

**Installation Address**  
***Doing Our Best to be a Child-Like College and Seminary***  
***(II Timothy 2:15; Mathew. 18:1-4)***

**By**  
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One day Jesus visited the campus of Lincoln Christian College and Seminary. And the newly installed academic deans, along with their colleagues-- the staff, administration, faculty, students, trustees, and even their family members--gathered around him. And one of them asked Jesus: "Who is the greatest seminary and college in the Kingdom of heaven?"

Jesus walked into their midst and took a child by the hand and he had the child stand in front of him and Jesus said: "Trust me and obey me when I say this. Unless you humble yourself and become like this child, you will never get a look at what the kingdom is really like. This child is ultimately powerless and utterly dependent upon the parents. The child is not preoccupied with power or status or greatness. This child is not fighting the disease of conceit. Therefore, if you want to be the greatest in my Kingdom, become the humblest. In other words, if you want to become the greatest seminary and college in the Kingdom, become a nursery school."

And Jesus left our campus, and his acted out parable provoked a considerable amount of discussion and debate among the disciples in Lincoln, Illinois. They focused on one question: Do we really want to be a nursery school?

It sounds so unprofessional, so child-like, so simple. . . . How will such a designation attract quality students and faculty as well as generous donors? What will other colleges and seminaries think? What if we put in our mission statements that we desire to be child-like educational communities?

How do we expect to gain a hearing in this world? How do we expect to influence this world? Won't this world laugh at such a quest to be child-like?

*This world* . . . Perhaps we need to pause here and reflect on how humility is scorned by this world . . . Humility in a competitive-oriented society has about as much chance of making an impact as does grace in an achievement-oriented culture.

*This world* . . . We live in such a self-centered, self-glorifying culture that maybe we do indeed believe *Time* magazine's declaration that YOU are the "Person of the Year," I am the person of the year.

*This world* . . . A world obsessed with the personal pronouns, "I," "my," "me," "mine" and "you." "Thy will be done" is replaced by "My will be done." A world filled with Youtube.com, narcissistic blogs, and myspace.com.

*This world . . .* A world committed to upward mobility when Jesus seems to be talking about downward mobility . . .

*This world . . .* A world filled even with churches and parachurch organizations who can also be seduced by power, status, and prestige as leaders often begin to adopt the disastrous attitudes that often arise when we speak about mega-churches, senior or lead pastors, or deans, good doctors, or assistant, associate, or full professors, seniors in college, or graduate students, and accredited schools.

But we are not of this world. Our attitudes and agendas are not the same.

Jesus says . . .

It is not human accreditation that truly counts, it is the divine accreditation.

It is not success as defined by a post-Christian pagan society that matters, it is the divine call to faithfulness and humility.

It is not about rising high, it is about dropping to our knees and washing feet as modeled by the Divine Servant, Jesus.

This does not mean we put aside our dreams and core values.

My colleagues have spoken about the core values of servant-leadership and authentic community. Consider with me one more core value.

*We are a confessional school*, not another evangelical school. And even though we want to cooperate with other schools, we must not dig up our roots and throw them onto the rubbish pile, allowing ourselves to be assimilated into the so-called larger evangelical community.

No! We are a confessional school associated with a movement begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> century led by individuals like Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell. They were leaders who had a vision of daring to become the people God wants: a people who would be committed to biblical authority and on the basis of that authority a people who would be committed to being the united community of God who is committed to making more and better disciples of Jesus.

However, as important and treasured as this value is . . .

*We must be a child-like school, approaching our mission with a child-like attitude and spirit so that our service and achievements will be truly God-honoring and not self-promoting.*

Humility must be the explicit core value permeating all others that we have talked about this day.

But danger is present when we as individuals or we as an educational community believe that we are above the lure of striving for power, prestige, and position.

How radical was Jesus' action in Matthew 18! Sometimes we think that a child should be shipped off to children's worship or junior worship. Children can be so distracting. But what does Jesus do? He takes the child and makes the child the center of attention in order to get us adults to focus on the odd, peculiar nature of true kingdom service.

Sometimes it seems that the older we get the more childish we become and not child-like.

Humility is, for us as a college and seminary, to think of ourselves as God thinks of us.

And what does that mean?

Humility is to know ourselves lost, needy, dependent, broken, little, poor, ruined, powerless, vulnerable, unaccredited, and status-less.

Humility says to us: "You have the God-given gifts and God-given opportunities, and you must use them for God's glory."

Humility must cast its shadow before us as we look forward to the years of service, a shadow I sang about as a child:

"Nothing in my hands I bring,  
Simply to the cross I cling."

But what about our dreams?

Humility does not mean that we do not do our best as we carry out our mission, but it is not by our strength or might but the Lord's.

Humility does not mean that we do not plan strategically, but our plans must acknowledge that all we do is done by God's grace and gifting.

Humility does not mean that we do not desire to have good students, staff, and programs, but only One is good, and his name is God.

Humility does not mean we do not become a nationally known college and seminary, but it does remind us that ultimately our goal is to make Jesus known internationally.

This call to humility is part of our heritage. There is an essay written by Alexander Campbell that I think should receive wider attention. At the end of his work on how to do our best as servants of God in handling the Word of truth, Campbell wrote that as we approach Scripture we must remember that:

“There is a distance which is properly called *the speaking distance*, or the *hearing distance*; beyond which the voice reaches not, and the ear hears not. . . . As it respects God, there is an understanding distance. All beyond that distance, cannot understand God; all within it, can easily understand him in all matters of piety and morality. God, himself, is the centre of that circle, and humility is its circumference. . . . Receding from pride, covetousness, and false ambition; from the love of the world . . . the voice of God is distinctly heard and clearly understood. All within this circle are taught by God; all without it are under the influence of the wicked one. ‘God resisteth the proud, but he giveth grace to the humble.’”

Alexander Campbell  
*Christianity Restored* (1835)

As a college and seminary may we step within the understanding distance. As an educational community, may we be within the circle where God is at the center. And the circumference of that circle is humility.

For . . .

Humility prepares us to hear the voice of God in Scripture.

Humility prepares us to respond to the call of God to serve in the world.

And humility prepares us to receive the blessings from God in Jesus as we study and serve.

Like a child, may our college and seminary acknowledge our powerlessness and lack of status . . .

Like a child, may we admit how utterly dependent we are upon God . . .

Like a child, may we avow that all we are and do are a testimony to God’s grace in Jesus.

As humility is a proper response to the salvation that God offers us in Jesus, so humility is a proper response to the service that he has called us to offer to him.

So in the days ahead, let us talk to one another about the truths our college and seminary are built upon, and let us listen thoughtfully.

Let us talk about the necessity of remembering our heritage and remaining appropriately loyal to it, and let us listen respectfully.

Let us talk about our responsibility to carry out our mission and dream our dreams, and let us listen submissively.

But let us not talk about our desire to be a great seminary and college or I shall suspect we do not understand the call of Jesus.

So the question we posed to Jesus should not be: Who is the greatest college and seminary in the Kingdom? But rather: Lord, what kind of seminary and college do you want us to be?

And the answer remains the same. Do your best to be a child-like college and seminary.