

# ARPTalk(51)

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October 20, 2011

**One of the hallmarks of the healthy church is VIGILANCE. Without vigilance truth turns into syncretism, orthodoxy dilutes into heresy, love corrupts into license, discipline degrades into ecclesiastical anarchy, intellectual pursuit devolves into intellectual idolatry, and academic freedom transmogrifies into academic tyranny. Woe to the church that fails to be vigilant in the care of her agencies!**

**"...while the pious snore the wicked gain ground and do harm to the Church."**

**Second Helvetic Confession, XVII. 5**

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## [ARPTalk \(51.1\)](#)

# **An Open Letter to the “*Star Wars*’ Cantina Presbytery” (Second Presbytery)**

Dear Gentlemen of Second Presbytery,

A former member of Second Presbytery once referred to our presbytery as “The *Star Wars*’ Cantina Presbytery” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35cLo7d07Xs>). By that, he meant that the presbytery was made up of the oddest people. I was taken aback by his cutting sarcasm; however, after the Fall Meeting of Second Presbytery on Tuesday, October 11, 2011, I am now convinced that Second Presbytery is indeed the “the *Star Wars*’ Cantina Presbytery” of the ARP Church. We are much more than odd. We are a gallimaufry of various blends and shades of strangeness that makes Second Presbytery a caricature of a presbytery

that is then a caricature of itself – a garish Hudibrastic burlesque of Presbyterianism!

Attached and at the end of this article, is a copy of the “memorial” that was brought before Second Presbytery, first, by the Session of the Spartanburg ARP Church, and then the Sessions of the Redeemer ARP Church and the Unity ARP Church joined in support of the “memorial” by adding the names of their Sessions. This memorial was the most important item before Second Presbytery for consideration. The salient points of the “memorial” are three:

(1) The EC Foundation:

Established after “the March 2010 ‘Snow Synod’ to support resistance to the efforts by the General Synod . . . as it sought to ensure missional fidelity at Erskine College and Erskine Theological Seminary as agencies of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church,” the *EC Foundation* exists (a) to “support these [Erskine] institutions as they are involved in any civil litigation” against the ARP Church, (b) to impugn “the honor and reputation of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church by alleging on its website that the General Synod acted ‘illegally’ at its March 2010 meeting, and by speaking of the General Synod as ‘an unreliable and capricious partner’ in its dealings with Erskine,” (c) to express “gratitude for the support of ‘some alumni and friends of Erskine’ who ‘object to the current direction of these institutions,’ who ‘have suspended their financial support of Erskine,’ and who have instead ‘chosen to make gifts to this foundation’” and has thus jeopardized the financial stability of Erskine College and Seminary, and (d) to support “the recently terminated Dr. William Crenshaw, a man known for his opposition to Evangelical Christianity and to the mission of Erskine College as an Evangelical Christian liberal arts college.”

(2) The question regarding Mr. John R. Hunt, an elder in the Young Memorial Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, and Messrs. William W. Lesesne, Lee W. Logan, and James W. Gettys, Elders in the Due West Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church:

Since “elders in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church have solemnly promised ‘to submit in the spirit of love to the authority of the session and to the higher courts of the Church’ (Form of Government IX.D.3.6), and ‘in all things to promote the unity, peace, purity, and prosperity of the church’ (Form of Government IX.D.3.7),” have these Elders violated their ordination vows as “Directors” of the *EC Foundation*?

(3) The actions called for:

That the Sessions of these Elders “investigate the activities of Mr. William W. Lesesne, Mr. Lee W. Logan, and Dr. James W. Gettys, and Dr. John R. Hunt respectively as Directors of the *EC Foundation*, to determine whether their activities as Directors of the *EC Foundation* have been in conflict with their role and responsibilities as elders in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, and to ascertain whether ecclesiastical charges should be filed against these elders. Both Sessions shall report back to Second Presbytery with their findings and proposed courses of action at a called meeting of Second Presbytery to be held no later than November 30, 2011.”

In the simplest of terms, the Sessions of the Young Memorial ARP Church and the Due West ARP Church were asked to investigate the activities of four Elders as they are both Elders in these congregations and “Directors” of the *EC Foundation* and to determine whether or not their involvement with the *EC Foundation* is in violation of their ordination vows as Elders in the ARP Church.

Others may see the story of the October 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of Second Presbytery differently (and I invite the views of others), but these are my recollections and observations.

1. For the record, I had NO part in framing or putting forward this “memorial.” I was surprised by it. I support its sentiment; however, I would not have presented the motion in the manner that it was presented. When the “memorial” was debated, I did not speak to it; nevertheless, I did vote for it.
2. The emotions that had been fomented against the “memorial” verged on hysteria. If I had been Messrs. Lesesne, Logan, Gettys, or Hunt, I would have spoken for and voted for the investigation. As a matter of fact, I would have insisted on it. I would have wanted both the wisdom of my cause explained and the righteousness of my cause seen. As it is, there is a blanket of doubt and distrust over the affair.
3. The performance by Mr. Neely Gaston, former Executive Vice President of ETS, has to be the most bizarre show of the day. With a red face, neck veins bulging, and voice warbling, he once again declared the actions of the “Snow Synod” illegal as he attempted to read page-after-page from South Carolina law. Finally, the Moderator asked him to speak to the point. I do not think he ever did, but he did sit down. This chimera that the “Snow Synod” acted “illegally” is simply an act of self-delusion. Yes, the actions of the “Snow Synod” were taken to civil court; however, I do not know how Mr. Gaston and others get to the notion that General Synod acted “illegally”. In point of fact, the affair was settled by what is called by many as “The Compromise,” and the legal actions were

dropped before the civil court could rule on the matter. It was not one of Mr. Gaston's better days.

4. The most convoluted speech of the day was given by Mr. Randy Ruble. Without speaking to the issue that was being debated, Mr. Ruble rehearsed his role in the lawsuits that were filed by the BOT and members of his faculty after the "Snow Synod". He seemed to give the impression that he was an innocent bystander in the affairs; He declared that he was a faithful churchman, and then he acknowledged his complicity in the law suits and financial matters regarding the *EC Foundation*, stating that he had given \$4,000 to the *EC Foundation* to assist in paying attorneys' fees for the plaintiffs. He also said that his actions were efforts to help newly appointed President David Norman. Well, as I remember the story, many of those actions occurred before President Norman appeared on the scene. No doubt, time has passed, and I am sure that Mr. Ruble's recollections of the details may have corrupted.
  
5. The saddest speech of the day came from a member of the Session of the Due West ARP Church. This Elder informed the presbytery of what "wonderful and good men" Lesesne, Logan, Gettys, and Hunt were. In the past, he pointed out that Lesesne, Logan, and Gettys, Elders in the Due West congregation, were men who had worked hard for the cause of Erskine College and Seminary - even giving their lives in the employment of Erskine. He also noted that Hunt had given faithfully to Erskine. The Elder said that the Due West congregation and community had been bitterly split by this controversy between the ARP Church and Erskine College and Seminary. He said that too many people had left the Due West congregation because of this clash. It was time, he said, to let bygones be bygones. Every one sins; does it really matter what these men are doing on the *EC Foundation*? An investigation of the activities of these men would hurt the Due West ARP Church, the community, and Erskine. To ask these men if their vows as Elders in the ARP Church and their activity on the *EC Foundation* as "Directors" were in conflict was too controversial and disruptive. This matter should be overlooked for the sake of peace. The great imperative before us was that we should "love one another" and forget what had taken place and that these men were still attempting to subvert the ARP Church and the present Erskine administration. A friend has written the following words regarding this Elder's words: "From time to time during debate at meetings of Presbytery, we are reminded that we are all sinners, and the reminder is proffered as a rationale for excusing those whose actions or words are being examined. That is non-information and immaterial to any debate, and it does not relieve the body of its responsibility to examine infractions of duties, theological standards, or ethical behavior

in an effort to maintain presbytery, denominational order and, hence, peace.”

6. The responses of the representatives of the Young Memorial ARP Church were troubling. The elder representative was horrified that the Session was being asked to investigate the activities of Mr. Hunt. A Session should not be asked to investigate the actions of one of its members, he declared. Mr. Jeff Bost, the Pastor of the Young Memorial congregation, confessed that he was so distressed over the matter that he would not have been able to sing the “Psalm of Unity” (Psalm 133) if the “memorial” had passed. That is, if the Session of the Young Memorial ARP Church had been asked to do something that is very vanilla Presbyterian, Mr. Bost would have been devastated by it.
7. Mr. Matt Miller, the Pastor of the Greenville ARP Church, did the most surprising thing of the day when he introduced the Erskine administration and BOT into the debate by reading an e-mail from President David Norman and Chairman Joe Patrick to the presbytery. Essentially, the communiqué stated that the matter of the *EC Foundation* was an Erskine matter and informed the presbytery that they were dealing with it. At the time, no one seemed to notice that what Mr. Miller did was a violation of presbytery’s protocol and “out of order.” That is, the audacity of the action was such that everyone was caught by surprise. Likewise, at the time, no one seemed to notice that Erskine matters took precedence over and trumped Second Presbytery in the oversight of its own house. In fact, Erskine (the tail of the dog) wagged the dog (the church). If anything demonstrated that Second Presbytery has become “The Star Wars’ Cantina Presbytery,” that did!

There were three extraordinarily distressing issues that arose from this debate that have been publicly demonstrated on the floor of Second Presbytery for all to see. Let me explain.

1. The Erskinolatry of “olde Erskine” was unmasked and put on display for all to see. The direction of affection was clear, and, for many of those who spoke, it ran toward Due West rather than vertically. I was stunned by what I heard and saw. I came away with the impression that the first and great commandment is written in these words: “Thou shalt love one another as thyself and permit anything without question or rebuke for we are all sinners and not to do so is not to be nice. The second is like unto it: with all thy mind and soul and strength, thou shalt love thy Higher Power as thou art able to conceive him. On these two hang all the Twelve Commandments.” By the way, if you are not familiar with the Eleventh and Twelfth Commandments, they are: “(11) Thou shalt be nice”; and “(12) Thou shalt say no critical thing about Erskine no

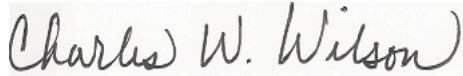
manner the depth of the evil, for in so doing our god is pushed over on his face.”

2. Everyone is tired of this conflict over Erskine and wants it to “go away”; however, instead of doing the thing that will resolve the conflict, we run from it. We run from “peacemaking.” We attempt “peacekeeping” rather than “peacemaking.” According to Matthew 5, Jesus did not sanction “peacekeepers” – those who do the expedient thing and cover up the issues! We attempt to keep the peace by “peacekeeping” because we fear how others will esteem us. We show little or no fear of the God of the Bible who placed us in a position of leadership. Moreover, doing the right thing is hard if we cherish calm and the accolades of others. Perhaps I expect too much from the small pond of the ARP world where egos, reputations, and careers are forced into tension with biblical/confessional/ecclesiastical fidelity. However, the tensions that divide us can only be resolved through “peacemaking,” for in “peacemaking” issues are resolved rather than “swept under the rug.” I think the following words by Martyn Lloyd Jones are particularly applicable to both Second Presbytery and General Synod: “There is no purpose in having a basis or a confession of faith unless it is applied. So we must assert the element of discipline as being essential to the true life of the church. And what calls itself a church which does not believe in discipline, and does not use it and apply it, is therefore not a true church.” (*What is an Evangelical?* The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992, p. 83.) It is heart-wrenching to watch men seek to maintain the status quo by “peacekeeping” rather than attempting to bring health to the church by “peacemaking” – resolving the issues that divide us! However, as they say, it is what it is!
3. I was amazed at how little the members of the Sessions of the Due West ARP Church and the Young Memorial ARP Church knew about our Presbyterian polity. They could have done a great service for Second Presbytery and the General Synod by: (1) Nothing that we are divided on Matthew 18:15-20 and have no consensus as to the difference between a “private” and “public” offense and asked presbytery and General Synod for instruction; (2) Nothing that we are divided on the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 6 and asked presbytery and General Synod for an official interpretation; and (3) Noting that our “Book of Discipline” is a contradictory and convoluted document and therefore useless and asked Second Presbytery to memorialize General Synod to revise and update it. Instead, they became defensive and fled from the opportunity to be constructive.

I close with this story. When Raphael was painting his famous Vatican frescoes, a couple of cardinals stopped by to watch the master and criticize his work. “The face of the Apostle Paul is too red,” said one of the

churchmen. Raphael retorted, “Paul blushes to see into whose hands the church has fallen.”

These are my thoughts,



Charles W. Wilson

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### **Memorial to Second Presbytery**

Whereas, elders in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church have solemnly promised “to submit in the spirit of love to the authority of the session and to the higher courts of the Church” (Form of Government IX.D.3.6), and “in all things to promote the unity, peace, purity, and prosperity of the church” (Form of Government IX.D.3.7), and,

Whereas, Dr. John R. Hunt is an elder in the Young Memorial Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, and Mr. William W. Lesesne, Mr. Lee W. Logan, and Dr. James W. Gettys are elders in the Due West Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, and,

Whereas, Dr. John R. Hunt, Mr. William W. Lesesne, Mr. Lee W. Logan, and Dr. James W. Gettys are Directors of the EC Foundation, and,

Whereas, the EC Foundation was formed in the wake of the March 2010 “Snow Synod” to support resistance to the efforts by the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church as it sought to ensure missional fidelity at Erskine College and Erskine Theological Seminary as agencies of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, and,

Whereas, one of the stated “values” of the EC Foundation is “to support these [Erskine] institutions as they are involved in any civil litigation,” and,

Whereas, the EC foundation raised substantial funds to support the lawsuit of Dr. Richard Taylor, Mr. David Chesnut, and Dr. Parker Young against the General Synod, and,

Whereas, the EC Foundation has impugned the honor and reputation of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church by alleging on its website that the General Synod acted “illegally” at its March 2010 meeting, and by speaking of the General Synod as “an unreliable and capricious partner” in its dealings with Erskine, and,

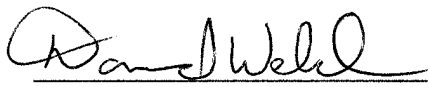
Whereas, the EC Foundation on its website has expressed gratitude for the support of “some alumni and friends of Erskine” who “object to the current direction of these institutions,” who “have suspended their financial support of Erskine,” and who have instead “chosen to make gifts to this foundation,” and,

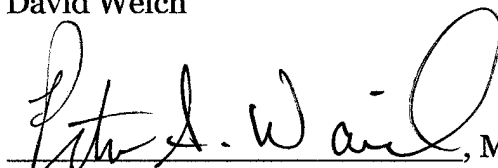
Whereas, such intentional diversion of funds from Erskine to the EC Foundation poses a hardship and threat to the wellbeing of Erskine, and creates further challenges for the Erskine administration as it seeks to faithfully implement the stated mission of the schools, and

Whereas, the EC Foundation on its website has expressed support for the recently terminated Dr. William Crenshaw, a man known for his opposition to Evangelical Christianity and to the mission of Erskine College as an Evangelical Christian liberal arts college,

Therefore, Second Presbytery hereby instructs the Sessions of the Due West Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Young Memorial Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church to investigate the activities of Mr. William W. Lesesne, Mr. Lee W. Logan, and Dr. James W. Gettys, and Dr. John R. Hunt respectively as Directors of the EC Foundation, to determine whether their activities as Directors of the EC Foundation have been in conflict with their role and responsibilities as elders in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, and to ascertain whether ecclesiastical charges should be filed against these elders. Both Sessions shall report back to Second Presbytery with their findings and proposed courses of action at a called meeting of Second Presbytery to be held no later than November 30, 2011.

Approved by the Session of the Spartanburg Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church meeti  
September 18, 2011.

  
\_\_\_\_\_, Clerk  
David Welch

  
\_\_\_\_\_, Moderator  
Peter A. Waid