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"Alpha and Omega Founder, James White, Purchases a Bogus Doctorate
from a Non-Accredited Diploma Mill"

BY
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In the Introduction to my book, [The Ecclesiastical Text: Text Criticism, Biblical Authority and the Popular Mind](#), I refer to a seminal work titled: [The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students](#). Here I make the point that it is the lack of education on the part of most "Christians" in the English speaking world that has led to the disuse of the King James Version of Scripture, not its supposed difficulty to read. Other titles have continued to arrive in a steady stream highlighting this steady declension of educational standards: Hanson, Heath and Thornton, [Bonfire of the Humanities: Rescuing the Classics in an Impoverished Age](#) (Isis Books, 2001), reveals how the rush to gain qualifications for the business world, etc. has led to the loss of interest in world-view subjects offered by the humanities. In his words,

[The problems with classics have a wider context: the utilitarian assault on liberal education in America that has been going on for nearly the entire twentieth century. The idea that a university education should serve some immediately practical end-whether training technicians for government and industry or transforming consciousness to promote various social causes-is dangerous for the academy \(p. 299\).](#)

The latter situation can be seen in the many "dumbing down" books on the market just now, beginning with the wonderful title: Sykes, [Dumbing Down Our Kids: Why American Children Feel Good About themselves But Can't Read, Write, or Add](#) (St. Martin's Griffin, 1995), but followed by, Gatto, [Dumbing Us down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling](#) (1991); Dawn, [Reaching](#)

[Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for This Urgent Time](#) (1995); Thornton, [Dumbing Down: Essays on the Strip-Mining of American Culture](#) (1996); [Dumbing Us Down](#) (Pending publication, 2002).

These latter timely jeremiads on the state of education-and religious practice--in the United States should send shudders of fear and shame up and down the spine of anyone who invested the time, money, and effort to earn higher professional and academic degrees in the past twenty years or so. This is because, just as Enron stock is now nearly worthless after attaining the heights of the seventh largest corporate entity in the country and in so doing has diminished the worth of our economy overall, just so may your degrees soon be looked upon. This is particularly so in the American religious sector where private, non-accredited seminaries and non-residency diploma mills now abound. Do note the extraordinarily alarming book by David F. Noble, [Digital Diploma Mills: The Automation of Higher Education](#) (Monthly Review Press, 2001). Noble-who in this case lives up to his name-has been fired from MIT and the Smithsonian Institute for being perceived as anti-technology because he still believes real education takes place in a lived-in community where vital human exchange takes place. In his startling words:

[Like research, the instructional activity of the academy \[has\] now come to be viewed by academic administrators and their corporate partners as a "profit center." \[This book\] describes in detail this extension of academic commerce from research into instruction, the heart and soul of academia \(p. x\).](#)

Noble here address what he sees as the wave of the future-Internet universities-and goes into some detail in explaining what this will mean for the quality of education in the future.

Within this climate of recognized "distance learning," "degreed authors" can now claim expertise in a given area after having been given a "doctorate" from a non-accredited seminary, or diploma mill, and the unsuspecting public are then led about by the noise and taught any number of preposterous notions on the basis of "Dr. so and so's" writings. Just this week I received the following interesting piece of Spam in my in-coming e-mail account alerting me to a "University Diploma Program," which promised I could

[Obtain a prosperous future, money, earning power, and the admiration of all. Diplomas from prestigious non-accredited universities based on your present knowledge and life experience. No required tests, classes, books, or interviews. Bachelors, masters, MBA, and doctorate \(PhD\) diplomas available in the field of your choice. No one is turned down. Confidentiality assured. CALL NOW to receive your diploma within days!!! 1 - 212 - 898 - 0346 OR 1 - 312 - 803 - 1921](#)

Call us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including Sundays and holidays.

This has become a common source of degrees in the fundamentalist world for years, but now also finds many examples from within Evangelical, Reformed, or Calvinistic ranks as well. One such institution is the Columbia Evangelical Seminary. I raise this issue just now because for a few years an exchange I had on a discussion list with James White has been posted on his website in a highly edited and slanted fashion (though I never gave him permission to post my exchanges there). Within this exchange it will be seen that I detected very early on that White was something of a crowd entertainer, a self-proclaimed public “debater” of the cults. In our exchange it became quickly evident to me and others that he was well out of his range when addressing New Testament text criticism and after tiring of his “debate tactics” I curtly informed him that he was a “hack.” I took a considerable beating for my forthrightness, but at the time I felt I was doing the participants on the list a favor by exposing his antics. The opposite was true. I now became the object of abuse, just as in the Nixon Kennedy debates: Kennedy was seen to be the hero by the TV crowd, but Nixon was felt to be the top-dog by the radio listeners. Public debaters do know how to turn a crowd, but seldom how to win an argument, because they are by nature performers, not serious thinkers. I quietly took my abuse from those who favored Mr. White, but when I learned that a few years later he began sporting “doctor” before his name I became very curious. A friend went to his web site and discovered that Mr. White was now “Dr.” courtesy of a “distance learning institution,” a non-accredited diploma mill. White, thanks to the agency of this “distance learning institution,” that actually boasts that it is not accredited (see www.columbiaseminary.org/Accred.htm), now proudly sports his newfound academic prowess. But one man's cheating is another man's pragmatism. In White's own words (keep in mind the ad as noted above):

The greatest example of this came in my dissertation. Thousands, Lord willing, will read my doctoral dissertation, as it will be published by a major Christian publisher. The work is on the doctrine of the Trinity. Rather than being the “traditional” dissertation, wherein I have to come up with something “new” to write on, we did something truly novel: we decided to write a book that actually defines, and defends, the Trinity for the person in the pew! I say this is novel, since there are hardly any such works in existence, but also because of the fact that (again due to secular influence) it has become vogue in Christian seminaries to write only dissertations that touch upon something “new” from some “unusual angle” [we shall soon learn that there is nothing “new” about being expected to produce original research, but has always been the standard for the highest academic degree given by graduate schools]. No one can argue the result of this viewpoint: how many reading this article have ever read a doctoral dissertation? How many have ever been enriched by such a document? I can thankfully say

that I already know of individuals who have come to know Christ as Savior through works that I wrote as part of my Columbia work. In the same way, I know of people who have been kept from great confusion and deception by those same works. Life is short, so why invest time in education that won't have such results? [for the entire dismal text go to <http://www.aomin.org/CrEd2.html>]

Here White admits that his “dissertation” is not “conventional.” Neither, however, is the institution that “granted” it. The Association of Theological Schools is the national accrediting agency for theological education in the United States (see <http://www.ats.edu/>). They state in no uncertain terms that, “Courses, seminars, and colloquia for research doctoral degrees shall be completed on the main campus of the institution offering the degree (L.3.2.0)â€¦ [and] “Because of the importance to scholarly growth of a sustained period of study in residence {i.e. on a campus}, admission should not be offered unless financial resources and arrangements are available to enable students to engage in full-time study for at least a significant part of their program (L.4.1.3). White's institution requires none of this and so they are not accredited. Furthermore, “In general, faculty members should be competent in teaching and research, with a record of contributions to their discipline (L.4.2.1.2).” Almost none of the Pentecostal founders and many faculty at this “distance learning” seminary would fit this description because many of them have their doctorates from this same in-house diploma mill where such proven records are not required. Finally the ATS demands that a doctoral student “have a comprehensive and critical understanding of the disciplines of their doctoral study, the competence to conduct original research that can contribute to their fields” (L.5.3), not write popular treatments of vast and complex subjects for a commercial readership! White's “doctorate” aids in understanding his modus operandi in debate.

Moreover, because he is a “public debater,” not a qualified academic authority, he uses the tactics of a street fighter-dirty tricks. What follows are two documents that are publicly defaming statements White made about me in an exchange on a Reformed Baptist discussion list. The three untruths put forward by White, and ably refuted by a fellow Reformed Baptist pastor, are as follows: 1) that I am a “Theonomist;” 2) that I am a Baptist hater; 3) that I am an “antitrinitarian.” All three of these damning accusations are horrible but none of them has ever been corrected by White. What follows after this first exchange are messages between someone else who opened a correspondence with White's organization asking that his distortions of me be corrected (but not at my prompting, however). The recalcitrant replies speak for themselves.

These are dark times we live in; and they shall get darker still. Men who purchase bogus degrees from diploma mills in order to claim expertise they do

not otherwise possess, while defaming the authority of those with whom they do not agree, are clear indications of our slide into the merky waters of obscurantism.

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