we not willing to speak out? Why are we not willing to attempt the hard task of “tough love”: CHANGE! Change now!

The Failure Of Gradualism

In 1972 when I came into the ARPC, I was convinced by our elder leaders that the way to change Erskine College and ETS was the slow way. Their approach: “Go slow quickly!” This is the strategy of gradualism.

The question we now need to ask: “How has that worked for us?”

The answer: Not well! At the college, the idea of combining excellence in learning and evangelical Christian commitment is scoffed at. Even the student leaders have pointed to the college's REFUSAL to be a Christian college that integrates faith and learning. In the last three years, leader after leader, in the issues of the student magazine, *The Mirror*, have challenged the Administration. Now individuals in the Administration are bantering about the motto of learning and service (or some such politically-correct triviality) as a replacement for “academic excellence” and “evangelical Christian commitment.”

At the seminary we have gone from Tom Long to Merwyn Johnson to Richard Burnett and Michael Bush—a procession of years with neo-

Barthian, PC(USA) theologians. I do not deny the intellect of these men. I disagree with them forcefully and say they are not where the ARPC is or where the ARPC is going and integrity should lead them to another place.

It has now been more than thirty years since the General Synod acknowledged that there were significant problems at Erskine and sought to address them by the adoption of the "Statement on the Philosophy of Christian Higher Education." The response of the Erskine Administration was to ignore the General Synod. Every eight or ten years the General Synod has reacted to Erskine's waywardness. Statements have been passed. Instructions have been given. There were high expectations of transparent compliance and sterling loyalty to the ARPC. Instead the response was to pay lip-service to the General Synod, change some window dressings and continue in the direction of disloyalty to the ARPC. The pattern hasn't changed yet. The statements of the *ARP Manual of Authorities and Duties* regarding the definition of an evangelical and employment have been assiduously disregarded. Indeed, if I have misspoken, where is the documentation? Look at the *Erskine NetNews*. There is a list of names and photos of new professors. After last year's General Synod, one would think that something would be said regarding compliance to the *ARP Manual of Authorities and Duties*. Not a word! What does that mean? Would good administrative stewardship allow this to flop around in the breeze?

In the mid-1980s Dr. Wayne Frazier spoke eloquently on the floor of the General Synod, noting that the "Statement on the Philosophy of Christian Higher Education" was NOT being implemented. Similarly, in the mid-1990s serious questions were raised about the theological positions of certain ETS professors, and, in order to avoid a full-scale incursion by the General Synod, the Board undertook an internal examination of all members of the faculty to ascertain whether they held to the inerrancy of the Scriptures. As is expected, ALL INTERNAL AUDITS HAVE A PREDICTABLE OUTCOME. More recently, in 2007 the "Additional Report" was presented on the floor of the General Synod detailing serious problems at Erskine College. President Randy Ruble begged that the problems were his inheritance, not his making. He informed General Synod that under his watch the will and direction of General Synod were his highest concern. Once again, on the basis of high sounding words, we left Bonclarken with high expectations of POSITIVE actions. What has come of this? There is now MORE turmoil in Due West than ever. Is the Administration ignoring the General Synod again? Are they

hoping that the memory of the General Synod is short and they will get a free pass on these issues again?

My brothers and sisters of the ARPC, why has the General Synod been unable to exert transforming influence on Erskine College and ETS? Consider the following:

- **The 2007 General Synod Vision Committee Report spoke of a “culture of niceness” and “mediocrity.” We ARPs expect people to be “nice.” We don’t know what to do when our directives are ignored. Therefore, we are not well equipped to make the tough personnel decisions that are necessary in order to effect lasting institutional change. Somehow we fail to understand that “PERSONNEL IS POLICY.” We cannot expect an administration to implement the mission of Erskine as it is defined by the General Synod when key members of that administration disagree with that mission and the General Synod is not willing to hold them accountable—CALL FOR RESIGNATIONS IF NECESSARY.**
- **How is it that of all the Boards and Agencies of the General Synod Erskine is the only one that does not reflect the theological direction of the ARPC? Why have we allowed this? Why are we allowing it now? The problem with Erskine is not that she does not have a football team (as some are wont to claim), but that she does not reflect the direction of the ARPC and therefore does not have the trust, confidence, money, heart, and, most importantly of all, THE LOVE of the ARPC.**
- **The Administration and Board of Erskine have been dominated by an alliance between moderate-to-liberal “good- ol’-boys” who attended Erskine College and/or ETS during the period from 1950 to 1990. Much effort is expended to make sure that control is maintained. I witnessed this as a Board member. I had an administrator say to me: “Chuck, don’t create problems for us. I think I can get you on the Executive Committee so that you can help us with the boys on the right.”**
- **The first commandment in the ARPC: Be nice! The second commandment in the ARPC: Never speak ill about Erskine—even if what is said is true.” Thus the “culture of niceness” trumps institutional and personal integrity. And worse, it does profound damage to the cause of Jesus Christ. Can we reasonably expect God to bless such a mess?**

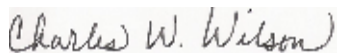
What are the results of the gradualism to change Erskine?

- **Like the crowd in the old story of “The Emperor’s New Clothes” we have been hesitant to speak out about the obvious. We have believed high-sounding platitudes and pietistic nonsense that have served as fig leaves for naked administrative unfaithfulness.**
- **Very good people at Erskine who support the mission have been marginalized and become profoundly frustrated; some have left in disgust, and others are considering leaving even as you read this.**
- **Erskine is a toxic mixture of secular humanism and Christianity. On the Day of Judgment, will God quiz us on our willingness to live with this syncretism? Often at Erskine the lines between belief and unbelief are unclear. How many students have had their faith undermined by this syncretism?**

What’s wrong with changing Erskine now? Why do we tarry? Why are we willing to tolerate such disloyalty to the ARPC? Can we speak of our love for the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ and not boldly and forcefully seek reformation?

Gradualism has not worked. Gradualism will not work. The reason: It IS SIN! IT IS THE SIN OF THE CHURCH’S TOLERATING HIGHHANDED AND INTRANSIGENT DISOBEDIENCE IN HIGH PLACES! It is abandonment of love for Erskine.

These are some of my thoughts,



Charles (“Chuck”) W. Wilson

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(2)

Charlotte, N.C.

Outreach North America Charts a Course for Support of Church Planters

A big THANK YOU and a tip of the hat are to be given to Alan Avera and John Kimmons for their work in planning and carrying out the most recent meeting of the "Carolinas/Virginia New Church Community" in Charlotte, NC, on September 8-9. The work that Outreach North America is doing to support the work of our church planters is commendable, most needed, and long overdue. As a former church planter, I can only wish that such support had been available to me when I was doing the work of a church planter.

In the past, church planters were expected to work alone. That was a brutal method. Today we assign the church planter a coach who has been a church planter. This doesn't make the work of church planting easier, but it does lessen the loneliness of the church planter, focus the accountability of the church planter, and hopefully enhances the possibility of success for the church planter.

The regional meetings are a time for sharing struggles, getting support and counsel, acquiring new information on church planting, praying with other church planters, coaches and leaders, developing/redeveloping strategies and goals and getting local congregations involved in the task.

There were more than 25 planters in attendance at the two-day seminar. The mix of men and ideas are amazing, challenging and rewarding. Within the context of our Presbyterian and Calvinistic traditions are considerable differences in approaches but a unity on the authority of the Word of God and the mission of Church to go and plant churches in the making of disciples.

The work of Outreach North American, first under the leadership of Jim Corbitt and now under the leadership of Alan Avera, has been crucial in developing and receiving new congregations into the ARPC the last fifteen years. Our General Synod has been blessed with an

influx of very able, creative and challenging new pastors who are united in vision to see the advance of the Church of Christ in our ARP tradition.

These are my thoughts,

Charles W. Wilson

Charles ("Chuck") W. Wilson

[\(continue to article 3\)](#)

(3)

Columbia, S.C. **Preachers Challenged to Preach**

Following on the heels of the meeting of the “Carolinas/Virginia New Church Community” in Charlotte, NC, was the seminar “Preach the Word: Preachers Conference, Expository Preaching—The Need of the Hour” on Thursday through Saturday, September 11-13. The conference was held at First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, SC, and was sponsored by the *Institute of Reformed Worship* of Erskine Theological Seminary, Columbia extension. The speakers, in the order they spoke, were Hughes Oliphant Old, David Jussely, Alistair Begg, Sinclair Ferguson, and Mark Ross.

Those church planters who attended both the “Carolinas/Virginia New Church Community” and the Columbia conference on preaching chose wisely. On the one hand was the challenge of the practical issues of church planting and on the other hand was the challenge and joy of preaching.

Dr. Old, the first speaker, spoke of the conference as “a justification for preaching.” No! It was much more than that! It was a celebration of preaching!

If the criteria for judging the success or failure of a conference on preaching is that the speakers demonstrated the art of expository preaching well, the speakers addressed the failures and laziness of the preachers attending to do true expository preaching, and then the speakers challenged the attending preachers to repent and go and do faithful expository preaching and they desired to do that, then the conference was a rousing success. A big **THANK YOU and a tip of the hat are to be given to Mark Ross and the Columbia staff for the work that they did in putting together and implementing this conference. The Erskine Theological Seminary—Columbia Extension is to be congratulated!**

These are my thoughts,

Charles W. Wilson

Charles ("Chuck") W. Wilson

(continue to article 4)

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Seminarians Respond

In past issues of *ARPtalk* I have noted that some of our brightest and best graduates of Erskine College have left Due West for seminaries other than Erskine Theological Seminary. The question asked was: Why did they do that? Two of those young men have responded. Below are copies of their responses.

Will Hunter

There are several reasons (not necessarily in order and not necessarily exhaustive) as to why I chose RTS Charlotte for graduate work. First is the recommendation from my father, Robert Hunter, who is now pastor of Gilead ARP church in Huntersville. He is a 1998 RTS Charlotte graduate who loves the institution and loved his time there. He strongly encouraged me to attend RTS as well. Second is RTS-C's strong emphasis on training pastor-scholars. I feel God is calling me to pastoral ministry and RTS-C's emphasis on rigorous academics with a pastorally driven focus were exactly what I was looking for in a seminary. Third is location. Charlotte is my hometown, and I was excited to move back to the city. I enjoyed my time in Due West at Erskine College but was ready for a change of scenery. Fourth is the faculty at RTS-C, both the professors and the administration. In my campus visits I was impressed by the academic credentials of the professors, their high view of Scripture and by the entire faculty's desire to get to know the students.

Dr. Evans, who was an amazing teacher and mentor to me, helped me in this decision-making process. He encouraged me to consider Erskine Seminary. Indeed, I did consider Erskine Seminary. One reason (among several others) is that I loved studying under Dr. Eves at Erskine College, whose teaching helped me tremendously in my spiritual growth and knowledge and understanding of God's Word. I would have loved to study under him at the seminary. But ultimately I had my heart set on RTS Charlotte and it was clear to me that it was the best fit for my seminary education.

Daniel Wells

My decision to attend Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte over my denominational seminary, Erskine Theological Seminary, involved a variety of factors, some of which were unique to my experience as an Erskine College student. I entered Erskine College knowing that God was calling me to seminary, and it was my dream to go to Erskine Theological Seminary

since I felt called to pastoral ministry in the ARP Church.

However, I found certain aspects of my experience in the Due West community to be negative enough to not attend Erskine Theological Seminary. Much of it boiled down to the fact that I felt unsafe on the Erskine campus. The Minister and His Work Committee of Second Presbytery concluded in March of 2007 that a "culture of intimidation" existed on the college campus, which I attested to. However, I also felt intimidated in my relationship to the seminary.

In feeling unsure as to the stability of the seminary, I was still encouraged by administrators and faculty at the college to consider Erskine Seminary. Yet, I ended up not applying because I knew I would not feel comfortable there. In addition, discussions relating to the 2008 Calvin Colloquium and that certain faculty may be openly promoting a neo-Barthian perspective made me uneasy to attend such an institution in training for ministry.

So, I decided to attend a seminary that I felt would edify me and help me to mature and grow into a faithful minister of the gospel. Reformed Theological Seminary, while not perfect, is robust in its commitment to evangelical and Reformed theology, encourages students to critically reason from a Christian worldview, has a high view of Scripture as God's inerrant Word, and has faculty and administrators that I do not feel intimidated by.

As one who still aspires to do pastoral ministry in the ARP Church, I think it is important to pray for and support the agencies of our General Synod to be faithful and godly in their kingdom tasks. I love Erskine Theological Seminary (as well as many of the administrators and faculty there), and I want to be able to recommend such an institution to students in my church and in my presbytery in the future.

(continue to article 5)

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Gag Order Placed on Seminary Committee

Chairman Doug Petersen has placed a “gag order” on the members of the Seminary Committee. The report by *ARPTalk(5)* on the last meeting of the Seminary Committee has the Erskine Administration all in a tizzy.

What has become of TRANSPARENCY in Due West? The Erskine Administration has made much of their willingness to be open in their actions as they pertain to the life of the ARPC. Why are they now afraid of the Seminary Committee’s process being watched by the ministers of the ARPC? Is there a hidden agenda? Do they not realize that they are under a microscope?

The issues that are presently before the Seminary Committee are not insignificant to the life of the ARPC. The issues involve the theological integrity and identity of ETS. The ministers of the ARPC are keenly aware of what is at stake.

I can think of nothing that could go further to deteriorate and erode the confidence of the ministers of the ARPC in ETS than closing the doors of the Seminary Committee and gagging the members of the Seminary Committee with a threat of removal. These actions are both puzzling and distressing. The ministers of the ARPC owe their loyalty to the church and not to a college or seminary. **OUR EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ARE THE HANDMAIDENS OF THE CHURCH; THE CHURCH ISN'T THE HANDMAIDEN TO ERSKINE.**

Threat of removal from the Seminary Committee! Why is such heavy-handedness needed? Why such a draconian measure? The next meeting of the Seminary Committee is scheduled the morning of the day the Board meets in the afternoon and that is not enough time for “leaks” to occur. What is the real message that is being sent? Is the real message “Watch out ARP ministers, if you don’t pledge first loyalty to the Erskine Board we will remove you?”

One last question: Are we to expect that the work of the Seminary Committee will be presented as a *fait accompli* with little regard to the stance or the opinion of the ARPC?

These are my thoughts,

Charles W. Wilson

Charles ("Chuck") W. Wilson

(continue to article 6)

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The BARN and GREYSTONE

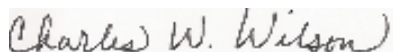
If you are not aware of the following website, (www.ecstudentfellowship.org), may I suggest that you go to it. Reverend Paul Patrick is the Chaplain at Erskine, and "Campus Ministry at Erskine College" is the web news site of his ministry.

A big **THANK YOU** and a tip of the hat are due to Chaplain Patrick for the work that he is doing at Erskine. The "Barn" is the large group Bible study that he conducts on Sunday evenings in the barn that is behind his house on his property in Due West. On Sunday evening, September 7, the "Barn" kicked off the 2008-2009 school year. Present at this meeting were Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Query. Mr. Query is the Moderator of the ARPC.

On September 19-21 Chaplain Patrick took 53 students to the Reformed University Fellowship-sponsored Southeastern Collegiate Retreat at Camp Greystone at Tuxedo, S.C. The music team from the "barn" led the music ministry for the 300 students who attended the retreat. The topic of the retreat was the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Well done to the Erskine students! 53 out of 300 is impressive!!

These are my thoughts,



Charles ("Chuck") W. Wilson

(continue for preview of ARPTalk(7))

Things to Look for in *ARPTalk(7)*

**The following are some ideas for articles that may be used in
ARPTalk(7):**

- **Proposals for changing the culture at Erskine**
- **A review of the meetings of the Presbyteries**
- **A review of the meeting of the Erskine Board**
- **A comparison of the new "Presidents Scholarship" with the
EBK Scholarship**
- **An analysis of Vice-President Gaston's vision statement for ETS**