Global Shift Spawns Opportunities

Rick Hove, Faculty Commons Executive Director

In an article in The Washington Post, Wes Granberg-Michaelson details the global shift of Christianity away from North America and Europe. A century ago 80% of Christians lived on these two continents, but now just 40%. “Today, the Christian community in Latin America and Africa, alone, accounts for 1 billion people.”

And while it is difficult to assess, he estimates that “more Christian believers are found worshipping in China on any given Sunday than in the United States.” Wow.

Many scholars have documented this historic shift. God is powerfully at work around the world, particularly in Asia and the Global South—opening up new gospel opportunities in universities worldwide.

Professors have an extraordinary position of influence to lead the way for God’s work in the world during this global shift. Faculty Commons’ new book, A Grander Story, is written for this very purpose, to invite Christian professors to invest their God-given talents to play a critical role in God’s work.

We are so encouraged to hear stories like these from around the world:

Newcastle, Australia: “Yes we are definitely being used by God, and to know that there are other believers—Christian professors—who are seeing the Elijah complex cured! It is a huge encouragement to us to know that we are not alone—that God has heard and answered our prayers.”

East Tennessee State University (ETSU): “I am interested in starting Faculty Commons here in Nigeria. I have identified some professors and shall be starting up together … I had a meeting with two other professors to share the vision of FC with them and they plan to start a Christian faculty group. We will get the book to five universities, in different states.”

We know copies of A Grander Story are circulating throughout Japan, “Central Asia” (another secure location), Poland, Italy, the UK and likely in additional countries as well.

None of this should surprise us. At the conclusion of Matthew’s gospel Jesus informs us: “All authority has been given to me” (Mt 28:18). He is the ruler of heaven and earth. He has purposed to gather a great multitude from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and language groups to gather around the throne to praise Him forever (Rev 7:9). God is moving powerfully across the world.

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When John Walkup was a homesick freshman at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, he longed for a spiritual mentor. A new Christian, he was a continent away from his family and friends in Seattle. Figuring out how to live the Christian life in a competitive and secular environment was a difficult task. “I hoped that at least one of my professors would identify himself as a believer,” he says. “None ever did.”

Five years later, John entered graduate school at Stanford. There he found the spiritual mentors he needed. A few of his professors identified themselves as followers of Christ; one even hosted a weekly Bible study for students. “Their examples played a major role in my decision to embark upon an academic career,” John explains.

During his 27-year-long career as a professor at Dartmouth and later at Texas Tech University, John was determined to be for his own students the mentor he had longed for. He began each semester by identifying himself as a Christian in each of his classes. And he looked for Christian students to whom he could pass on what he had learned from his Christian professors at Stanford. Of these students was Bob Marks, now a professor of electrical and computer engineering at Baylor University.

Like John at Dartmouth, Bob was a new Christian when he arrived at Texas Tech to earn his PhD under John’s advisiorship. “John served as an ideal mentor spiritually, intellectually, and by example,” Bob says. “As with many others of his students, the impact on me was deep and long-lasting.”

One of the most important things Bob learned from John was how to share Christ’s love with students without abusing the vertical authority of the professor-student relationship. “Inappropriately approached, there can potentially be awkwardness between Christian professors and their students,” Bob explains.

But John, he says, “always listened more than he talked.” This often led to the student opening this door for spiritual conversations. “As he watched John, Bob was taking mental notes: “This, I remember thinking, is the way professors should interact with students.”

Bob also internalized John’s teaching that worldly accomplishments pale in comparison to the investments he would make as Christ’s ambassador on his campus. “John and I have co-authored 19 publications together, Bob notes. “They sit somewhere on servers or dusty library shelves and are rarely read any more, if at all.”

The optics research program that John had built at Texas Tech met a similar fate. Two years after John took an early retirement to join the staff of Faculty Commons, the program was terminated and his lab was dismantled.

But the investments John and Bob have made in the spiritual lives of their students and colleagues contribute to spiritual fruit. In 1999, John moved back to the San Francisco Bay area, where he and his wife mentor faculty and graduate students at Stanford, University of California Berkeley, and San Jose State. John tells these professors: “My lasting legacy is not the papers I published or the NSF, DOD, or NASA grants and contracts I received. It is the impact I have had for Jesus Christ on the lives of my students and colleagues.”

Dr. Bob Marks agrees whole-heartedly. “John’s legacy illustrates the lasting impact professors can have in Christ’s kingdom. In the end, it’s the only thing that lasts. John taught me that.”

Join with us in Prayer

“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.” – Matthew 9:37-38

1. Pray for the millions of college freshmen arriving on campus soon—that they will come to know Jesus in college and serve him for a lifetime.
2. Pray that Christian professors will wisely and winsomely identify as Christ-followers as they introduce themselves to students at the start of this new school year.
3. Pray that God will continue to spread our book, A Greater Story, to professors all over the world.
4. Pray that recent discussions regarding freedom of speech (that have even reached the US House of Representatives) will result in Christian professors being able to appropriately speak from a Christian perspective at universities across the country (Colossians 4:5).

Investing in the Mission

Your financial investment will help us build movements of professors and students to take the hope of Jesus Christ to the world. Will you prayerfully consider partnering with us in this vital endeavor? All contributions to Faculty Commons are income tax deductible.

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