

ARPTalk EXTRA(2)

January 30, 2009



Dr. Gaston at the 2007 ETS Graduation in May

Congratulations Dr. H. Neely Gaston Doctor of Divinity

***ARPTalk* wishes to congratulate the now Rev. Doctor H. Neely Gaston, Executive Vice-President of Erskine Theological Seminary. According to Dr. R. T. Ruble, President, Erskine College and Seminary, Dr. Gaston was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity in December by Cornerstone University and Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Cornerstone University and Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, like Erskine College and Erskine Theological Seminary, is one institution. Dr. Joseph Stowell is President. Dr. Stowell, educator and nationally**

known radio personality and preacher, was formerly the President of Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, Illinois.

During my time on the Erskine Board when discussions about the reformation of Erskine College and Erskine Theological Seminary arose, the conversations were quashed by fearmongering: "We're not going to be like that Bible College, Bob Jones University." The mantra of Dr. Bill Crenshaw, Erskine College English professor, is "Bobby Jones College" and the "funnymentalists in Greenville." Interestingly, Bob Jones University has never been a "Bible College." But when one is artful in fearmongering, precision is never a high priority. The pervasive opinion on the Erskine Board among the Erskine elite was that academic achievement and Bible affirming fundamentalism were incompatible. I had the feeling that none of these "head-in-the-sand" opponents of Biblical integrity and academic excellence had ever interacted with a Bible College graduate who is a Biblical fundamentalist.

I don't like using *Wikipedia*, but the Cornerstone website directs inquirers to a *Wikipedia* site for the history/timeline of the institution. I suppose the Cornerstone folks maintain this site. Below is the story of Cornerstone University and Grand Rapids Theological Seminary.

- January 1941-1944: Baptist Bible Institute of Grand Rapids, Michigan**
- (modelled after the Baptist Bible Institute of Toledo, Ohio)
 - (located in educational wing of Wealthy Street Baptist Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan)

1944-1948: Baptist Bible Institute and School of Theology of Grand Rapids, Michigan

- 1948-1963: Grand Rapids Baptist Theological Seminary and Bible Institute**
- (first seminary graduating class of 2 students, Spring 1949 -- one of whom was Victor M. Matthews, who immediately began teaching at the school)

1963-1972: Grand Rapids Baptist Bible College and Seminary

- (Fall 1964, first students arrive at new campus/Leonard & East Beltline NE)

1972-1994: Grand Rapids Baptist College and Seminary

- January 1977, the new Leon J. Wood Seminary Building opened
- February 1977, the Leon J. Wood Seminary Building dedicated

1994 - merged with Grand Rapids School of the Bible & Music and renamed as Cornerstone College

1994-1999: Cornerstone College and Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary (3-28-94) (legally renamed as Cornerstone Baptist Educational Ministries -- C.B.E.M.)

1999-present: Cornerstone University (4-8-99)

2003: Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary became Grand Rapids Theological Seminary

The list of former Presidents of Cornerstone University and Grand Rapids Theological Seminary reads like a “Who’s Who” of American fundamentalism. Impressive!

Now I think the readers of *ARPTalk* are aware of the differences between strident, doctrinaire “Fundamentalism” and evangelical fundamentalism. Evangelical fundamentalism was and continues to be a reaction against the theological liberalism that has come to dominate the mainline denominations of the United States. Historic, evangelical fundamentalism was and is marked by the *Five Fundamentals of Niagara* (1895): the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Bible (inerrancy), the depravity of man, redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ only, the true church made up of all believers, and the second coming of Christ to set up his kingdom. Certainly there were and are other points that are emphasized, such as: the reality of Biblical miracles, the virgin birth, the reality of both heaven and hell, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the historicity of the creation account and the creation of Adam and Eve, etc. Another mark of historic fundamentalism is its eschatology: premillennialism colored in the rubrics of dispensationalism.

I have read “The Cornerstone Confession.” I have been in conversation with Dr. Stowell. Cornerstone/GRTS is an institution that is still in touch with its roots: doctrinally—evangelical fundamentalism; Bibliology—inerrancy; ecclesiology—Baptist; and eschatology—premillennialism. I may have missed something but I don’t think I have missed much.

There is one other very interesting aspect of Cornerstone/GRTS: tenure is no longer given. Cornerstone/GRTS is a fully accredited university/seminary that employs professors on one to five year renewable contracts.

This is ironic, isn't it? The Executive Vice-President of Erskine Theological Seminary has been granted an honorary Doctor of Divinity from one of those "Bible College type," "funnymentalist" schools. Bless their hearts, how will the "ol' school" Erskine elite explain this? There must be people on the Erskine Board, at the College, and at the Seminary rolling around on the floor and foaming at the mouth at such an indignity being foisted on an Erskine administrator. They must be about to despair and die. What will they say now?

Forgive my humor. I couldn't let this moment past. The barb is not aimed at Dr. Gaston but at certain Board members and others.

Now, in all seriousness, congratulations are due Dr. Gaston. But what does this mean?

In the past Dr. Gaston has openly stated that his goal was to change the direction of ETS. He has stated that under the leadership of his predecessor ETS had gone too far to the right—too close to the PCA, too close to the TR types. He has said that his goal was to make ETS more "moderate" by moving closer to the EPC, the Confessing-Church types of the PC(USA), the Methodists in all their theological strangeness, and Baptist moderates.

Does this honor from Cornerstone/GRTS mean that Dr. Gaston has changed his mind and direction? Is Dr. Gaston's now seeking to move ETS toward evangelical fundamentalism?

If this is the case, I'm sure that some of our doctrinaire Presbyterian, Reformed, means of grace, amillennial/post-millennial types are going to have a jumbo, supersized case of heartburn and apoplexy. However this is not too troubling for me. I spent most of my early adult years amongst evangelical fundamentalists. There is no doubt that they love, honor, and stand for the Bible.

Does this mean that Dr. Gaston is now seeking to implement our understanding of Biblical authority: inerrancy? What will this mean for ETS neo-Barthian professors, Richard Burnett and Michael Bush?

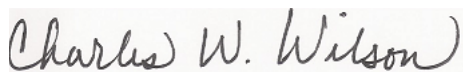
Seeing that Cornerstone/GRTS has done away with the silliness of faculty tenure for a contract system, does this mean that Dr. Gaston is going to attempt to implement such a policy? I hope so!

In the past *ARPTalk* has been very critical of Dr. Gaston (see http://arptalk.weebly.com/uploads/7/0/5/3/705327/arptalk_7_.pdf). Has a mistake been made? Has a change taken place? In Biblical parlance, has the leopard changed his spots? If Dr. Gaston is going to forge a path toward historic, evangelical fundamentalism that doesn't curb our Presbyterian and Reformed traditions, I want to join him. I want to support him.

All this is interesting. It's even awe-inspiring . . . dumbfounding even!

Dr. Gaston, please tell us what you are doing. An evangelical fundamentalist school doesn't usually grant honorary degrees to the head of a Presbyterian institution that has neo-Barthian professors who do not affirm inerrancy. You have changed your direction, haven't you? Please tell us clearly!!!

These are my thoughts,

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

Charles ("Chuck") W. Wilson