

## **My Calling To Be An Academic**

### **Keith Campbell, PhD**



People turn to academics for many reasons: Love of learning; desire to push a discipline forward; to make a difference in the world; a scholarly mentor recognizes academic potential in them. And the list goes on.

I pursued academics for all of these noble reasons. But there is one additional reason that significantly shaped my academic career. I perceived a need for U.S. scholars like me to serve beyond the North American borders. In fact, this is precisely what I said when interviewing for acceptance to my Ph.D. program. I was asked, “Why do you want to earn a Ph.D. in New Testament Studies?” I replied, “One day, I want to teach and serve abroad.” Why? Because scholars are lining up hundreds deep in the U.S. for teaching and research jobs in my field while the need skyrockets in many places for biblical scholarship.\*

From my academic infancy, therefore, I wanted to be a scholar who traverses geographical borders and people groups to engage universities worldwide. These aspirations materialized in 2011 when, with the help of Global Scholars, I landed a teaching post in Shanghai, China, where a foreigner (especially a U.S. foreigner) teaching the Bible long term in a public university was as rare as snowballs in Buenos Aires.

I served in Shanghai for four wonderful years before yielding to God’s call to the universities beyond China as Global Scholars’ Vice President of Global Partnerships. Now, a team of scholars from around the world and I are developing an academic society that will serve, resource, and connect Christian scholars by encouraging and helping them integrate their faith and their scholarship. This society, in other words, will encourage Christian Scholars to think Christianly about *every* aspect of their academic life.

### **Why *This* Call?**

Why am I pursuing this particular call to advance the philosophy of integrating faith and scholarship? Simply put, because it is needed...badly! For emphasis, let me say this again. No, let me “scream” it with capital letters: INTEGRATION IS NEEDED...BADLY! In my experience, Christian scholars throughout the world often are frighteningly unaware of their need to think Christianly about all aspects of their respective academic disciplines.

For example, I recently spent several hours with a group of Christian scholars in an Indian city. These scholars are admirably committed to the Christian faith, even willing to sacrifice deeply for Christ. They are bold witnesses to the Gospel. But no matter how much I prodded, they simply could not see their scholarly work *as professors* at the university as real ministry. Instead, over and over again they emphatically said things like “I look forward to retiring so that I can devote my life fully to ministry.” I asked one

professor, a scientist, if he ever felt led to worship God when looking through a microscope at the beauty of creation in the complexities of the sub atomic world. Nothing! Just a blank stare followed by an incredulous retort, “I only worship God when I read the Bible.”

This is inadequate. Doing good work as a scholar *is* good ministry. Professors are in a unique position, so unique, in fact, that less than 1% of the Earth’s entire population are professors. But this miniscule percentage influences almost everyone else on the planet. Aside from the pragmatic influence that professors yield, the Bible states clearly that “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Col. 3:23 NIV). This includes scholarly work.

Think about it like this. What if I were take my car to an auto mechanic, and he says to me, “I am a Christian!” This, of course, is good news. But, what if he says, “I use my job as a mechanic only to do real Christian work like sharing the Gospel. In fact, being a mechanic is just a pathway for me to do God’s real ministry for my life.” As this mechanic’s customer, I would reply,

Brother, I praise God that you are a committed Christian. And, I am elated about your call to ministry. But, since I’m entrusting my car to you as a mechanic, and since I’m paying you a lot of money to fix it, I need to know if, indeed, you are also a good mechanic! In fact, because you are a Christian, you ought to be the best mechanic you can be. Anything less than that, and you are, in essence, stealing my money. Simply put, I would rather you not separate your Christian work from your mechanic work.”

Now, let’s return to professors. If I am a student who pays tuition for a Christian professor to teach me mathematics, then I should expect this professor to be the best mathematics professor she can be. Because she is a Christian, she ought to be the best professor she can be. Anything less than that, and the professor is stealing from her student! And thievery is not good Christianity! Christian professors should not separate their Christian work from their academic work.

\*Ssee my article “The American Evangelical Academy and the World: A Challenge to Practice More Globally” in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56 [2013], pp. 337–53.

-----

God has called me, and a host of others, to propagate this message of integration to the Christian professors of the world. To do this, we are developing the Society of Christian Scholars, which will launch by the end of 2018. For more information about this society, contact (in South America) Dr. Richard Smith: comenius1251@gmail.com; (in Europe) Dr. Granville Pillar: granville.ibolya@hotmail.com; (in Anglophone Africa): Dr. Osam Temple: osamosam2000@yahoo.com; (everywhere else): Dr. Keith Campbell: kcampbell@global-scholars.org.