

MIN181 RELATIONSHIPS and ETHICS in MINISTRY

ETHICAL INTEGRITY in EDUCATIONAL CREDENTIALS and ATTRIBUTION

Evaluating Kinds of Ministry Degrees

In 2007 the Assemblies of God saw the growing lack of integrity among Pentecostal-charismatic ministers regarding higher education. There was an increasing willingness to use unaccredited “degree mills” to obtain so-call college or graduate degrees. The title of “doctor” begin to proliferate among charismatic and some Pentecostal ministers. Claiming “masters” or “doctoral” degrees from these unaccredited schools was a serious breach of integrity.

Individuals and churches were creating “accreditation mills”, so-called accrediting agencies which were fraudulent organizations not recognized by any legitimate authorities. These accreditation mills then proceeded to “accredit” false “diploma / degree mills”, fake schools that will offer “degrees” for taking simplistic, “courses” that normally have less content than a traditional Sunday School class.

All of this was a form of fraud, an attempt to claim educational accomplishment – earned degrees – by people who had not actually done the hard work of attending legitimate, fully accredited schools and earning real degrees. In legitimate ministerial circles and among legitimate Christian denominations, such practices have always been considered highly unethical. It amounts to telling and living a lie.

Recognizing this growing fraud among independent charismatic – and some Pentecostal – ministers, the Assemblies of God amended their national Bylaws to forbid Assemblies of God ministers from engaging in this practice.

As you consider pursuing advanced degrees, please understand that just as not all schools are equal ... not all degrees are equal - bachelors, masters, or doctorates, are not equal in content nor equal in quality. Not all bachelors degrees are equal, not all masters degrees are equal, not all doctorates are equal. This is certainly true of degrees at every level which are often characterized as ministerial degrees.

Some of the common masters and doctoral degrees today are:

Masters of Leadership – the focus here is often on practical leadership applicable to various fields. If you are at a Christian Institution there may be some Bible or Theology, but **it will be very light**. These **degrees** average anywhere from 24-30hrs of study. Usually there is a heavy focus on analyzing & implementing various leadership styles, an emphasis on praxis.

Masters of Biblical Languages – these are usually 24-36 hours depending upon the number of languages and the level at which one desires to study. The most common languages of study are of course going to be Biblical Hebrew and Koine Greek – both of which are dead languages. Working knowledge of Biblical Languages is an **extremely admirable endeavor** to increase one's skill at biblical interpretation and communication. Other languages in specialized fields might include Aramaic, Ugaritic, Coptic, Latin.

Masters of Theology – these are often 36-48 hours and can engage numerous fields of study – Master in Theology may have a broad focus of systematic theology, biblical theology, historical theology, or it may center on Pauline theology or another specialized field of theology. **This is a highly useful degree**. When individuals wish to earn a bible degree, and have previously earned a secular degree – such as a degree in business or education – a Masters of Theology **is highly encouraged**. If you have a previous bible degree at the bachelors level and want to pursue an advanced degree – this could be an excellent option - and depending on the school it covers much of what students learn in the first 2yrs of a Masters of Divinity.

Masters of Divinity – usually 90-100hrs of graduate course work in Bible, Theology (systematic, biblical, historical), Hermeneutics & Biblical Interpretation, Church History, Extensive study in Biblical Languages both Greek & Hebrew (sometimes other ANE languages), Biblical Counseling, Ministerial Leadership, Homiletics & Preaching, as well as specialized fields such as Pauline Theology, Hebrew Poetry, Ministerial Ethics, Pastoral Theology, etc. **The Masters of Divinity was the most common degree across denominations and in church history and a good MDIV is considered the flagship degree necessary for full ordination in**

many denominations. If someone is willing to commit the time to an authentic MDiv, there is no substitute.

Basic doctoral degrees:

ThD – Doctorate of Theology – (Academic Degree)

- Usually a focused degree on an area of theology such as Pauline Theology, Historic Theology, or another area of focus.

PhD – Doctorate of Philosophy – (An Academic Degree)

- The standard academic research degree. ***Most highly esteemed, most in-depth.***
- *If you intend on doing academic doctoral work in any field of Bible or theology – you will likely be required to have an MDiv, if you have a Masters in theology or biblical languages, additional coursework may be required before you begin a ThD or PhD*

What are other types of Doctorates?

DMin – Doctorate of Ministry – (Ministerial Degree, focusing on praxis)

- **In Preaching** – *The core command of Scripture and most important task of a minister ... correctly interpret, teach, and preach the word of God. Heavy research into the origins, historic practice, and art of preaching. Rigorous standards will be applied for what actually is biblical preaching, and what is not. Successful implementation of an approved thesis and project.*
- **In Leadership** – study of various leadership philosophies, and application of leadership styles to various situations and scenarios, implementation of your doctoral proposals is often required.

D-Ed – Doctorate of Education – (Educational Degree). Those involved in the administrative side of educational institutions may seek a D-Ed in order to improve their organizational, administrative, logistical skills in coordinating education. For example, the principal of a school might be interested in this degree. Someone who trains teachers might be interested.

Over the past few years, I have had the opportunity to be a part of in-depth dialogues both inside the Assemblies of God, and with individuals in other denominations such as Southern Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist – the dialogues have involved a combination of denominational officials, biblical scholars,

seminary professors, local church pastors, as well as other ordained ministers in these movements.

Across every denomination – each individual expressed a **growing concern that ministers are no longer pursuing degrees which are of most benefit to the church of Jesus Christ both local and global – IOW – those not yet in ministry but pursuing ministerial degrees are not choosing BIBLE BASED DEGREES – but instead are choosing degrees with a more entrepreneurial focus and with deficient bible & theology.**

Another concern unanimously expressed was that those already in ministry – who are pursuing advanced degrees – are not choosing degrees in which the primary focus in bible or theology of any kind. There may be tertiary bible or theology courses – but nothing of real depth, merely surface level.

If your aim is to be a teaching shepherd (pastor), a bible teacher, a preacher of God's Word – nothing could be of more importance than LEGITIMATE TRAINING in rightly dividing, correctly handling, the word of the LORD. This may not be popular to say, but it is nevertheless true.

From the beginning of the Church, the Apostles gave themselves to study of the word, God's People were praised for their love of study of and knowledge of the word, the Bereans specifically were admired. Throughout the history of the church – study of the scriptures was always pre-eminent in training of ministers. Theology was once called the Sacred Science and the Queen of the Sciences.

I am a 5th generation member of the Assemblies of God, my relatives are in the pictures of our very first organizational meetings in Hot Springs, Arkansas. The best tradition & practice of the Assemblies of God – has always been to pursue the best bible training we could, as we could. Due to life circumstances – such as age, finances, family – not everyone in the history of our movement has had the same educational opportunities – we have always understood that – and we have always embraced and been willing to train men & women who showed a deep love for God's Word and a true calling to preach the Gospel.

Regardless of our circumstances, each Christian is called to be a good student of the Word, so we encourage you to take advantage of every educational opportunity you have – read books recommended by our best A/G Scholars and by the best scholars in other trustworthy movements.

Build your personal, family, & church library with good books on the Bible, Theology, Church History, Hermeneutics, the History & Culture of the Holy Land, on preaching. Get good commentaries on each book of the Bible. Don't buy just any book, get good recommendations! All education should make you want to learn more about The God we serve, the Book He has given us, the history of His Church – what we have believed and why.

A scholarly minister and denominational official recently said ...

“Today’s emphasis on ‘leadership degrees’ is a modern phenomenon alien to Scripture and to all of church history. These degrees are quick and easy ways to say you have a ‘masters’ or a ‘doctorate’, but they do almost nothing to improve you understanding of Scripture, theology, church history, or preaching. They make a lot of money for Christian universities and are very easy degrees to earn compared to degrees in biblical studies, biblical languages, and theology. We are paying a heavy price in the biblical / theological knowledge of our ministers, and we will reap a whirlwind of biblical illiteracy in our churches in years to come.”

ALSOM aims to provide the best educational opportunities with the resources we have. Our goal is to set you on a trajectory of lifelong learning. WE can provide you with excellent resources on Bible, Theology, Hermeneutics, we can help you build your personal and church library with resources that will open to you the broad and beautiful horizon of God’s Word.

Some of you may endeavor to pursue higher education at some point. Our denomination wants to do right by you, and advise you on Integrity in Education. No dollar should ever be wasted on deficient studies, rather we want every dime you spend and second you spend in study to be the absolute best it can be, the most rich and fruitful and fulfilling experience. So we must talk about Integrity in Education.