

**Christian Education Awareness Network
(CEANet)**

Presents:

The Snare of College Accreditation

by Dr. James Bartlett (*)

In this article, the secularizing effect of college accreditation is shown to be undesirable for Christians, and a snare worth avoiding. Since the creation of the U.S. Department of Education in 1926, Christian leaders have been sounding the alarm and were even willing to suffer jail sentences to avoid accreditation. Is accreditation somehow better today, or have the watchmen on the wall simply not been heard? The monopolizing effect of accreditation has been keeping Christian educational innovation in a box. Scholarly research has shown conclusively that accreditation doesn't even accomplish its own stated purposes. This article exposes the issues and provides direction for Christians who understand that God has called His people to take dominion; even in college accreditation.

Introduction

Have you ever noticed that the first question people ask about a college is "Are they accredited?" By implication, the questioner is asking if the school is accredited by an organization recognized by the United States Department of Education, or otherwise recognized by state government as a degree-granting institution. They assume that the accreditation process ensures quality in education, and that employers will only hire employees with accredited degrees.

It will be shown here that accreditation does not equate to quality, that employers really are more interested in ability than pedigree, and that accreditation inherently has strings attached which undermines Biblical authority, philosophy, pedagogy, and faith. For these reasons, many pastors in the 1980s were willing to go to jail rather than accept accreditation for their Christian schools.

I. The U.S. Department of Education Tragedy

When the U.S. Department of Education was forming in 1926, J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937), Professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary, and founder of both Westminster Theological Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, spoke before a Joint Committee of the United States Congress and argued against forming the U.S. Department of

Education. A few excerpts from his testimony are presented below, which articulate the philosophical and pedagogical undercurrents which tow Christians under the accreditation tide into uniform (standardized) and secularized education. Standardized education is based on the assumption that people are essentially machines and can be mass educated; similar to the mass production of automobiles in a factory. However, since people are not machines; but created by God to love and serve Him and others, standardized secularized education functions to significantly limit education and enslave people. Dr. Machen testified that,

“The department of education, according to that bill, is to promote uniformity in education. That uniformity in education under central control it seems to me is the worst fate into which any country can fall ... It is perfectly clear of course, that if any such principle of Federal aid in education is established, the individual liberty of the States is gone, because I think we can lay it down as a general rule, with which everyone who has examined the course of education recently will agree, that money given for education, no matter what people say, always has a string tied to it. That appears in gifts of money by private foundations, and it appears far more, of course, when the gift comes from the Federal Government, which has already been encroaching to such an extent upon the powers of the States. But this bill establishing a Federal department of education, which has in it the principle of Federal aid, is a step and a very decisive step in exactly the same direction, and it is for that reason that we think it is to be opposed.... It is to be opposed, we think, because it represents a tendency which is no new thing, but has been in the world for at least 2,300 years, which seems to be opposed to the whole principle of liberty for which our country stands. It is the notion that education is an affair essentially of the State; that the children of the State must be educated for the benefit of the State; that idiosyncrasies should be avoided, and the State should devise that method of education which will best promote the welfare of the State.... That principle was put in classic form in ancient Greece in the Republic of Plato. It was put into operation, with very disastrous results in some of the Greek States. It has been in the world ever since as the chief enemy of human liberty. It appears in the world today.... The same principle, of course, appears in practice in other countries in modern times, at its highest development in Germany, in disastrous form in Soviet Russia. It is the same idea. To that idea our notion has been diametrically opposed, and if you read the history of our race I think you will discover that our notion has been that parents have a right to educate children as they please; that idiosyncrasies should not be avoided; that the State should prevent one group from tyrannizing over another, and that education is essentially not a matter of the State at all.... The principle of this bill, and the principle of all the advocates of it, is that standardization in education is a good thing. I do not think a person can read the literature of advocates of measures of this sort without seeing that that is taken almost without argument as a matter of course, that standardization in education is a good thing. Now, I am perfectly ready to admit that standardization in some spheres is a good thing. It is a good thing in the making of Ford cars; but just because it is a good thing in the making of Ford cars it is a bad thing in the making of human beings, for the reason that a Ford car is a machine and a human being is a person. But a great many educators today

deny the distinction between the two, and that is the gist of the whole matter.... I think it is very interesting to observe how widespread that theory is in the education of the present day.... Sometimes the theory is held consciously. But the theory is much more operative because it is being put into operation by people who have not the slightest notion of what the ultimate source of its introduction into the sphere of education is. In this sphere we find an absolute refutation of the notion that philosophy has no effect upon life. On the contrary, a false philosophy, a false view of what life is, is made operative in the world today in the sphere of education through great hosts of teachers who have not the slightest notion of what the ultimate meaning is of the methods that they are putting into effect all the time ... standardization, it seems to me, destroys the personal character of human life.”¹

II. The Influence of Government

Most schools desire accreditation for the state and federal funding, or posture for marketing. The accepting of government authority and jurisdiction over Christian education via accreditation or certification violates the first commandment (having another god, Exodus 20:3) and the accepting of state or federal money violates the eighth commandment (essentially stealing through taxation to redistribute wealth, Exodus 20:15).

“Thou shalt have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3). *“Thou shalt not steal”* (Exodus 20:15).

As Reverend Sandlin indicates, the result of Christian educational institutions accepting accreditation and government funding is devastating.

“State money corrupts every religious organization that accepts it; and if you get state money, you shouldn’t whimper when you suffer state control. Christian universities are a leading example. If they accept federal funds, and soon become dependent on those funds, they are at the mercy of the Feds and their gory social engineering. If no school is deemed worthy of funds unless it teaches Darwinism as truth, unless it refuses to discriminate against homosexuals in hiring policy, and unless it lives up to politically correct environmentalist standards, federally funded Christian schools are presented with a clear choice: quit taking the Feds’ money, or compromise the Faith. Most opt for the latter.”²

III. Politically Correctness

An accredited college today is the politically correct mode of higher education, which should concern Christians who are discerning the times (Matthew 16:3). Mr. Steven Yates, founder and director of the Worldviews Project, has pointed out that political correctness “is a long-researched, carefully calibrated form of mass mind-control. It substitutes allegedly ‘consensus’ notions, almost all of which are deceptions, distortions and lies, for the perceptions developed over centuries of civilization. This is achieved by means of fear, exploiting a basic psychological phenomenon of society, namely, the fear of social ridicule, or of being different. It exploits ignorance, and its reign is dictatorial. Mass mind-control, by definition, excludes scope for independent thinking, to which it is opposed.”³ The programming of American students and parents to ask a college “Are you accredited?,” without understanding the underlying

philosophies and fearing the implications of being different, is evidence of this mind-control and deception at its politically correct best.

IV. We Were Warned of the Snare Setters

Noah Webster, in his 1828 Dictionary, defined the word “snare” as an instrument for catching animals, and more broadly as anything by which one is entangled and brought into trouble. Just as the Israelites were warned that serving the gods of their enemies would make them sin against God and ensnare them (Exodus 23:33), so Christians are warned that [by implication] a desire for outward credentials will make them sin against God and ensnare them(1 Timothy 6:9).

“They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against Me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee” (Exodus 23:33).

“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition” (1 Timothy 6:9).

Scripture further teaches us that the proud people of this world are reasonable suspects to investigate regarding the presence and placement of a snare (Psalms 140:5). Strong’s Concordance elaborates on just who these proud people are. They are the people having inordinate self-esteem and possessing a high or unreasonable conceit of their own excellence. The proud person conceives that anything excellent or valuable, in which he has a share, or to which he stands related, contributes to his own importance, and this conception exalts his opinion of himself. The reward system of kudos, degrees, credentials, accreditation, and tenure is designed to motivate with this idea.

“The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me. Selah” (Psalms 140:5).

Academia is therefore, likely, the most fertile ground for the development of ungodly pride and snare spin doctors Even the secular skeptics understand that pride in academia prevents intellectuals from discovering the truth, and entrenches views and systems of accreditation which are not subject to honest scrutiny. Secular scholar and researcher Dr. Steven Braude writes the following in his paper titled, “Pride and Prejudice in Academia.”⁴

“I have seen how prominent scholars marshal their considerable intellectual gifts and skills to avoid honest inquiry. I have seen how intelligence can be as much a liability as a virtue in particular, how it sometimes affords little more than complicated ways of making mistakes, entrenching people in views or opinions they are afraid to scrutinize or abandon.

I have seen, in effect, how intelligence often expands, rather than limits, a person’s repertoire of possible errors.

I have also come to realize that members of academic and other professions tend to be strikingly deficient in the virtue that, ideally, characterizes their field. I have seen how scientists are not objective, how philosophers are not wise, how psychologists are not perceptive, how historians lack perspective, not to mention (while I’m at it), how physicians are not healers, attorneys are not committed to justice, psychiatrists are crazy, artists lack taste, etc.”

The system of accreditation created by such academics is a star witness of their intellectual blindness and unwillingness to be objective, discover truth, and the best of education through the free market. Christians know that the fear of man brings a snare (Proverbs 29:25). More and more Christians are noticing how pride in academia, the fear of man, and the snare of accreditation have led the church to accommodate the world.⁵

“The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe”
(Proverbs 29:25).

V. A Lesson from Snaring Rabbits

One type of animal snare is a loop of cable set to capture the animal as it chooses to pass through the snare on its way to some desirable end, or simply continuing along its usual path. Accreditation is much like being caught in such a snare, because people, like the animal, don't think that it can be harmful. People may even think that accreditation ensures quality in education and the most direct path to a well paying career. However, accreditation, like a snare around the neck of a rabbit, places the victim under the power of another. Many Christian colleges have disengaged from their Christian churches, with the acceptance of accreditation always as one step along the worldly path of no return.⁶

VI. From a Dad's Chair

From a parental viewpoint, I see that each child is unique and needs different learning opportunities to fulfill God's calling. Accreditation forces programs to become best fits for the average student and, thereby, fits no one perfectly. The prescribing of curriculum for the student based on faculty ideals can be improved upon by family and church involvement in the higher education process, like homeschooling.

The typical prescribing of a program leaves the student, parent, and Holy Spirit in submission to the program rather than the desired leading of the Holy Spirit and parents. Additionally, educational motivation toward accredited degree credentials differs from the educational motivation toward family business freedom (1 Corinthians 7:21). Where credentials are exalted and the end justifies the means (pragmatism), the family and church often suffer. This happens as the student drops from family strengthening mutual involvement in favor of pursuing corporate careers that launch from degree programs designed by advisory boards consisting of representatives from major corporations and establishment educators.

VII. Quiet, Please. Don't Let Anyone Know that it's a Monopoly...

Accreditation also monopolizes education. The free market is well known for producing the highest quality product at the lowest cost. Accreditation inhibits the free market in education, because state educators fear the free market would put them out of business. When state educators control (monopolize) private post-secondary education (in most states), it is a form of both socialism (economic control) and Marxism (thought control). Gary North points out that the

educational accreditation protects the education cartel.

“A cartel is an association of producers that jointly establishes certain output criteria for membership. The goal of the cartel is for all of its members to obtain net revenues above what would be possible if there were open competition, especially price competition.”⁷

Without state intervention, new businesses attract consumers by offering higher quality at lower prices. To discern a cartel in higher education, one can simply look for laws against the unaccredited use of certain words like “university” and “college.” These regulations are present in most state laws today. Montana is an exception, thanks to Christian legislators and people who enacted the repeal.

VIII. Accreditation Results

Even statistically, accreditation doesn’t do its job, as detailed in the report titled “Can College Accreditation Live Up to Its Promise?” by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA).⁸ Accreditation is rarely discussed today, but many professors, trustees, and administrators have noticed that the accreditation system does more to raise costs within accredited institutions than to improve or even maintain educational quality. These observations led the American Council of Trustees and Alumni to fund the study which concluded with a 54 page report. The report summarizes,

“...Accreditation has not served to ensure quality, has not protected the curriculum from serious degradation, and gives students, parents, and public decision-makers almost no useful information about institutions of higher education. Accreditation has, however, imposed significant monetary and non-monetary costs. We call for changes in policy at the federal, state, and institutional levels.”

Most homeschool families understand that state teacher certification is not necessary for high quality elementary and high school learning. In a parallel manner, the idea that accreditation is needed for high quality college education is also a myth. The accreditation myth has also been observed in theological education.

Dr. Gary Greig, Educational Adviser of the Apostolic Council for Educational Accountability (ACEA) reviewed the history of accreditation in the context of seminary education. He related how the 16th century Reformation was born in an academic setting with one its first fruits as curricula revision which increased the emphasis on Greek and Hebrew in the curriculum. The goal of Puritan theological education was essentially to produce a learned clergy. As time passed, the scholastic, academic framework that God used to bring revival became a bottleneck that choked the life of God from seminaries and seminarians. “The Seminary leaders became enamored with scholarship rather than practical ministry.” The narrow focus on scholasticism in seminary education left little room for the Holy Spirit to move or guide the learning process.

“From the very beginning at Harvard there was explicit rejection of the Holy Spirit’s power and guidance as something foreign to the structure of theological education and the related authority of Puritan clergy. When the Great Awakening revivalist, George Whitefield, criticized Harvard and Yale for their spiritual decline in 1740, the leaders of Harvard and Yale criticized Whitefield and rejected Whitefield’s position that the Holy Spirit could directly

guide and empower God's people without the mediation of theologically trained clergy."

Dr. Greig explains the four consequences to the academic focus of seminaries as:

(1) The separation of head and heart. (2) The separation of theological education from church life and ministry. (3) How the seminary came to be viewed as a poor investment for ministry preparation. (4) That entrenched traditionalism led to seminaries becoming structurally irreformable.

"The scholastic bottleneck and the structural irreformability of seminary programs, curricula, and faculty are reinforced by theological accreditation, which assumes all the values of traditional theological education...More problematic for the Church, seminaries are accountable to accrediting associations, like the Association of Theological Schools, rather than to the churches for which they are educating leaders...The noose of the traditional scholastic, academic focus was about to be tightened around the neck of every seminary and ministry training college of the early twentieth century that wanted to be recognized by their peers and eventually accredited."

He concludes that God wants to come back into the theological classroom; how much more the multitude of other college classrooms!⁹ The ACEA has developed a "creative alternative to accreditation" for the affiliated seminaries and Bible schools which may serve as a useful model. It is not a new form of accreditation, but "a way to facilitate peer-level evaluation and mutual accountability while maintaining the integrity of their individual callings from God."

IX. Observations from Specific Diversities

During a 17 year career at North Dakota State University, I was trained in and participated in every aspect of accreditation for both engineering and engineering technology programs. I had always thought that there must be a better way to ensure quality. I noticed that the government controlled accreditation visits to universities and programs did not consider the learning of each student, only samplings. The accreditation visitors were comprised of corporate executives and secular educators who saw only the best condition of the university or program, once each six years, which the faculty had scurried to prepare for. I saw how most students passed through accredited universities and programs in the presence of many unnoticed and important deficiencies. My conclusion was that accreditation assures and encourages "minimum standards," the result of which is minimum education and maximized "diversity."

Speaking of diversity, to the common citizen, the global academic agendas driving "diversity" in colleges and universities can seem harmless. The word "diversity," and learning about other cultures, appears innocuous. What could possibly be questionable about eating foods from different cultures and understanding those cultures better? Nothing is suspect in those published activities. However, these are only the facade of the "diversity" agenda within the politically correct movement.

The term "diversity" has been redefined from its traditional meaning and has become a fundamentally new way of thinking about American society. Some trace its roots to Justice Lewis Powell's opinion in the 1978 Bakke case, where the Supreme Court was split on this affirmative action case. Powell chose to affirm the educational value of diversity and thereby

justify reverse discrimination. From there, diversity education metamorphosed into a strategy to first stress that people must be defined by race, and thereby create identifiable groups in society. Secondly, it uses the fiction that diversity of race, gender, and sexual preference are equivalent to diversity of worldview (thoughts). Worldviews can then be written into workplace and campus accreditation policies for government agencies to “optimize.” We call government control of the economy Socialism. This Socialism, when extended into the management or control of thoughts, is called cultural Marxism.

So why not let the government manage our thoughts? State Marxism and his friend humanism teach our children in word and deed all that is anti-Christian: atheism, naturalism, materialism, relativism, Darwinian evolution, behaviorism, socialism, positive law (change society v. protect people), and to abolish the home and church toward the betterment of the new global world order.

Roy Atwood, of New Saint Andrews College, pointed out: “Accreditation is supposed to be a peer system of quality assurance in higher education, yet in the past 20 years it has become a means of imposing secularism and ideological uniformity. Academic quality is less important than social and political conformity to secular ideologues.”¹⁰ Modern “diversity” (mind control) is being implemented through the accreditation process as conveyed in the following example.

“For example, in 1990, the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools deferred accreditation of Baruch College of the City University of New York on the grounds that it has a “paucity of minority representation on the faculty and in administration.” This predominantly Jewish institution had 18 percent minorities on its full-time faculty, but with 70 percent minorities among its student body, the faculty minorities were deemed “insufficient.” Baruch’s president Joe Segall later wrote, “It is hard to decide whether higher education has entered a new era of McCarthyism or a Kafkaesque trial process.” What he found particularly offensive were the accusations of “racism” if the college did not bend to the accrediting team’s capricious racial quota demands. In 1991 the Mid Atlantic accrediting body brought pressure against conservative Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, for its position on forbidding the ordination of women and thus restricting women from positions on its board. It took political pressure from then Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander to delay the accreditation reauthorization of the Mid Atlantic States Association itself for its heavy handed tactics of threatening institutions with a loss of accreditation to impose its particular ideological whims on religious colleges and seminaries. Robert Atwell, president of the American Council on Education, declared “diversity” as the driving engine of academic accreditation.”¹¹

Dr. George Leef, Director of the Pope Center for Higher Education Policy, previous Vice President of the Locke Foundation, and author of “Can College Accreditation Live Up to its Promise?” wrote the following.

We need more educational alternatives in the US. In a nutshell, my contention is that accreditation is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of educational quality and that reliance upon it is misplaced... There were some House hearings in 2002 relating to accreditation. The star witness was former Senator Hawk Brown of CO, who became the president of the Univ. of Northern Colorado after leaving the Senate. He told members that

accreditation was pretty much a costly irrelevance... Representative Petri of WI introduced a bill that would have decoupled accreditation from eligibility to receive federal student aid of funds...

X. Why are we looking at these details?

The need for a genuinely Biblical worldview in higher education is clear because our society is at war with God and its own history. The “walls” (Nehemiah 2:13) are seen to be mostly torn down, letting the enemy of humanism run in and over the church at will. But God will still empower His willing people to take dominion (Psalm 8:6), cast down high places (Ephesians 6:12), occupy (Luke 19:13) and disciple all the nations (Matthew 28:19-20).

Just as Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19), we can expect a few Christians to be led (Romans 8:14) as watchmen and builders in the realm of higher education, building upon the solid foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11).

“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

Throughout the homeschool movement, God has led families to opt out of politically correct higher education. They understand the problems and want their young adults to have an occupationally and intellectually fulfilling Biblical education in the context of their own family, ministries, and businesses.

God’s Word places educational responsibility on the family and does not remove this responsibility when the child goes to college (Deuteronomy 6:7; Ephesians 6:4). The church is to encourage and enable the family to fulfill its Biblical education responsibilities, but the state is only responsible to prevent one group from tyrannizing another (Romans 13:4). Due to Christian neglect in educational leadership over the past few generations, the state has now become an educational tyrant. To return the role of government to its rightful place will require widespread and thorough Christian understanding of the times, with Biblical and Spirit-led responses in every sphere of learning.

XI. The Time is Now, But Where do We Start Taking Christian Dominion?

A place to start reversing the effects of accreditation on higher education is to return the responsibilities of higher education with accreditation back to the family, church, and Christian community. The perceived purposes of accreditation are best served by involving parents and students in genuine “accreditation” or quality assurance and feedback processes. In this way, parents and students see that the program meets professional standards, educators have timely feedback for continuous improvement, employers have student specific evidence of accomplishments, the tax payer is not funding the process, and each program can be individually tailored to the student’s educational and business development interests. A checklist for parental, church, or community accreditation can be easily authored to include the needed skill and knowledge proficiencies along with integrated Biblical perspectives.

To understand that accreditation is really not needed, consider the non-accredited Aero Manufacturing Engineering Technology (AMET) Program at North Dakota State University in 1994. Students graduated and were hired as design engineers at Cessna Aircraft Corporation, Liaison Engineers at Northwest Airlines, and Manufacturing Engineers for Boeing Aircraft Company. Ability was what mattered to the executives responsible for their hiring. Only the Boeing (politically correct) human resources department proved a temporary hurdle to a full engineering salary. The students hired into Boeing as hourly engineers rather than salaried engineers and then worked on the Boeing 777 wing production line doing the identical job as the engineers from accredited programs. Since both were required to work overtime, the unaccredited employee took home a larger salary than the accredited, and later pursued graduate schools which allowed them to jump the junior engineer rank entirely. These students were not Christian thinkers, but demonstrated how the accreditation hurdle was overcome. As Christians called to take dominion of higher education with its attending accreditation, we need to look to God, family, and church for His educational “accreditation,” as we let His will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

The Influence of Accreditation Lingers

Professional credentials are a modern invention which has substituted a controlling secular hierarchy for the genuine credentials of personal character and ability. When a Christian understands how the pursuit of such professional credentials programs their entire life to pursue secular humanism and fractures their family, then the pursuit of an educational alternative is preferred for the sake of true knowledge (Proverbs 1:7).

As students incorporate home study with apprenticeships and entrepreneurships into their educational alternative, then, the necessity of a “degree to open the door,” the urgency to “make money,” and the desire for “the real world” are eliminated, along with the more obvious anti-family stumbling blocks of higher education with its lingering side-effects.

Accreditation as Surrogate Family

Accreditation can also be seen as a surrogate family. Since accreditation has essentially resulted from the lack of involvement of the family and church in education, modern accreditation is only seen as valuable where the family has no idea of what their young adult is going to learn. Just as with welfare programs, accreditation is evidence that the family and church have neglected a God given responsibility and have an exciting opportunity to once again set the public agenda.

I think even Cicero would speak against college accreditation due to its influence from an authority direction.

“For the force of reason in disputation is to be sought after rather than authority, since the authority of the teacher is often a disadvantage to those who are willing to learn; as they refuse to use their own judgment, and rely implicitly on him whom they make choice of for a preceptor” (Cicero, 44 BC).

Paul Otto, History Faculty at George Fox University echoes our conclusion when he writes,

“It seems to me that at some point, Christian colleges, if they are to remain true to the gospel, may have to forgo accreditation in order to offer a genuinely Christian education.”¹¹

In conclusion, it seems to be time for discerning Christians to return the responsibility of higher education to the family—including its “accreditation.”

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