

The Doctorate and the WELS:  
A Reflection and Evaluation of the Wisconsin Synod's Attitude  
Toward Doctoral Degrees.

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The idea which sparked this topic arose from a little confusion. Recently, some W.L.S. professors began promoting the concept of "continuing education" in the ministry. According to this plan, pastors would not simply settle down and vegetate under their workload, rather they would read challenging material, attend classes, or even pursue degrees relating to ministerial work.

This writer began examining the Doctor of Ministry degree, which appears to have direct application to pastoral work. But before one undertakes any major venture it is wise to be a little circumspect and even retrospective. Some, but not many, in the WELS continue formal education after ordination. What has been done in the past?

It is common knowledge at W.L.S. that Professor J. P. Meyer was awarded a doctoral degree by Concordia, St. Louis, and refused it point blank. One might hastily conclude that such was the attitude of all WELS pastors/professors in the past. It was not, though many have drawn that conclusion. The man whose portrait dominates the Tower Room, and whose influence is unmistakable on the Dogmatics notes did not refuse such a degree. That man was of course Professor Adolph Hoenecke. J. P. Koehler's History of the Wisconsin Synod reveals that Hoenecke "was honored with the degree of doctor of theology by Northwestern College of Watertown and by Concordia Seminary of St. Louis, in connection with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Milwaukee-Wauwatosa seminary in 1903" (Koehler, 1981, p.213). President Ernst of Northwestern College, Watertown, was another man of that era who "was made honorary Ph.D. by the Concordia Seminary faculty of St. Louis, at the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Watertown school" (Koehler, pp. 227-228).

Confusion arises when attempting to reconcile the different reactions to these honorary degrees. Were the different responses motivated by different

times and situations? Or is it a simple difference of personality? Is there a trend to be noticed? The following is an attempt to understand not only why Hoenecke accepted and Meyer refused, it is an attempt to understand in a general way how the leaders and pastors of the Wisconsin Synod have viewed doctoral degrees. In the strict sense, this is an impossible task, because many of the opinions are no longer available. Yet maybe, just maybe, there are some insights from both the distant and recent past to be gained and applied to the present and future.

This topic cannot be treated fairly without dealing with:

I. WELS Attitudes Toward Outside Influences in Education:

In 1889, the Wisconsin Synod met and elected a new president, Philipp von Rohr. This event marks "the beginning of a new period in Synod's history," at least according to Koehler (1981, p.183). He relates that "With Rohr's advent, the Wisconsin Synod came into closer contact with the world and learned the way of the world" (Koehler, 1981, p.184). The "chief concern" of this synodical meeting of 1889 was the infamous Bennett Law passed in that same year (Koehler, 1981, p.184).

Wisconsin's Bennett Law was an attempt to regulate private and parochial schools according to standards set by the state. Section 5 of this law states:

No school shall be regarded as a school under this act unless there shall be taught therein, as part of the elementary education of children, reading, writing, arithmetic, and United States history in the English language. (Beck, 1965, p.229).

While today it would be unthinkable to call anything a school which does not teach the three R's and U.S. history in the English language, apparently that was not the case a century ago. The Wisconsin Synod was not against the stipulations, it was against the state stipulating anything relating to a

church school. This was the official response of the Wisconsin Synod:

We are not opponents of the State schools but consider and declare them to be a necessary institution. We are always ready to pay taxes to the State for the support of public schools. We are opposed to any and all appropriations of public school funds to private schools.

However, we stand upon our rights to establish private schools through our own means and to administer and conduct them without hindrance according to our Christian convictions and sound educational principles. (Beck, 1965, p.230).

Koehler was probably not alone in his opinion that,

The public school ideology is a religion, and cannot be otherwise, since there is no education that does not impart some kind of religion, even down to the three Rs... The public school ideology is antichristian, even without the teaching of Evolution, thru the mere fact of its making a fetish of education and by its making a gospel of democracy. (Koehler, 1981, p.187).

He quotes St. Paul (Eph 1:10) in deducing his viewpoint:

All things in heaven and on earth are gathered together in Christ. That applies to every kind of teaching, from religion down to penmanship and drawing. (Koehler, 1981, p.190).

The accreditation issue was another outside influence related to education. This issue was often debated in the Wisconsin Synod throughout the years. J.P. Meyer summarized the common thinking of the W.L.S. faculty in 1922 in his Quarterly article (20:215). "The inconsistency involved and the dangers courted by having church schools accredited with state institutions have repeatedly been pointed out in this magazine." He proceeds to favorably quote the article "A New Scholarship Needed" from the "Moody Institute" by Professor Lowell H. Coate. The following excerpts give the sense,

When the church herself sets the example by spending millions of dollars to secure the world's recognition she need not be surprised when her young people follow the course to its logical conclusion -- enter the larger graduate institutions to the undoing of their faith ... Is it consistent with the dignity and

purpose of the church to bow and beg for recognition from the world from which she professes separation? [The standards have been] set up by the world for its own purposes ... the church and the world are headed in exactly opposite directions" (WLQ, 20:215).

Five years later, Meyer quoted an article by Professor J.H. Dickason in the "Presbyterian" to this same point.

Practically every college in the country to-day belongs to some 'College Association'. The North Central; the Central; New England; Southern, and others. There has been much rivalry between these 'associations' as to which can have the higher standards. Year by year they mount higher. The results have already proved disastrous to a number of the smaller colleges, and will be the undoing of a number of others in the immediate future, unless doors of help are soon opened. There is no charge against such colleges of inefficient teaching; in most cases the quality of instruction has been beyond criticism; the quantity has been satisfactory; the student graduates went out into the world and proved that they were prepared by the service rendered. No, the 'associations' have not been troubled about the internals nor the externals; just about the externals! There must be so many volumes in the library, so much equipment, so many professors, so many students, so much endowment, so many Ph.D.'s, so many A.M.'s, so much salary to each professor, so many silk hats, and numerous other 'requirements'. Character and teaching ability and successful experience are not even mentioned. More stress is placed upon the endowment and the hat and the staggering weight of this degree! (WLQ, 27:70).

The attitudes of the Wisconsin Synod leaders and pastors have occasionally changed and varied on the issue of accreditation. It would be unfair to describe their thinking in a simplistic fashion as though it had been consistently unanimous. As late as 1965, E.E. Kowalke wrote in his Centennial Story,

Northwestern has never sought formal accreditation, though there have been movements afoot in that direction. The faculty minutes of January 8, 1904, record that at the request of Dr. Ott a special meeting was held to consider his proposal that the faculty apply to the state university for the special designation of "accredited college." Since no agreement could be reached, the matter was tabled. Our graduates, with their excellent classical and liberal arts training, have always been able to transfer to

universities whenever they desired to do so. (Kowalke, 1965, p.263).

Nevertheless, Northwestern was accredited in 1981. Carleton Toppe devotes an entire chapter to the "Accreditation Issue" in Holding the Course (1990, pp.78-89). "The accreditation of Northwestern did not come easily to the faculty, nor was the synod of one mind about it" (Toppe, 1990, p.78). Toppe discusses some of the concerns and fears felt by the faculty on this issue. One major problem was that same basic and simple concern voiced with regard to the Bennett Law of 1889. Accreditation meant Pell grants and other funds would be available to students... "Some day, would he who pays the piper want to call the tune?" (Toppe, 1990, p.80). The concerns Prof. Meyer expressed in the 1920's remained as well. After all, is it not "inappropriate for a secular agency, unspiritual in its educational philosophy, to judge the Spirit-led education of the future ministers of Christ"? (Toppe, 1990, p.80).

Doctor Martin Luther College was accredited a year earlier than Northwestern (see Morton Schroeder's A Time to Remember, p.154 ff.). Both NWC and DMLC were accredited by North Central. This Association urged both faculties to improve their qualifications as instructors and professors at the college level. In other words, the faculty members were asked to pursue advanced degrees in their fields.

Neither school seems to have been opposed to this. Toppe, as president of NWC, reported to the college board, "We need to make sure our faculty does not lag in self-improvement through graduate study and scholarly presentations. We need to owe such progress to ourselves more than to the North Central Association" (Toppe, 1990, p.89). As for DMLC, it is apparent from the 1980 Report to the Ten Districts that the faculty was already very much active in this regard, "on part time leave to study music, 1; on full time leave to study music, 1; beginning doctoral studies, 2; continuing

research for doctorate, 1; completing doctorate, 2; studying at Yale, 1; on leave for semester to study at Oxford, England, 1; and on leave for seven months to study literature in the British Isles, 1." (Schroeder, 1984, p.156. See also the Status Study of DMLC, 1971-1972, p. 34, for the statistical increase in higher academic degrees by the faculty from 1963-1972, and p.35, for the increase in those pursuing advanced study).

The only other WELS college, Wisconsin Lutheran College, seems far more enthusiastic about and interested in doctoral degrees than either NWC or DMLC. But the motivation for these degrees does not seem closely tied to the accreditation issue. For that reason, WLC's position will be discussed later.

## II. Attitudes Toward Doctoral Degrees.

As was previously mentioned, it is impossible to accurately trace WELS attitudes throughout the years, since full-scale surveys were never taken. That will cast a good measure of doubt on any attempt to trace these attitudes. The following may be far more subjective than objective.

### A. Degrees of degrees.

It would be beneficial at this point to draw some distinctions between doctoral degrees. Some are earned through study and dissertation, some are not. Some are required, some are not. These simple divisions afford us a useful three-fold division of doctoral degrees:

- 1.) Not earned, not required;
- 2.) Earned, not required;
- 3.) Earned, required;

(Note: The 4th possibility: Not earned, required is preposterous and will not be treated for that reason).

- 1.) Not earned, not required.

This category would include honorary degrees like those awarded to Ernst and Hoenecke and refused by Meyer. These degrees are simply no longer awarded by WELS schools. Paul Eickmann relates in personal correspondence,

The doctorates granted by Concordia and Northwestern in earlier years... were tributes granted in order to honor the theological and educational achievement of leaders of our church. I have never heard of any criticism of them. It's my impression, however, that doctorates were later granted on a somewhat wholesale basis by Concordia... and that then a lot of "D.D.'s" honoris causa were distributed simply to honor prominent church men of no particularly scholarly distinction. That cheapened the degree, and neither Northwestern nor our Seminary ever went into that business.

Perhaps that is the reason why J.P. Meyer refused the honorary doctorate from Concordia. Or perhaps it was partially due to the tensions between Wisconsin and Missouri at the time. Yet, in this writer's opinion, it was mainly due to personal scruples. Possibly, Meyer was uncomfortable with recognition of any sort. He signed his articles in the Quarterly with the mere initial "M," while the rest of the faculty permitted their names to be attached to their work (although one must wonder how many would not know who "M" was anyway).

Perhaps there is a need to make some room here for a caution of sorts. The WELS and specifically "M" are not necessarily to be congratulated for any apparent displays of humility. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks in the heart. A current W.L.S. professor still tells the story of how "our Professor Meyer" showed up those degree-conscious Missourians by offering to discuss a topic in the Lutheran Confessions on the basis of the Latin (Dr. John C. Lawrenz relates the same story in correspondence). Perhaps they needed to be "shown up." Who can say? It also seems to have been a trademark feature of some W.L.S. professors in the past that they would humiliate the students of the class to somehow motivate them to rise up from



their pitiable degree of ignorance (cf. your foreward to August Pieper's Isaiah II; also the fact that Prof. Meyer required his dogmatics classes to read the Latin quotations out loud, while it would seem apparent that only Prof. Meyer would have derived meaning from it). At any rate, we can all learn from the important principle Jesus revealed in his Sermon on the Mount, "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full..." (Mt 6:16). The point is: are we, or our professors, guilty of "showing off" about not "showing off"? C.S. Lewis once said something to the effect that if you think you are not proud, you are very proud indeed. With that considerable caution aside, we may proceed.

2.) Earned, not required (doctoral degrees).

There have been some men who have voluntarily worked toward and earned doctoral degrees throughout the history of the WELS, even though this work was not required. In the 1870's, the faculty of Northwestern, Watertown, included two men with Ph.D.'s in classical languages, Dr. Theodore Meumann and Dr. F.W.A. Notz (Koehler, 1981, p.136-7). In 1890, Prof. J.H. Ott was granted a leave of absence from this same school to pursue the doctorate which he obtained after two years in Berlin and Halle (Koehler, 1981, p.188). Other Northwestern professors with doctorates were Hoermann, Wente, and Arthur Notz (as related by Dr. John C. Lawrenz in correspondence). Unfortunately, none of these three worked out for Northwestern, "Hoermann had no discipline, Wente no tact, and Notz got himself too deeply involved with politics" (Dr. Lawrenz <sup>letter</sup>).

Dr. Lawrenz compares NWC to the Seminary of that era and includes two important points:

During the "Ernst" era at NWC the seminary in Wauwatosa was not marked by men with graduate degrees. My sense is that their work in theology did not demand it and the leaders there were secure in

\* "About The Author" pg. 10

their theological competency without any "certification" by the academic world. Certainly men like Hoenecke, Koehler and Pieper didn't have to apologize to their peers in respect to academic prowess. When you step back and look at NWC and Wauwatosa there were many teachers of competence at both schools, thoroughly schooled, but without doctorates. I think you will find it different in Missouri at that time. In Missouri the doctor's title was expected of theologians and academicians both. I suspect that this difference reflected the roots of the two synods...

One point is that men can be extremely well qualified and yet not hold an impressive degree. This can be seen throughout the history of WELS, certainly no less today. Another point is that while Missouri has required doctoral degrees in their colleges and seminaries, Wisconsin has not. For that reason, this category of "earned, not required" would be more difficult to discern in Missouri's history (difficult, not impossible -- it would not be fair to accuse Missouri unfairly of legalism on this point, just a different view).

This writer is quite well acquainted with two men who fall into this category in more recent times, John C. Lawrenz and John F. Brug. Only one other teacher in my pre-ministerial training route would fall into this category, Dr. John Sullivan, who has since retired. Feeling somewhat at a loss to understand and describe fully just what it means to take a few years off and pursue a doctoral degree, and what might motivate one to want to do so, I asked Dr. Lawrenz for his story. The following are excerpts.

The path that led me to a doctorate is not a straight one. One factor was a dissatisfaction with "the system" as I perceived it in college. At the time I didn't understand well the theological issues dividing Wisconsin and Missouri. In fact I would have to honestly say that I kept the whole matter at arm's length because my father was so deeply involved and like all sons with strong fathers I probably wanted to get out from under my dad's shadow and be my own person. I recall how some students would relate to me negatively because of my last name long before they knew me as a person. Usually these were the ones whose fathers were not so sure my father's leadership in WELS was correct. These things were minor compared to the feeling that I had in college that NWC was cheating me of my education. This feeling was shared within

my class by others. We often referred to NWC as "Prep 2" because we felt we were getting a rehash in college of what we already had in high school. The faculty was old on the average and several men were well past their prime. A curriculum revision went through that we, right or wrong, didn't respect all that much... New faculty members were green and we also felt that they were called by the board because they were theologically safe and would not rock the boat after the departure of Gehrke and Jungkuntz. We observed how these greenhorns were thrown into the classroom with little or no <sup>academic</sup> preparation. The college did little to encourage graduate work for its profs then...

(N.B. Lawrenz is relating what he was feeling at the time - he has since considerably revised his views.)

It would be accurate to say that I drifted into Mequon and my heart wasn't fully in my presence there. I didn't hate the idea of becoming a pastor, but my heart wasn't in it. There was a feeling that confessional Lutheranism had pat answers for everything and I wondered to myself if I would believe everything I was being told if my education was challenged from the outside. This didn't begin at Mequon, it was there already at NWC. At the same time it would be an exaggeration to say that I was a rebel waiting to follow others out of the WELS by way of graduate school. In fact, there was another side of me that resented the implication that graduate school would necessarily "corrupt" the convictions I held as a WELS Lutheran Christian. If what I believed and was taught was correct, I told myself, then my convictions ought to be strong enough to stand the test of anything graduate school could throw at me...

Old interests and new attitudes led me to investigate the possibility of taking a year out between my middler and senior years at Mequon. My father encouraged me to talk with Prof. Rudolf Honsey at Bethany. He had been pastor of an ELS congregation in Boston and had taken classes at Brandeis University while there before being called to Bethany... He painted a positive picture of Brandeis. This university was founded after World War II by Jews for Jews. The school arose out of the same general upsurge in Zionist feeling that was a positive reaction to the horrible suffering the Jews had undergone during the Hitlerzeit. The school had determined to become a first rate university and went after top faculty. Honsey spoke well of Cyrus Gordon, a Jewish scholar who had made his name in the Ugaritic field. Cyrus was a bit of a maverick. He didn't believe great works of literature were composed by committees. This conviction led him to keep J-E-D-P at arm's length. He was also a generalist who believed in an ancient oecumene that linked Mesopotamia, the Levant, Egypt and Greece. He felt that traditional scholarship had broken the ancient world into areas, not because they were so separate in ancient times, but rather because the scholars of today kept themselves separate in their respective disciplines. Gordon's discipline at Brandeis was called "Mediterranean Studies." Its purpose was to give young scholars a chance to major in the Mediterranean world rather than in a single area. Brandeis also had a "Near Eastern and Judaic Studies" department. I came to take courses from both departments, although my doctorate came in Med. Studies. (from personal correspondance)

The purpose for permitting his story to go into such detail was to attempt to convey the emotions, senses, and feelings involved in his pursuit of that doctorate. His letter goes into much greater detail and provides for fascinating reading. One must take care here not to assume that all doctorates are obtained under the same basic circumstances. Each individual has his own reasons. One might do it simply out of curiosity. One might do it to develop his abilities to the utmost. One might do it because he believes that a college/seminary professor ought to be a doctor. Often, multiple combinations of reasons are involved. That was certainly the case with John Lawrenz.

That may well have been the case with Dr. Brug as well. He arrived at DMLC at a time when the North Central Association was urging the faculty to work toward advanced degrees. No doubt, this played a major role in his working toward a doctoral degree. In a personal conversation, he once mentioned that his work also enabled him to see how the academic world really works. His Ph. D. gives him some opportunities and advantages that he would not otherwise have. It is questionable whether that Moslem doctor would have wanted to debate someone who could only write M. Div. after his name. "The Ph. D. ... has become the union card in the research-oriented university world" writes Paul Eickmann (personal letter). Dr. Lawrenz writes of his experience as a pastor in Gainesville, Florida, "In a university town my doctorate was a net plus and opened many doors for evangelism." (letter).

Many more men could be listed in this category, but lack of time and resources necessarily prevents such exhaustive work. We must move on.

### 3.) Earned, required (doctoral degrees).

As mentioned above, most of the Missouri synod professors would fit into this classification. Currently, WLC is the only WELS school that actually

requires a doctorate. Yet since the school is so young it is quite difficult to draw much information at this date. I wrote a letter of inquiry to WLC regarding their apparent practice of requiring doctoral degrees. Dr. John Bauer, Vice President for Academic Affairs, wrote this in reply:

You are correct in your observation that Wisconsin Lutheran College seeks to call individuals who hold the doctoral degree. This stated qualification is aimed at providing the best possible quality for the students of this college. To be sure, accreditation agencies look carefully at faculty credentials. However, our primary motivation is the conviction that the best type of liberal arts education is that which is grounded in instruction provided by people who are expert in their discipline. It is our belief that students deserve the best possible instruction from this college. One measure of that is the academic preparation of the instructor.

At the same time, this level of academic achievement is not the only standard by which we judge faculty quality. All faculty at Wisconsin Lutheran College receive a divine call into teaching ministry. All faculty are likewise required to be active participants in their local congregations, and to make themselves available to other church and para-church organizations as resources for the church. These two stated standards, namely academic preparation and spiritual commitment, have been widely supported within the WELS. It is our perception that those who understand these requirements encourage us to maintain these standards.

With respect to your question concerning those individuals who teach Biblical or doctrinal courses I can only say that the same standard applies. However we recognize that candidates already holding the doctorate in theology are few and far between. Consequently we have maintained a policy of supporting current faculty in their pursuit of the doctorate. This holds true for faculty in other disciplines as well. In those areas where candidates holding the doctorate are not readily available, and Wisconsin Lutheran College is forced to call someone with master's level preparation, a provisional call is extended. Such a call is renewed annually, contingent upon that individual's satisfactory progress toward the doctorate and toward synod certification. WLC covers the full cost of tuition for such study.

As a baccalaureate degree granting institution that has achieved accreditation only three years ago, it is unforeseeable that WLC will ever award the doctorate. Such degrees are awarded only in this country by universities. In fact, I do not see the day when this institution would even award the master's degree...

Clearly, WLC is charting a new course in the WELS. So far, it appears that there is not a great deal of opposition to their actions.

## B. Some Evaluations of the issue

First, is it true that a doctorate best prepares one for teaching at a liberal arts institution? Perhaps that is true at a large university, but is that really the case in our colleges? Professor Paul Eickmann of NWC seems to disagree with that assumption, "On a small faculty, holding two masters' degrees might be more useful than a Ph.D" (letter). He also relates that NWC seems to be expecting its professors to earn masters' degrees in their fields, whereas this was merely encouraged in the past. One must also consider another angle in this issue which Eickmann provides:

[The Ph.D.] is supposed to be awarded to those who have made some original contribution to human knowledge. A number of the men I know have done the course work that is required for the degree, but have not written the thesis which is also required. That is my situation. The thesis requires a high degree of specialization. By its very nature, it does not especially contribute to one's qualifications for teaching undergraduates, though the mere experience of going so deeply into a narrow topic can help anyone recognize the limitations of human knowledge, and that ought to be a salutary experience for teachers of undergraduates, too. But it takes a lot of time, and that is a concern for any Christian. ... (He writes that he finished the coursework required for the doctorate) But coursework is not the main thing for the doctorate. I figured that at my pace I would be able to take the required comprehensive exams and to write a thesis in about two more years of full-time study. At my age I did not consider this to be the best possible use of the time. Furthermore, there were and are other teachers at NWC who need the time to complete master's degrees; and there are younger men who will make better use of doctoral training than I. So I have attended Sem summer school for a couple of years and try to take workshops that I hope will make me a better teacher. I do not expect to do more work specifically for a doctor's degree. (letter).

It would seem that if all of our leaders, professors and pastors had Paul Eickmann's attitude, there would be nothing to discuss in this issue. There is nothing inherently right or wrong in pursuing doctoral studies, it all hinges upon motivation or attitude. Why do you want to pursue this degree? If it is pride, it is wrong. If it is a desire for prestige, it is

wrong. If it is to maliciously avoid a more humble and less recognized ministry, it is wrong. But if it is to improve your talents and abilities, to equip yourself for your call, or to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in any possible way, then it is good and right. Such questions are not always so easily answered because we all carry around an Old Adam within us who turns even our finest intentions into filthy deeds. Paul Eickmann aptly writes, "Paul certainly did not despise education. But he considered it his highest honor to be a doulos Iesou Christou" (letter).

What does it mean to be a servant of Jesus Christ? That is the question on the mind of each prospective pastor/teacher/layperson. The answers do not always come so easily. Many facets are to be examined carefully. Even then answers may fail to appear. One of the most difficult questions in any person's life is, "What should I do with my life?" Even after one has arrived upon a course (e.g. "pastor"), there are more choices and options. "What school should I attend? What courses should I take to prepare myself?" The WELS has pat answers ready for such questions. Even then, one often wonders, "Am I really ready? What can I improve?" When one receives a specialized call (e.g. professor at a college/seminary), there are more options, "How many courses should I take? How can I better prepare myself?" In any aspect of ministry, one should really consider himself to be in a constant state of preparation. This has not necessarily always been the all-pervasive view in the WELS. Prof. Eickmann writes, "It is certainly a step forward that we are recognizing more and more that the Sem graduate is not a finished product" (letter).

But when should a man prepare for teaching in a school of higher education, before or after he receives the call? The answer to that question is not unanimous in our synod. WLC prefers that the man train before the

call. It would probably be fair to say that the rest of the synodical schools are satisfied to have a man train after being called to the position. In a paper delivered before the synodical school faculties last summer, Professor Eickmann expressed some of his thoughts about our church body's calling process. (from letter)

A concern for the ministry of the gospel has led our church to staff its training schools with pastors and teachers who know from the inside what the ministry is about. It has been the policy of our boards of control to publish requests for candidates for professorships without expecting that the nominees should have completed specialized subject-area education. That comes later. Our practice imposes on the professor after he accepts his call an obligation to attain depth in a particular subject area. Intensive continued education may place strains not only on the individual and his family, but on the synod and our schools as well. Sometimes we have been too easily satisfied with shallow subject-area preparation. Yet our church has persisted in calling pastors and teachers with broad liberal-arts training to its faculties.

Our boards of control call Christian human beings of particular character, talents and interests who want to serve where Christ and his church may call them. We have not encouraged those with scholarly inclinations to follow their own special interests by equipping themselves as soon as possible with academic qualifications. The church has not in effect asked men to nominate themselves for faculty positions by pursuing advanced degrees before they receive calls to teach in our prep schools and colleges. An age of specialization will subject this practice to increasing pressures. Most secondary and post-secondary educators specialize earlier in their educational careers; I expect that we will also be calling younger teachers to our worker-training schools. But even as we continue working to upgrade our professional competence and depth in our subject areas, maintaining our doctrine and practice of the call is well worth the sacrifice of easier academic recognition. The risen Lord provides pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:7-13). He gives the ministry to the church. Let the church decide how to use his gifts."

Another viewpoint might be that "a person's very interest in pursuing higher education is also a gift of the Lord Jesus to his church, a gift of the Spirit who should not be quenched" (provided by Prof. Eickmann, personal letter). Several of today's pastors who have gone on to earn doctor's degrees



include Silas Krueger and Robert Koester (Eickmann, letter).

One passage which might come into play in this discussion is I Corinthians 7:24, "Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to." Is Paul saying here to serve your present call faithfully and if called elsewhere prepare and serve there? Is it assuming too much for a man who recognizes that God has given him extraordinary gifts to prepare himself for a position on a faculty of higher education? Is voluntary pursuit of a doctoral degree tantamount to "volunteering" for a professorship at some school? Dr. Lawrenz answers,

Definitely not! On this score I disagree with the hundreds who have never had the chance and know few people who have. I rather believe that "volunteering" is a function of one's basic attitude to the ministry. If you wish to serve, you will accept the assignment the Lord gives you through the church. During my years in Florida there was an assumption that I was just waiting for a call to NWC or Mequon. I must say it annoyed me. Also one of the MLS board members said that they openly discussed whether or not to call me to Saginaw because I would only stay here a short while. I mention these things because I feel the problem in my case was elsewhere, in the minds of others. It wasn't my problem. What I have done is made my special training available to the synod through the calls I've had. Mequon made use of my good offices for the Summer Quarter in Israel. There is no question that I took an active role in promoting and organizing that project, but I never sensed from them that I was angling for a call to Mequon. Nor do I feel that I ever gave that impression. (letter)

One must admit that Dr. Lawrenz's abilities and opportunities are rare in that he was able to take four years out (one after middler year, three after graduation) before receiving his first call to Gainesville, Florida. But why would one want to quibble about that? The truest test of friendship and Christian love is to sincerely share someone's joy and accomplishment without a trace of envy. To share in such accomplishments doesn't mean to spend all day patting such gifted servants on the back with "he's our guy" kind of compliments, but rather to put such a one to work and to praise God

for subsequent productions. One would have to have his head in the sand to not recognize what great things the Lord has permitted John Lawrenz to do. Open any volume of The People's Bible (NPH) and realize that John Lawrenz provided the helpful cartography. Grab a copy of the New Evangelical Translation (God's Word to the Nations) of the Bible, notice who did the maps -- John C. Lawrenz. When the isagogical course through the Old Testament is published for the Spiritual Renewal Project, John Lawrenz will be its author. This is the season of Lent. Most of our churches read the Passion History from a harmony provided by John Lawrenz (NPH). For these things we praise not John Lawrenz, but the Lord of the church, who has given this servant and his work for the church's benefit.

The same might be said about WLS professor John Brug. He has provided three volumes of The People's Bible and several helpful Bible class courses. Perhaps more importantly for WLS, his presence in the classroom teaches students that a doctorate is really not a title at all, it is an attitude and mark of competency. The attitude is a "leave no stones unturned" approach to any topic, subject or issue at hand. To mention one example of this, see Prof. Brug's paper on the role of women in the church\* which includes more bibliographical references than three pastors might read. The attitude is that quantity and quality need not be mutually exclusive. For that reason, we should look for additional work from such men. This writer's view is that it would be fair to expect such men to provide the church with works of greater dimensions, for example some exegetical commentaries on the Old Testament books. There has been such great damage to the Old Testament scholarly world by the historical-critical crowd that many Old Testament books lack even one doctrinally sound, exegetically based, up-to-date commentary. Even for those that have fairly decent commentaries, one is constantly confronted with

\* "Application of Principles..." (April 24, 1990)

Reformed theology, millennialism, evolutionary leanings, or concessions to the critical scholars. There is a real need for some work to be done in this area, and I believe that if one of "our men" did the work "our pastors" would read and make good use of the material. I cannot agree with Professor Meyer who was reluctant to write a dogmatics text. Because he didn't, students today read Franz Pieper. Why must we always let Missouri do this type of thing first? The People's Bible is a great idea made reality and surpasses anything Concordia has to offer by far. When this ambitious project is finished, I hope that we don't just sit back and admire our work. I hope men like Lawrenz and Brug will again put their talents to good use by writing some readable, exegetical commentaries on the Old Testament. Who knows, maybe someday the Reformed will buy our books...

And we dare not forget about all the competent men who hold no "impressive" degrees. Professor Eickmann is a fine example of this. He has mastered his field and conveys that knowledge in a thoroughly organized and lively fashion to his classes. Professor David Kuske of WLS is another good example of the fact that it doesn't take a doctorate to produce top-notch work. He is mainly responsible for the "blue" Catechism being used by most of our congregations. He was a key man in the production of the "Net" Bible translation. He is currently revising the parish education curriculum. Many more men could be mentioned, more in fact than would not be mentioned.

But before we get too far afield we must at least recognize a few dangers of getting a doctorate. One distinct danger is that the doctor will get a bloated sense of himself and resign himself to the ivory tower. For that reason, Dr. Lawrenz believes quite strongly that professors need three legs to their professorial stool.

One leg is aptness to teach, the kind of gift Paul recognized as

necessary for ministry in general. I believe it is a gift not everyone has. Schools ought never be places to put men who can't communicate. Another leg is competence to teach. We might equate this leg with graduate work, although broad competence gained from reading and self-study is okay if it is thorough. The particular degree is not as important as the knowledge gained in pursuing one's discipline. The last leg, is a living involvement in the ministry for which students are being trained. This is the anti-"ivory tower" leg. You know, it is so easy to lose perspective in an educational institution. This is one reason I favor the kind of Sabbatical-in-ministry that Prof. Jerome Spaude is pursuing this year in Calgary. He's living in the mission field. They renew his contact with mission ministry. He'll come back to MLS with a real appreciation of the 1990's ministry. In short the best-prepared profs are those who can teach, have something to teach, and know the relevance of what they are teaching for the ministry. (letter)

Another danger in studying at non-WELS institutions is that one might begin to adopt the theological viewpoint of that institution. This may be happening among those who attend "church growth" schools like Fuller Seminary in California. The danger is always present to let one's beliefs erode. Do "church growth" principles subtly lead people to believe that we really can help the gospel along? If one spends more time with Reformed people or those who don't have a very high view of Scripture, will it solidify him against them or cause him to make concessions? What are the implications of church fellowship in attending the seminary of heterodox church body?

Another danger is inherent in the very nature of the doctorate. The premise that one must come up with something entirely new and fresh may lead some off the deep end in their attempt. Could it be that this premise led Bjarne Teigen to attempt to find out at what precise time the bread takes on Christ's body in the Lord's Supper? At any rate, to pursue a theological degree is inherently dangerous. Since our Seminary does not offer such a degree one would have to submit to theological instruction elsewhere. Would the pressure to find something new lead one into error? It can happen. Furthermore the encouragement of free thought would loosen all of the controls

which the synod has placed upon its schools. One good reason why many WELS pastors and leaders are wary of doctorates is because of the role such doctors played in the split with Missouri and the Protes'tant controversy.

Anyone who wants to obtain a doctorate and remain in the WELS will have to be ready for some opposition. John Lawrenz seems to have gotten less opposition than one might think<sup>(as related by letter)</sup> though who knows what people were saying behind the scenes. There are several responses one might encounter today. The person from a long line of WELS pastors will be more likely to look at a doctor as though he were a little bit weird. The person who comes from Missouri for confessional reasons might view such a one respectfully, yet with some resignation. The average layperson will tend to be overly impressed with the degree, or defensively upset about it. These are this writer's generalizations. Another writer may see it another way.

In this whole matter, we need to carefully interpret and apply what Jesus says in Matthew 23:5ff:

Everything they (the teachers of the law and the Pharisees) do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'

But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

It doesn't take a "doctor" to break this law. Pastors with no special title break it when they "show off" in front of lay people, or bark about seniority at conference. Professors break it when they view themselves as in a special class of wonderful people God planted on earth to live in beautiful,

secluded atmospheres and decide doctrinal and other matters for everyone else. And "doctors" and synodical leaders have the temptation to view themselves more highly than they ought. "Jesus is saying that the attention of his followers must not be fixed on human titles and distinctions but on God in Christ, worthy of all reverence, praise, and honor" (Wm. Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary, vol 1, 1975, p.824). Our respect for leaders and gifted men ought not cause us to revere them with hero worship.

I fear that today we often fall into this sort of thing with Luther. Missouri comes painfully close with Walther, Pieper, and Walter Maier. WLS professors at least approach it with Hoenecke, A. Pieper, J.P. Meyer and others.

The Wauwatosa theologians had the right attitude in going back to the source and studying the Word anew with the fresh perspective of the world in their day. We, too, should return to the font and learn those truths anew and apply them to today's people, situations and churches. To do this we need to not only retain our rope hold to the Word and theologians of the past, we need to extend ourselves reaching forward to keep in touch with the present world, people, issues, and churches. To help us to do this we may need some gifted men to spend several years of their lives in intense study. How else will we keep at the cutting edge of the primary source material? If one does not truly master Greek and Hebrew, his attempt at exegesis will limp considerably. If one does not thoroughly research what's happening in ELCA or the Boy Scouts of America or the Abortion issue or recent legislation on divorce, his understanding of the present situation will not be complete and accurate. We may not all have the time and skills to do this work, but it is clear that someone has to do it. For that reason, we thank the Lord of the church for giving us such men, and pray that he will do so in the future. If each person

in the WELS, every single person, views himself or herself as a servant of Jesus Christ, and seeks to apply his or her own unique gifts for the good of the Lord and his church, opposition to doctorates will cease because no one will pursue one out of selfish motives. Such attitudes are like that of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2). "To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Philippians 4:20).

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