

ABHE Chief Academic Officers Address
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To get at the heart of your spiritual influence over your faculty I would like to go back to our foundation if I may. Against the backdrop of a sea change in biblical higher education, I would like to give a context for who we are today, sound the alarm bell for tomorrow, and set the stage for our future beyond to a group who I believe holds the key to helping your institutions thrive.

At the risk of sounding gloom and doom, we in biblical higher education are facing tremendous challenges, as are our graduates. To understand our challenges, we must realize that we are a complex organism, committed to carrying out our mission in an ever changing environment.

Complex because first of all we must continue to be woven into the life of the church from local congregations to international structures of missions. Secondly, we are a scholarly institution whose faculty must be current in the discipline in which we teach. Thirdly, we are interwoven with accrediting bodies, state departments of education, government grants, and loans for education. Finally, we are a faith-based private college in a pluralistic world of many religions.

Let me briefly explain this complex, fragile, and changing environment. Nationally and locally, both congregations and denominations are facing challenges at their very core including same sex issues, gender roles, and the inerrancy of the Scripture. Many Christian institutions, both church and parachurch, are facing issues of leadership succession.

Meanwhile colleges are facing new scrutiny after years of cost increases. The dominant organizations that once avowed the importance of biblical higher education are increasingly becoming more secularized and politically correct.

In short, the institutions on which we often depend for legitimacy, financial support, student recruitment, and job placement for our graduates are almost all markedly weaker than they were just 10 years ago.

Has there ever been a time when a nation's moral center has shifted as rapidly as it did in America from 1960, when I was growing up, until today? We have gone from watching television programs like "Leave It to Beaver," "Father Knows Best," "Gunsmoke," "Perry Mason," to the whole array of reality shows, raunchy sitcoms and graphic dramas on television today. It was normal in my childhood for families to be comprised of a man, his wife, and their children till death do them part. Divorce obviously was present but quite uncommon. In the early 60s most people would have thought of America as a Christian nation or at the very least more comfortable with buying into the Christian worldview. Whether it actually was or not isn't the point—everyone thought it was. Sexual intimacy outside of marriage was shameful. Living together before marriage was shocking and almost unheard of, and homosexuality was very deep

in the closet. Obviously this has all changed and America in 2017 is almost nothing like America in the 50s and 60s.

What has changed since the early 1950s? Obviously, the answer is the culture and everything about it. Back in the 50s Christian institutions like us were more at the center of things than they are today; but today we find ourselves on the outside looking in. Many institutions like us had long held the notion that our cultural habits were biblical mandates. Just last semester I got a 50-minute earful from a 1960s graduate about that very thing. We cannot afford to do that anymore. We must make sure we only take firm stands on what is biblical, not what is cultural. This is so foreign to the way I was raised and the church environment in which I worshiped.

2 Timothy 4. 3-4: **“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”**

Paul told Timothy to preach the Word faithfully and warned him of a time coming when people would not endure sound teaching. Instead they will gather to themselves teachers who will tell them what they want to hear and who will suit their own passions. They will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Today our culture does not like what you and I stand for. If we preach that Jesus is **our** way to God, and that each person needs to find **their** own way, there is no problem. If we stand with the Word of God and claim there is no other name under heaven given by which people can be saved, we will infuriate all the religions that say ALL paths lead to God. If we say that marriage is between one man and one woman for life, we are labeled as narrow, hateful, intolerant, and homophobic. If we hold to biblical teachings on gender roles, our culture today says we are oppressive.

Today if we refuse to compromise on these beliefs we will continue to stand on the outside of cultural acceptability. If we compromise on these truths, we may gain man’s favor but we certainly lose the gospel of salvation and the power of God. We have to increasingly learn to live as a counter-culture minority instead of as a cultural majority.

There are people in my generation and older who are having a hard time with this right now. Just last year we had a trustee committee meeting and after I gave a college report stating that in last year’s budget 25% of our tuition revenue was derived from the adult learner compared to 42% this current budget year, a very, very sincere meaning gentleman who has been with LBC for a lifetime said in essence he would like to see Lancaster Bible College return to the era of the 50s when all our students who were enrolled at LBC were neatly tucked into our dormitories. His statement sucked the air out of the room. Many in this generation have grown up in a world in which Christianity in one form or another dominated culture. Certainly this gentleman had. In reality, today it does not.

Many are having trouble adjusting from being the cultural majority to accepting that we are now a minority. When you are the majority you can do different things and act differently than when you are a minority. We the new Christian minority, in a post-Christian America must learn to live counter-culturally. We in essence reject the dominant culture and march to the beat of a

different drummer, one that comes from above. We must learn to live as a counter-cultural movement standing by gospel truth and biblical essentials regardless of how unpopular we are in our culture. We are now a counter-cultural minority and we must learn to lead our academic endeavors under this new reality.

You, like I, have read all the discussions on whether or not our focus should be on reclaiming our culture. Is influencing and dominating our culture our mission, or is teaching the Scripture, instilling a biblical worldview and living godly lives as a testimony to a dark world our mission? Whichever view you hold, we must learn to live godly lives in the face of adversity, and lead our faculties accordingly.

We gather here today as academic officers in colleges of biblical higher education to acknowledge our dependence on the strength of Christ to sustain us. We live in the middle of the academic system. As academic leaders of your schools, you guide the daily and long-term operations of multiple departments, tend to many faculty, and oversee numerous academic programs. You manage staff facilities, and budgets. Many of those duties result in grueling schedule demands. You also handle personnel issues including advocating to the provost and president in a productive and healthy way. The list of problems confronting any academic officer can seem endless. Your role is pastoral and it is that of academic officer and spiritual officer in charge of your faculty.

We must not confuse the cause of Christ with the academic system or institution. The cause of Christ will triumph regardless of us. Because God is sovereign, the accomplishing of God's will and purpose is not dependent on our plans, our programs, or our methods. We dare not judge our work quantitatively because our task is to be faithful in declaring the Truth, living the Truth, teaching the Truth, teaching a biblical worldview to a new generation of students.

1 Corinthians 4.1: "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."

As materialism and liberalism have crept in, many once doctrinally sound churches and organizations and schools and colleges and universities have lost their first love. Today as stewards of the intellectual capital at our respective colleges, may I suggest that we must examine ourselves to ensure we have a heart for God, that we are passionate about seeking God. Without this heart for God, without this passion, I believe we will continue to see further decline. Perhaps this academic year you and I can do our part to stem the decline.

What can you and I do? We are just a little stone in a big pond and yet we are here today, this year, under the umbrella of biblical higher education. May I be very direct in my answer to the question? We are the stewards of our mission. I believe we must re-double our efforts to produce a pedagogy grounded in biblical worldview instruction.

We must begin this year with a renewed vision to produce a fresh approach to authentic biblical higher education. Each one of us here today must take seriously our commitment to a biblical worldview approach for each discipline being taught on our watch.

Now I must confess that for all my years in Christian education, I have been quick to use the words “Christ-centered curriculum,” “biblical worldview instruction,” and “biblical integration.” Although I started out my career quite naively using the word “integration,” I have come to the conclusion, with the help of many mentors and authors, that integration never was the legitimate starting point for a godly pedagogy. Knowledge of God’s Word and a carefully reasoned application of that knowledge to learning and to life must be our point of beginning.

You and I must possess both a transformed vision and a renewed mind in order to see the world through the lens of biblical truth. This is what we mean by attaining a biblical worldview and teaching from that vantage point.

T.S. Eliot, one of the 20th century’s major poets, once wrote, “We must think in Christian categories.” As I have wrestled with that thought, I believe this means developing the reflex in our mind that relates every one of life’s experiences to its biblical relationship or consequences. I think that is what Paul called “taking captive every thought” and weighing it on the scales of God’s approval. Thinking in Christian categories means thinking about the world with the mind of Christ, seeing the world from a biblical point of view, considering all these implications from the vantage point of creation, the fall, redemption, and restoration.

Merely thinking in response to biblical principles is not enough. As academic officers we must also be intentional in our curriculum and in our lesson planning to help our students in our classrooms to learn to think in Christian categories and therefore find the development of being a person with a biblical worldview.

The French mystic, political activist and philosopher Simone Weil wrote a remarkable essay called, “Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God.” In fact, I spoke on that essay many, many years ago in one of my early chapels. She wrote that academic study is never for its own sake. Instead, hard study of any subject must have as its highest aim what she calls, “developing the concentration needed in periods of earnest prayer.” Interesting thought...

This is how she illustrates her point: “The solution of a geometry problem does not in itself constitute a precious gift. But the same law applies to it because it is the image of something precious. Being a little fragment of particular truth, it is a pure image of the unique, eternal, and living truth, which once in a human voice declared, ‘I am the Truth.’” Then she concludes with this stunning thought: “Every school exercise thought of in this way is like a sacrament.” This is what we instill in our faculty.

Can there be any more practical explanation of what a biblical higher education philosophy means when we talk about the integration of faith and learning? “Every school exercise...a sacrament.”

So you see this model for integration begins with a high biblical worldview of work, vocation, and calling. Every conversation with a student, every lesson plan, every class, every assignment becomes a tangible evidence of God’s gift to human beings of a reasoned mind with which to

seek wisdom, acquire knowledge, and ask for understanding. By making a biblical worldview pedagogy our own, we help our students in the development of their own biblical worldview.

In an article entitled “Learning from Young Atheists: What Turned Them Off to Christianity,” Eric Metaxis writes that while there have been many studies on why our children lose their faith when we send them off to college, Larry Taunton of the Fixed Point Foundation, who Metaxis quotes in his article, set out to find why so many young Christians lose their faith in college.

Taunton did this by asking the question: “Tell me about your journey to unbelief?” In essence, they answered that they grew up in the church where a generation of youth pastors knew their Bible, but their loss of faith coincided with their church’s attempt to ingratiate itself to them instead of to challenge them. They had attended church, but the mission and message of their churches was vague. They were given superficial answers to life’s difficult questions. The pastors they respected the most were those who took the Bible seriously, not those who sought to entertain them or to be their buddy. As Taunton found, young people respect people with conviction, provided they know what they’re talking about. One young person told Taunton “Christianity is something that if you really believed it, it would change your life and you would want to change the lives of others. I haven’t seen too much of that.”

That puts us on center stage. We have the opportunity to live our lives in such a way that we show our students that we actually believe what we say we believe and what we teach, and that our lives actually reflect it!

More than wishful thinking or a pitch to prospective students and donors, our mission statement is the COMPASS that guides our decisions, safeguards us from giving in to cultural pressures, and keeps us on course. Each one of us must look at our mission often with our faculty and work hard at mission clarity because we have seen the results in other institutions of higher education that have drifted from their original course.

We are at one of the most crucial turning points in human history. The five generations now living have witnessed a complete explosion of information, the collapse of distance (globalization), and the rising and falling of countries and alliances. Cultures and societies have been radically transformed and expansive wealth has brought great material comfort even as the most basic structures of society are undermined. Families are fractured, lawlessness abounds, violence invades our communities, and media brings a constant stream of chaos into our lives. Truth has become relative in a society that believes our most basic problems are rooted in a lack of self-esteem. Lacking objective truths and shared beliefs, our culture is crumbling under a mentality that exalts individual and group rights above all else.

As the 1970s hit says, “...just a ball of confusion—that’s what the world is today!” Only God’s authoritative Word offers an accurate perspective on who we are, where we come from, why we exist, what went wrong, the source of evil and suffering, and how the world can be set right again. It is our true north, “Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.”

Lead your faculties to stay fixed on our true north, which is fixed and reliable, the Word of God.

Practical Discussion Items:

1. Pastoral role, not adversarial role.
2. Lead each faculty member to reflect the stages of life they are in.
3. Chief servant.
4. Philosophy of chapel.
5. Never miss an opportunity to pray with a faculty member.
6. Stay away from the “gotcha!” mentality.
7. Thank, thank, thank, and thank again.
8. Conduct individual conversations with each faculty member each year about their teaching load.

It has become somewhat of a tradition for me to conclude my address to our faculty in the eloquently expressed prayer by William Barclay. By His grace, may the Lord for whom we exist to make known, grant this prayer’s fulfillment.

Grant, O God, that no false teaching may ever have any power to deceive us or to seduce us from the truth. Grant, O God, that we may never listen to any teaching which would encourage us to think sin less serious, vice more attractive, or virtue less important; grant, O God, that we may never listen to any teaching which would dethrone Jesus Christ from the topmost place; grant, O God, that we may never listen to any teaching which for its own purposes perverts the truth.

O God, our Father, establish us immovably in the truth. Give us minds which can see at once the difference between the true and the false; make us able to test everything, and to hold fast to that which is good; give us such a love of truth, that no false thing may ever be able to lure us from it. So grant that all our lives we may know, and love, and live the truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

O God, we thank you for all those in whose words and in whose writings your truth has come to us. For the historians, the psalmists and the prophets, who wrote the Old Testament; for those who wrote the Gospels and the Letters of the New Testament; for all those who in every generation have taught and explained and expounded and preached the word of scripture; we thank you, O God.