

# ***Russian-American Christian University***

## **2005 Commencement Charge**

### **Oleg Shevkun**

Dear 2005 graduates,

The day has come—your last day at RACU. This is a truly joyous event, and our words of congratulation are well in order. Ladies and gentlemen, let me make it quite plain here: folks, you’ve made it! There will be no more quizzes or tests, no more papers or exams. (I hear some of you are saying “Praise the Lord!”). You are about to open a new page in your life. You are no longer students—you’ve become trained professionals, ready to join the work force. So, my sincere congratulations go out to each and every one of you

Since I have the privilege of giving you the commencement charge, let me tell you a couple of things. First, let me tell you how much I rejoice with you over your achievements. Your graduation is, indeed, a major achievement, and it is something to be proud of.

But also, there is something I wish to share that I hope you will remember for years. Here in Russia, when a young college graduate gets his or her first job, the boss will often tell them one sacramental phrase: “Forget everything you’ve learned at school. Things are very different in real life.” Obviously, there is some truth in this remark. In your workplace, you will inevitably learn new things, and in some ways you may have to adapt to the employer’s policies. And yet, there is one thing I wish to impress on you today, on your last day at RACU: “PLEASE KEEP REMEMBERING!”. No matter what happens to you, no matter what your employer or your friends or the society may wish to lead you to believe, no matter where you find yourself—remember the basic values we tried to teach you here at RACU.

Well, let me make it very clear and easy for you. To remember our values, all you have to do is to keep in mind the name of our school: Russian-American Christian University. The words in our school’s name actually stand for these values. With your permission, I will take the liberty to expand on these for a few minutes.

First of all, remember that you’ve graduated from a **Russian-American** school. You are bi-cultural people, meaning that you have embraced the values of two cultures. Our business graduates are competent in both Russian and American accounting (to me, this is double mind-boggling, since I personally cannot fathom either of these). Our social work majors are well-versed in both Russian and American social care systems. Our budding linguists know and love both Tolstoy and Melville, both Hemmingway and Solzhenitsyn. As bicultural people, you know and share the ideas of democracy, and you are willing and capable to promote these ideas in our nation. Speaking of educational systems, you’ve experienced the best from both Russian and American education. In fact, this puts you head and shoulders above most traditional college graduates, either in Russia or in the US.

When someone is well trained and properly equipped for life, in Russian we say that he or she “stands on both his legs”. Now that you are rooted in two cultures, you, in fact, are standing firm on both legs. We did our best to give you this set of values—so please remember it, and please keep standing on both legs through the rest of your life.

Of course, there may be pressures to give it up. In today's world, some people try to lead these two cultures to a head-on collision and make them compete, to prove that one of them is higher and thus should dominate. Others hope that one day the cultures will blend with one another, and thus a new culture will be born in their place. Your background at RACU has taught you to appreciate the depth and the richness of both Russia and the United States. You will be able to stand firm against those who try to exalt one culture above the other. You will also know how to relate to two of the major nations in the world today.

While Russia is extremely rich in its history, its traditions, its literature and other forms of culture, over the last century we have gone through a tremendous tragedy. And it is now that we must re-learn the meaning and application of democratic values, as well as the importance of social morality and the role of personal responsibility. These are some of the top values in the American culture. Yet, as bi-cultural people, you will not be prone to blindly transplanting the values from one culture into another. Here at RACU, you've learned to observe, to think and to act in a culturally responsible way. And I believe this experience will serve you for the rest of your life.

You've graduated from the Russian-American university. Keep up this bi-cultural set of values in your life!

Then, there is more to our school than being Russian-American. It is also a **Christian** school, meaning that our main goal is to exalt the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by worshiping Him through both who we are and what we do. This is our top distinctive, and we are determined to keep it this way.

The Bible tells us to do everything as to the Lord, for His pleasure and His glory. What does this mean for us? Well, a couple of things. Throughout your time here at RACU, we made sure to address three basic areas of your life. We tried to give you knowledge—I am talking of your head, of your mind, of your ability to **know** things. We also tried to teach you skills—that is, to make sure you are not just full of theoretical knowledge, but that you are practically taught to do the things related to your occupation. These are the skills of your hands. However, if we were to confine ourselves merely to training your heads and hands, then we would be like many other schools around the world. Because we are a Christian school, our concern is more than just knowledge or skills. Along with your heads and your hands, we've also been trying to influence your hearts. That is, to play our role in gradually transforming your personality in the image of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The truth is, the spiritual life of our students and graduates is just as important (and possibly even more so) than your academic achievements. We have no wish to produce graduates bursting with knowledge and yet possessing underdeveloped hearts. And now, dear 2005 graduates, since I know most of you fairly well, I am glad to say that our labor has not been in vain. You are people who love the Lord in a very deep way, and who are highly committed to serving Him in your life.

Doing everything for the Lord also means becoming the best professional, the best specialist you may be. This is true for business people, for social workers, for linguists and teachers—in fact, this is true for whatever occupation we may have in life. Admittedly, being the best is not a new idea—many people in the world are striving to that as well. Yet the difference is in the area of motivation. We want to be the best, because it is our heart's desire to serve the Lord and gladly obey His will. Your colleagues may have a hard time understanding this. And even though some may strive for excellence in pursuit of a brilliant career or a bunch of money, I wish to urge you time and again: Do not forget that your alma mater is a Christian school, and remember that this fact tells a lot about who you are and why you do things. (On a lighter note, though: When you do get a career and make a lot of money, please remember to support your school!)

The Christian character of this school will also determine the degree of your involvement in society. Gone is the time when Christians in Russia were viewed as an enemy. Today, we have the privilege (and,

actually, the obligation) to get involved and make an influence. Employers are dreaming of associates with high moral principles. They are eager to hire people for whom the concepts of integrity and responsibility are more than just nice, long words. And while most in the market place still do not quite understand the potential of Christian employees, it is now up to us to educate them and show them that we can make a difference.

You might object by telling me how hard it is to be a Christian in the workplace. Let me give two thoughts in order to answer this objection. Quoting pastor Ronnie Stevens, the founder of Moscow Bible Church, someone whom I consider to be my teacher and friend: “Christian life is not difficult—Christian life is impossible. There was only one person, the Lord Jesus Christ, who could live it out. And there is only one person who can do it again—Jesus Christ living in you and through you.” We pray that Jesus will always be real in your life.

There is something else I wish to add, though. We know it is sometimes hard being a Christian in a secular workplace. And that is exactly the reason why you see this large group of graduates today. We do not want you to be “lone rangers.” Just look around and you’ll see a group of 26 highly educated and sincerely committed young men and women—the class of 2005. I hope that you will always keep in touch with one another, giving each other support and encouragement, remembering one another in your prayers, sharing your joys and sorrows, your triumphs and trials. Just pick up the phone and say: “Hi, Tanya!” or, “How are you doing, Pasha?” As alumni of the Russian-American Christian University, make a special effort to be there for one another as members of our ever-growing family.

And an ever-growing family it is! As you graduate, you enter the ranks of the other RACU alumni who have gone before you. And, Lord willing, there will be more joining our alumni family in 2006!

It is easy to get discouraged if you think of yourself as a “lonely Christian in the professional world.” Take heart—you are not alone! God is always with you; Lord Jesus lives through you; the Holy Spirit fills you and empowers you. And, on top of that, you have your fellow graduates, as well as your teachers and friends—we all are with you as members of one extended family. I charge you today: Do not forget this – whatever happens and wherever the Lord leads you.

Coming back to the name of our school. We are Russian-American (that is, bi-cultural). We are Christian (that is, living our lives because of the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ and for His honor and glory). But we are also a university—that is, a place of higher learning. Let no one ever deceive you, ladies and gentlemen. You all highly educated people. There are many facets to being well educated. For one thing, a well-educated person knows how to think for himself and evaluate various points of view in order to come to his own conclusions. An educated person is also capable of showing the initiative, taking responsibility and making the right decisions. A well-educated person is not led astray by crafty demagogues or skillful persuaders. He or she will not be easily manipulated, but will instead have a strong foundation on which to build his life—both academically and spiritually. He or she is always willing to learn, is never stagnant, and is always open to broadening his or her own horizon. My prayer is that these statements will always describe you, our dear class of 2005.

The time has come to say good-bye. But we at RACU will do our best to be there for you. You are in our hearts and our prayers. In a way, I envy you somewhat. You are standing at the beginning of a great adventure. But whatever the Lord does in you and through you, wherever He sends you, however He may use you—please remember one thing at all times. You are graduates of Russian American Christian University. We love you, and we are truly proud of you! May you all be blessed richly, our dear students, our beloved friends, our class of 2005! And may God bless you!