

To whom it may concern:

I was pained to learn recently of the current controversy at Emmanuel. I do not know all the details regarding the situation and therefore reserve judgment. Nevertheless, I refuse to allow my silence to be interpreted as indifference or, worse, antipathy towards a man whom I greatly esteem.

Dr. Chris Rollston's status within the field of the Hebrew Bible speaks for itself. I will only add that, as an Emmanuel student, I am confident his instruction and recommendation were crucial to my acceptance into a PhD program at Pennsylvania State University. (Consequently, I hate to think of the disservice that would be done to current and future students as a result of Dr. Rollston's forced departure. This disservice would extend not only to those whom he might instruct, of course, but also to anyone who would study at an institution so ingloriously marred.) Admittedly, I left the program at the end of my first semester, but even Dr. Rollston's involvement in that decision only further imbued me with admiration for him. Dr. Rollston gently encouraged me to persevere through at least a full year, yet he assured me that he would support whatever decision I ultimately made. His assurance was not hollow, for despite the fact that my departure from the program indubitably reflected poorly upon him, he has in no way retracted his dear friendship from me.

As someone who has left academe—I am now a humble high school math teacher—but not the church, I now value most the impact Dr. Rollston has had on me theologically. Surely, he opens doors to uncomfortable truths of our Scripture. But, truth be told, these truths are so uncomfortable in large part due to the fact that so often those who *should* open these doors instead attempt to erect walls in front of them or are simply too ignorant of the biblical texts to be aware of their existence. In contrast, Dr. Rollston unapologetically demands that his students enter these doors. Yet, with great care and empathy, he holds their hands as they do. The church needs ministers who know the Bible, including those parts that are unpalatable. Indeed, in my conversations with those outside the church over the last few years, I observe how refreshing they find my transparency with regard to Scripture. I am indebted to Dr. Rollston for forcing me to ask hard questions and concede hard answers.

In addition to being Dr. Rollston's student for four years, I served as his professorial assistant for two. During our hundreds of hours in his office together, our conversations were naturally more personal. There I shared with him details of my own story, and he reciprocated. I benefited from his pastoral counsel, as did the countless students who dropped by for free coffee. It was also during this time that I filled in for him occasionally at his church in Morristown. While their congregation was certainly of modest size, these “salt-of-the-earth people” (as Rollston would call them) spoke highly of their minister. Indeed, despite his reputation as a scholar, he excelled as a shepherd of laypersons. He models outside the classroom that which he teaches in it (for, make no mistake, Rollston teaches with a keen awareness that his students serve in the church).

I indicated that I would reserve judgment. That is only partially true. I will reserve final judgment, but I will also offer a provisional, but impassioned observation: It appears to

me that Dr. Rollston's position may be in jeopardy due to his steadfast commitment to “let the chips fall where they may.” I hope that this is not the case, that I have been misinformed or only partially informed, and that there is some hidden puzzle piece that makes sense of all this. If, however, there is no such explanation—if it truly is the case that expedience and financial concerns have trumped academic honesty at my beloved alma mater—then my heart will be filled not only with pain, but a great sense of shame. Moreover, I would remind those responsible that the act of dismissing one who speaks hard truths in no way removes those truths or even mitigates their hardness. May God have mercy on us if we tickle ears in exchange for financial security; indeed, I would that Emmanuel close its doors rather than compromise its integrity.

In peace,
Stephen Paul