

Whoring After Her Lovers: The Quest for Power, Control, Exploitative Domination, and The Industry of Accreditation- Or, How Academic Manipulators Have Become the New Magisterium

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In a colorful passage in the book of Jeremiah (2), we read of debauched Judah-

How dare you say, "I am not defiled, I have not run after the Baals?" Look at your behaviour in the Valley, realise what you have done. A wild she-donkey, at home in the desert, snuffing the breeze in desire; who can control her when she is on heat? Males need not trouble to look for her, they will find her in her month.

In much the same way, to borrow the metaphor, do many modern academics whore after the Baals of "accreditation." So perhaps it's time to take on the most sacred cow of all academic life and call into question its legitimacy. In the spirit of full disclosure, my degrees are from "accredited" institutions save the terminal at which juncture I chose to attend a Seminary that was no longer. The school for which I teach is not accredited by any national agency. I have purposefully chosen this route because I long ago came to the conclusion that accreditation was nothing more than a scheme and a scam.

In what has to be one of the most peculiar and bizarre events of academic history, American academics began to chase accreditation as a means of legitimization (or so they said) in the 1960's. Yes, accreditation is that new- a fact that many academics evidently do not know – either through willful ignorance or tragic indifference or simple blinkered ignorance.

The practice of accreditation in the United States began in the early 1960's as a means for post-secondary educational institutions (colleges and universities) to demonstrate to the Federal government a basic level of quality in their institution and programs for the purpose of certifying eligibility to receive Federal funds, which include Stafford loans, grants, and research monies.

Accreditation, and the requirement of accreditation, for elementary and secondary schools is regulated by the States with wide variation in its application.

The six regional accrediting associations, aware of the fiscal opportunity available in elementary and secondary school accreditation, expanded their accrediting field to include a commission for elementary and secondary schools. The United States Department of Education did not extend its recognition of the six regional accrediting associations and commissions to include elementary and secondary schools.¹

This relatively new institution aimed, it was supposed, and still is supposed, to ensure academic integrity, consistency, and excellence. However that isn't necessarily the real aim (which seems instead to be "fiscal opportunity"). Instead "accreditation" has become a huge industry and a huge instrument of control, dictation, and manipulation.

I think we are all aware of the fact that accreditation committees are sometimes comprised of persons who are familiar with those whom they are "investigating" -- which, at the very least, calls their objectivity into question. And at other times the "visiting accrediting team" actually acts in such a way as to protect the administration without any regard for their real purported aims.

In truth, accreditation and accrediting agencies serve as nothing more than a modern and very much self-serving replacement of the Roman Magisterium. Accrediting agencies and schools submitting to the accrediting process are part and parcel of an industry which, rather than pursuing academic excellence, simply serves to enrich its own coffers and the coffers of those institutions which have bought into its systematic hijacking of higher education.²

For instance, if you wish to run a nursing program and be "accredited" by the appropriate "accrediting" authority, payment of the fee is the primary consideration:

Payment of fees to the NLNAC is an obligation for recognition of accreditation status. The Accrediting Commission bills programs for all evaluation processes and an annual accreditation fee. The Accrediting Commission reserves the right to withdraw recognition of accreditation of any program that, after due notice, fails to meet its financial obligations³.

And as a cursory glance at the pdf to which the link points shows, that fee is substantial. And that's merely for one program. Every accrediting agency charges a substantial fee. In some cases, a very substantial fee. Consider, then, how much money accrediting agencies make for their 'services' when all programs of study are subjected to their "investigation." And if you doubt it, go to your administration and ask them the cost of the accreditation process and the annual fees your school is assessed.

But what purpose does accreditation really serve? Does it guarantee academic excellence? Certainly not. How could it? Academic excellence is completely a function of the interaction of the professor and his or her students. Good teachers are good teachers whether or not the institutions for which they work are willing to pay outrageous fees for nothing more than a "Good Housekeeping seal of approval" from a money-making industrial complex. And good students are good students whether or not SACS or anyone else says otherwise. So isn't it surpassingly odd that no one ever says so?

Similarly, bad teachers can, and do, inhabit teaching positions at schools willing to pay large fees to be declared "certified."⁴ And again, it stresses credulity to imagine why anyone is silent on the subject.

So what purpose does accreditation serve? Does it ensure excellent courses and qualified instructors? No. Poorly constructed courses and 'qualified' but utterly inept and incontrovertibly insensible teachers still stand in front of classrooms and lecture on incompetently.

Accreditation is to academic excellence what the local health inspector is to the local restaurant. When the restaurant owner knows the inspector is coming (and they always know because the inspector calls and tells them), he makes sure everything is in order so that it meets the inspector's checklist. And academic institutions do the same. They one and all know when the accreditation team is coming to campus and they make sure that all their ducks are in a row- for the visit. What goes on the rest of the time is anyone's guess.

If accrediting agencies were really and authentically interested in the welfare of the student body in terms of the quality of instruction, they would arrive unannounced and visit whichever

classrooms they thought fit. And their evaluation would be based on observation of a program over a period of time (because any professor can have a bad day and do a bad job when the investigator is present). As it is, however, the entire "visit" is nothing more than a mere formality: a farce really, intended to be nothing more than a show, a charade, which pulls the wool over the eyes of an unthinking public and academic partners whose eyes are on their own profit rather than the well-being of their students or the quality of the education they are receiving.

Furthermore, it is a sign of academic sickness and parochialism to insist that if a student isn't from an "accredited" school, the quality of her scholarship is sub-par. If students aren't evaluated as individuals by potential employers, then the entire educational system is a failure. Or rather, the industry of education is a failure.

What most academic Baal worshipers (that is, those who chase accreditation in the same way that Judah like a beast in heat chased satisfaction) don't know or don't remember is that accreditation is new. Before the 1960's it didn't exist. That means that, according to the defenders of "accreditation or bust," Gerhard von Rad, Rudolf Bultmann, David Friedrich Strauss, Karl Barth, Martin Luther, St. Augustine, and everyone who ever taught Biblical or Theological studies up until the arrival of American Accreditation were unqualified. But of course that's absolute nonsense and no one in his right mind would make such an assertion.

Likewise, only the unbalanced can, with a straight face, assert that only those from accredited institutions can make a contribution to the fields of Biblical and Theological studies.

Mind you, I'm not talking about the dilettantes who have never attended any institution of higher learning whatsoever: I'm talking about those who, by virtue of study, writing, and skillful demonstration of a mastery of the material have proven themselves as competent, if not more so, as anyone from Harvard or Princeton or Yale.

So why has such power been given to so few in so short a period of time? And why don't academics ever ask the question? Are they complicit in the scam called "accreditation"? Why does "accreditation" matter so much to some that if you even raise questions about it, you're in for more demonization than if you had cursed the winner of the Special Olympics 100 yard dash? Why will some of the very people reading this article insist that accreditation is necessary and even essential?

Because, in my estimation, since the Academy has rejected anything like Clerical authority or the authority of the Church or some overarching entity, it has deemed it necessary to create its own Magisterium: an entity which will ensure continued control, coercion, and enrichment. By it, accrediting agencies can enrich themselves, and schools can tout their "approval," enlist students because of the "certification" the "accrediting agency" grants, and thereby enrich their own coffers. They can, in short, coerce and extort. Accreditation is simply coercion and extortion and accrediting agencies are agencies of coercion and extortion; they are mobsters who visit the local shop owner and demand protection money or else...

In other words, defenders of the accreditation industry are defenders of their own power, self-interested prestige, and unencumbered control as well as financial gain.

Yet accreditation needs to be named for what it is: the perfect Ponzi scheme, carried out in the name of academic excellence. And the amazing thing is, the Academy fell for it! And it has for half a century (which is a very small fragment of academic history, isn't it? One is forced to wonder how academics managed quality before 1960...).

At the end of the day, accreditation is about retaining control and exercising power: for a price. If your institution is willing to pay the fee, it can be accredited. It won't make your teachers any better. And it won't improve the quality of your students. And it won't make learning happen. But it will feather the nests of the accrediting agencies. And it will bulk up the bank accounts of schools who claim it as their own. And I suppose, in America, that's what really matters.

Because in America, Higher Education is no longer primarily about education; it's about profit. Profit drives tuition and accreditation drives enrollment. A recent essay from the Harvard Crimson concerning the outrageous cost of a college education observes, regarding the factors of higher tuition that

This arms race incriminates another suspect: accreditation. "Not anyone can be in the college business. You have to be accredited. There are pretty high barriers to entry both from a cost perspective and from a reputational perspective," said Carey. The need for accreditation drives schools to make purchases—and to raise prices. For example, the University of Colorado Law School had to increase its tuition because the American Bar Association demanded that its library include things like electrical outlets for laptops and an instructional courtroom.

The problem, therefore, is that the market for higher education is rigged. Schools block cheaper competitors from entering, and government encourages prices to rise.⁵

The entire system is rigged for the benefit of schools which are concerned for profits and accrediting agencies concerned for the same thing. And they are in cahoots. What other industry, with a straight face, could insist on a 77% increase in fees⁶ and not suffer huge public mockery?

No one loves profit like a Baal worshipping varlet. She, of all people, is willing to do whatever it takes for it. And so, she does and similarly do the accreditation industry and its toadies in the academy. The truly tragic aspect of all this is that it's the students who suffer because they are the ones who will ultimately pay the price for this corrupt system. The irony is they're being told that it's all for their benefit. That's Kierkegaardian irony. Or Total Depravity. But that topic must await another occasion.

Notes:

1 Via <http://www.napcis.org/history.html>, and accessed June 21, 2010.

2 The cost of a college education has for several years now risen much faster than either the cost of living or other segments of the economy. See http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/press/cost06/trends_college_pricing_06.pdf, accessed June 22, 2010.

3 Via <http://www.nlnac.org/fees0910.pdf>, and accessed June 21, 2010.

4 56-year-old math professor Alfred Magrella was arrested on charges of sexual abuse and forcible touching- Via

http://www.collegenews.com/index.php?/article/nassau_community_college_professor_arrested_050320101001/ and accessed Jun 23, 2010.

5 Via <http://www.thecrimson.com/column/stubborn-things/article/2010/3/26/students-government-mccluskey-aid/>, accessed on June 21, 2010.

6 Georgia's 35 colleges and universities in March, 2010 released their plans for how to make nearly \$600 million in cuts for the coming fiscal year. At a joint House-Senate budget hearing Wednesday, Chancellor Erroll Davis said it would take a tuition increase of 77 percent for the colleges to meet a budget cut of \$385 million that was being discussed. Via http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/03/01/georgia-77-percent-tuition_n_480385.html, and accessed on 23 June, 2010.

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