

AN ADDRESS TO THE DELEGATES OF THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE
OF THE COUNCIL OF PRIVATE COLLEGES OF AMERICA AND THE
FLORIDA COUNCIL OF PRIVATE COLLEGES – OPENING SESSION
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Dennis D. Frey, Th.D., President
Master's International School of Divinity

To Dr. & Mrs. Earle Lee, Members of the Board of the CPCA, Dr. & Mrs. Abe Johnson, Members of the Board of the FCPC, Presidents of Member Institutions, Delegates, and Honored Guests, it is my distinct honor to have been invited to address the 2011 Conference on a matter related to the *Focus and the Purpose of the CPCA & the FCPC*.

We are familiar with these words written by the Apostle Paul, *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose”* (Romans 8:28). I am confident that the work of the institutions of our combined Councils represents the efforts of those who love God, and who are called according to His purpose.

A summary, purpose of the CPCA and the FCPC is to promote and protect the tradition of private faith-based higher education. A “purpose” is a *reason*. Therefore, promoting and protecting the tradition of private faith-based higher education is the reason for the existence of The Councils.

Whenever something is done for a reason – on purpose – it is because if it is not done, something dependent upon it will diminish or cease to exist. Private faith-based higher education is at a crossroads, and unless we purpose to do what we ought to do,

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it is very likely that it will diminish and possibly, as we now know it, cease to exist.

While at the moment forces that would diminish it or bring about its extinction lurk mostly in the dimly defined shadows of a rising anti-Christian bias, we ought to be under no delusion that secularized higher education regulatory legislation will be sympathetic to our cause. The fact is, leading voices in American higher education have for decades rejected the belief that the universe is the visible creation of an omnipotent, omniscience First-cause who is also its Sustainer and Saviour.

We would be wise therefore, to consider that in the future, our way of higher education may be in jeopardy sooner rather than later if we fail to recognize the possibility, purpose to prevent it, and work together as a team to do so.

The Preacher observed that "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. - And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart" (Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10, 12).

WHAT THEREFORE, DO WE MEAN BY THE TERM *PRIVATE FAITH-BASED HIGHER EDUCATION*?

Private – meaning that it is not public. That is, not designed, organized, or supported by local, state or federal government. That it should therefore be primarily subject to the sanction of those whom it serves.

Faith-based – meaning Christus Primum (Christ First), and that the entire foundation of true knowledge rests upon the Scripture. *“For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart”* (Hebrews 4:12). It stands eternal in the heavens, and cannot pass away.

It means no compromise on the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible. It means that such an insistence is not some antiquated and outmoded relic of a less enlightened age, but the wise and intelligent embrace of the wisdom of the ages.

It means that the faith-based program of every Council member institution must be rooted in the Word of God; empowered by the Spirit of God; and dedicated to lifting up the Son of God and that without the slightest equivocation!

PROMOTING FAITH-BASED HIGHER EDUCATION

To promote faith-based higher education means to encourage, support, and endorse the work. That is, institutional members of the Council purposefully reaching out to other legitimate faith-based institutions, including also those which have neither certification nor accreditation, and inviting them into the Council family of schools. The Council may be a cord of three strands, but we will be stronger when we are a cord of four strands, five strands, and more. Each member institution has a duty to serve as a scout.

We also promote faith-based higher education by boldly proclaiming our mission and purpose among other Bible-based organizations, including accrediting agencies, missions and

ministry organizations, denominations, para-church and national ministries. The goal of which is to establish a credibility factor that promotes CPCA and FCPC member institutions as trustworthy and reliable providers of faith-based higher education; the hopeful result being that graduates of a Council member institution are accepted on the same level of legitimacy as graduates of institutions which are members of ABHE or TRACS.

THIS BRINGS US TO THE ISSUE OF ACCREDITATION VS CERTIFICATION

How do accreditation and certification differ? Accreditation is essentially a statement of approval. In the United States, if it is to be meaningful, it must come from an independent association having attained its own approval from the United States Department of Education (USDE).

In the U.S., the government (USDE) does not accredit schools. However, the USDE is in the business of approving the associations which do accredit schools (for the purpose of serving as gate keepers for Title IV Funding). One must understand this if he or she is to properly understand accreditation. Title IV Funding is the nearly 80 billion dollar congressionally approved annual money stream that flows from taxpayers to educational institutions that are accredited by an agency approved by USDE.

The reason that USDE approves accrediting agencies is to assure control over the flow of Title IV Funds. The greater part of accreditation requirements is geared toward satisfying the USDE mandated standards that are specifically designed to regulate the huge taxpayer investment in higher education.

Accrediting associations in the U.S. are not required to seek USDE recognition, but without it, the value of such accreditation may be questionable, and schools they accredit are not eligible to receive Title IV Funds. That is why schools promoting accreditation from sources not approved by the USDE are considered "unaccredited."

Certification is also essentially a statement of approval, but significantly different from accreditation in several important ways. Most importantly, certification is not tied to Title IV Funding. Only USDE recognized accreditation qualifies institutions to receive such funding. Certification is not generally recognized as being equivalent to accreditation because certification criteria are not geared toward satisfying the requirements for Title IV Funding. Therefore, certifying agencies are not as well known, and their value not as readily appreciated.

Legitimate certification is similar to legitimate accreditation in that it also involves voluntary peer review through private agencies accountable to their constituents, but not to the federal government since Title IV Funding is not involved. Much of the misunderstanding that arises between the two is due to the lack of consumer awareness and the generally held, though false belief, that accreditation is the *only* standard for academic legitimacy.

Furthermore, certification is a term more often associated with professions, products, and processes. For example, there are certified professionals in banking, insurance, medicine, and in many other areas. Of course, the term "accredited" is also used in many of these situations. For example, the Divinity School where I serve as president is an *accredited member* of the Better Business Bureau. This is because the two terms often serve as synonyms. However, when it comes to higher education, accreditation is tied to Title IV Funding and certification is not.

Certification remains a largely untapped vehicle for academic legitimacy, especially for faith-based educational institutions which, in my judgment, will wisely shun the Siren call to come ashore upon the land of Money Tree; a tree not unlike the one forbidden in Eden.

WE NOW MOVE TO THE MURKY AND THORNY ISSUE OF ACCREDITED VS UNACCREDITED SCHOOLS

It is a plain fact that in America, the public has an obsession with accreditation, including the majority of those in Christian higher education. So much so, that speaking in favor of an institution being certified rather than being accredited is a form of heresy demanding of an intellectual inquisition. But at the risk of being banished from the realm, let us consider the following – which is not intended to speak against accreditation or to ignore its value.

Until very recently, degrees earned at high quality unaccredited Christian institutions were undervalued, usually for two reasons. First, the purpose of accreditation in general has been misrepresented, and largely misunderstood. Second, the existence of cheap and easy degree mills hiding behind a Christian façade created an atmosphere of misapprehension.

However, due to four primary influences, this misunderstanding is being challenged.

First, the extraordinarily high cost of tuition at accredited schools favors younger persons who can combine scholarships, and parental assistance, along with student loans as a way to pay for education. On the other hand, older adults dependent upon their own resources (especially those serving in Christian ministry), are often priced out of the market.

Second, being priced out of the market does not mean that older adults are ready to give up on continuing their education. On the contrary, increasing numbers are turning to the Internet as a way to search for alternatives. In doing so, they are discovering that technology has widened the way to higher education, and that new institutions have entered the field. The best of these are offering degree programs academically comparable to their accredited counterparts, yet with significantly lower tuition rates combined with payment plans that make it possible to enroll without needing financial assistance. This also makes it possible to graduate free of educational debt.

Third, the Internet makes it easy to compare schools. Not having to wait days for a catalog to arrive in the mail, allows prospective students to quickly review degree requirements and tuition. This enables them to identify high quality unaccredited schools, while at the same time spotting undesirable cheats.

Fourth, consumers of higher education are becoming better informed as to the value and purpose of accreditation. While accreditation remains a primary indicator of academic legitimacy, it is not the only criterion by which to judge the value of an institution. In the case of Christian higher education, increasing emphasis is being placed on the theological standards of the school. Individuals serving in Christian ministry in particular are becoming aware that the opportunity to earn a theologically sound degree from a high quality unaccredited institution can carry significant rewards.

Considering potential advantages of earning a ministry degree from a high quality unaccredited school, what should prospective students look for?

A High Quality Unaccredited Institution Will Have:

- A track record of institutional competency.
- A well-credentialed staff and faculty.
- An actual facility adequate for the administration of the institution, along with an opportunity for prospective students to visit in person before enrolling.
- Only those programs for which the school has appropriately credentialed faculty.
- Essentially the same degree program requirements as accredited schools.
- Tuition based upon a per-credit-hour rate, and a refund policy similar to accredited schools.
- A method by which church boards, mission's agencies, denominational leaders, and employers can be assured of the legitimacy and academic rigor of the institution.
- Certification (such as can be provided by the CPCA), partnerships, and agreements with other institutions which serve to demonstrate institutional acceptance and competency (such as can be provided by the fraternal bond within the CPCA and the FCPC).

If the above criteria are met, then the prospective student may have confidence that the unaccredited institution is worthy of further consideration.

A Degree from a High Quality Unaccredited (and hopefully CPCA certified) Institution May be Ideal for Those:

Already serving in Christian ministry who desire to up-grade or improve their education.

Desiring to enter Christian ministry, and serve through an independent local church or denomination that does not require a degree from a specific institution.

Serving through a para-church ministry.

Serving through a personal independent ministry.

Serving in a lay ministry capacity, and who wish to be better educated.

Desiring to use previously earned credits to complete an unfinished ministry degree.

Who simply desire to be better educated in some area of Theological study.

Caveat – The above sanction does not apply to cheap and easy unaccredited schemes. Obtaining a degree from such a so-called school, will eventually prove to be a disappointment. High quality institutions are well aware of the short-cutters. That's why both accredited and high quality unaccredited schools will only recognize credits and degrees from unaccredited schools that follow the same general academic guidelines recognized by all trustworthy institutions, such as those required by the CPCA.

However, it must be recognized that the practice of accepting or rejecting credits and degrees is not standardized, but is the prerogative of each institution.

Encouragement – Practically speaking, considering the state of the world economy, and the potential value of higher education, earning a Christian ministry degree from a high quality unaccredited institution may be a first-rate winner. If it is the purpose of the student to learn, and to therefore be better equipped to serve with greater effectiveness, then earning a certificate or degree from one of the top-echelon unaccredited but CPCA certified Christian institutions could be a wise investment of time and money.

PROTECTING FAITH-BASED HIGHER EDUCATION

To protect means to defend against. Primarily there are two forces against which we must protect faith-based higher education. The first is within us, and the second is without us.

Within us – we must protect faith-based higher education from those who would misuse it for the purpose of filthy lucre: the cheats, the charlatans, and the purveyors of cheap and easy credentials, especially those used in Christian ministry. We all know who they are, and they are a threat to all of us. They go out from us, but they are not of us.

If we fail to protect ourselves from them, there is the very real possibility that secular forces will bind the tares and the wheat together, and thereafter burn the whole pile.

Every Council member institution has a vested interest in inviting into our membership worthy others, while at the same time refusing to accept, acknowledge and cooperate with those who bring shame upon the very ministries that we have all struggled so long to preserve.

Without us – we must protect faith-based higher education from those who would demand that in order for us to be legitimate, we be regulated by the same powers that regulate public and secular higher education. We must protect against cease and desist orders, oppressive oversight, insistence on compliance with Godless ideology that we find obnoxious, or any other repression of the right of the church to direct its own affairs.

RECOMMENDATION

The opportunity and the need for the next level of development for the CPCA and the FCPC have never been greater. There has never been a more critical time to promote and protect private faith-based higher education in America, and there has never been a time when the window of opportunity to do so has been so small.

The task will not be an easy one. We are all working on already strained budgets of time and money. Most, if not all of us, are short on staff, short on time, and even shorter on income. The national economy has been slowing grinding most of us down to the bare minimum of our remaining resources. In fact, the task before us has never been more difficult, and if we were to focus too hard on it, the purpose of our being would become obscured, we would become discouraged...even looking for a way out.

Rather, let us focus on the purpose, and take to heart the words of St. Paul, *“Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith”* (Galatians 6:6-10 KJV).

I can, in these days of Biblical compromise and doctrinal corruption within the once hallowed halls of Christian higher education, think of no better way to do good unto them who are of the household of faith, than to promote and protect private faith-based higher education that is rooted in the Word of God; empowered by the Spirit of God; and dedicated to lifting up the Son of God, and that without compromise or the slightest equivocation!

Let us therefore “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14 KJV).

Thank you for listening, and may God bless you all.