

## GOD, LIFE, AND EVERYTHING "THE FALL OF PROFESSIONS"

My old seminary is in a crisis. They got a dean last year who began changing things quickly and harshly. Students wrote letters of protest - though not directly to the dean because they feared retribution. Faculty went to him in complaint but, according to them, were threatened with termination. Finally, at the beginning of the term, eight of ten full-time professors went on strike. They wrote to the board of trustees that they could not teach under this dean. The board wrote back that it accepted their resignations.

Why would the board of a small but old and respected institution act so precipitously? Why would it stand so steadfastly behind a dean who has seemingly alienated the faculty and students? Why was it willing to get rid of its full-time professors at the drop of a hat?

It's been argued that the professors were rash, that they gave an ultimatum ("Either he goes or we go") and thus deserve to be fired. But firing them does nothing to help the students, nor will it solve the problem of a dean who still alienates those who are left.

But what if getting rid of full-time professors was exactly his purpose? Especially those who had been there longest and were most expensive. This isn't as far-fetched as it sounds. In fact, it's happening all across the country, if a little less dramatically.

In recent decades, the mission of higher education in America has started to shift from making educated and inquisitive members of society to making money. They've become a business instead of a mission. As a result, the tenured professor has become an endangered species. Boards want to get rid of them in favor of part-time adjuncts who get low salaries and no benefits.

In other words, they are turning professors into fast food workers. Take away any sense of accomplishment from the professors, make them feel lucky just to have a job, and they are just employees.

Meanwhile, as they reduce the salaries and benefits of those who do the actual teaching, tuition still goes up, up, up until many in the middle class can no longer afford a university education. Universities are paying less and charging more. So where's the extra money going?

Of course, this has been a pattern in all employment across the USA. The business model has infiltrated pretty much every sector of society, even the once "higher" professions. Journalism used to mean something until MBAs started cutting news staffs to the bone back in the early 80s, so that real reporting was already disappearing when the internet brought newspapers to their knees. Doctors, lawyers, pharmaceutical companies once had an aura of real mission, of a higher purpose. Then they were allowed to advertise, and now they are just businesses with flashy commercials on TV.

Perhaps I'm exaggerating the "good old days," but it's clear that the corporate model is not good for certain sectors of society. It's not good for our legal system. It's not good for our medical system. It's not good for our journalism. And it's certainly not good for our educational system. The day we think of these as "products" to be produced as cheaply as possible...it's the day they start to become meaningless.

Of course, the way we treat ALL workers leaves much to be desired. We make them work only part time to avoid benefits, paying as little as possible. We shift their schedules around at random so that they have no possibility of obtaining other regular employment. Make no mistake, this is not to save money in struggling corporations, as profits have been going up even through the recession. They just increasingly go to an ever smaller group of people at the top. We've known this for awhile. We've blamed this on the workers who never had the gumption to get an education, to work hard, to pull themselves up by their bootstraps.

Only now we're doing it to PhD.s who have labored years to achieve their degrees, who work endlessly to teach their students and publish their research. We have begun to treat them the same way. Are we now going to say THEY are at fault for not working hard enough, too? Or is the truth that people in control want the money to stay in a few hands?

Cynical? You bet. But since when has the love of money ever led to anything holy?

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