

WOCATI NEWS

The Newsletter of the World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions

PREPARING FOR CONGRESS 96

Preparations have begun for CONGRESS 96 to be held from 27 June to 3 July 1996 at the Methodist Guest House in Nairobi, Kenya. The WOCATI Executive Committee sponsored a five-day consultation in April 1994 in Paris, France, to begin planning this second WOCATI CONGRESS meeting. (The first WOCATI CONGRESS was held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, in June 1992.)

The consultation, which was attended by 19 individuals from 15 countries, was devoted to the development of four papers by working groups on the subjects of: (1) academic degrees and credentials in theological education, (2) women in theological education, (3) the influence of cultures in theological education, and (4) scholarship and research. Each working group is chaired by a member of the WOCATI Executive Committee.

Drafts of the papers will appear in this and subsequent editions of *WOCATI News* to foster discussion of the issues prior to CONGRESS 96.

The Executive Committee met following the consultation to provide oversight of the ongoing activities of the organization. Included in its agenda was an evaluation of the first two issues of the newsletter, approval to develop a general descriptive brochure about WOCATI for use in membership enlistment, receipt of financial reports, and consideration of potential sources for future funding to enhance the work of the organization.



Participants at the April 1994 consultation in Paris, France.

Membership in the World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions is open to duly established associations (national, regional, and global) that are made up (at least in part) of schools and programmes that award degrees and diplomas in theological studies. Affiliate status may be given to organizations, consortia, or networks that have substantial interest and involvement in theological education but are not associations of theological institutions. Membership in WOCATI now stands at 19 associations worldwide. Basic membership dues, adopted at the recent Executive Committee meeting, are one hundred dollars (\$US 100) per calendar year. Checks or international money orders, payable in \$US to WOCATI, may be sent to the WOCATI USA office (see address on page 16).

PLEASE NOTE

This issue of *WOCATI News* is devoted to the **draft** of one of the papers for study and consideration at CONGRESS 96. The paper on **academic degrees and credentials in theological education** is summarized in English, Spanish, French, and Chinese, followed by the full English text.

WOCATI members are encouraged to copy this issue of the newsletter to facilitate wide discussion of the draft paper among their associations. If the paper is photocopied, proper credit should be given to WOCATI.

Member associations are also welcome to translate this and subsequent papers. If a translation is made, please send a copy to the Pittsburgh, PA, USA, office of WOCATI to facilitate its distribution and use in other parts of the world.

Delegates to CONGRESS 96 are asked to bring responses to the papers from their respective associations.

In discussion of the draft paper in this issue, please consider the following two questions:

1. **In what ways does this paper relate to your present situation?**
2. **What challenges does this paper bring to the future of theological education?**

ABSTRACT: Academic Degrees and Credentials in Theological Education

This paper examines the ways in which academic credentials are used by theological institutions around the world. It considers the nature and significance of academic credentials (certificates, diplomas, degrees, etc.) in theological education. It proposes ways whereby various academic credentials can be assessed and interpreted by institutions in countries and cultures other than their sources of origin.

The first section of the paper summarizes various arguments against the use of academic credentials in theological institutions: (1) they are seen as unrelated to competencies for church leadership; (2) “theology by the people movements” believe that academic degrees fail to recognize leadership skills developed outside the academy; (3) academic degrees cultivate a professionalism unrelated to the work of the Holy Spirit; (4) churches need inclusive leadership that can never be produced by traditional credentialing programs; and (5) the variety of credentials offered and what they represent make earlier patterns of credentials obsolete. This section concludes with an argument that contextualizing theological education requires a new appreciation of past traditions AND new efforts to relate emerging indigenous credentialing systems to the global community of theological schools.

The paper proceeds to describe the origins of academic credentials in Europe and their development in the West to certify academic competence and to confer the right to practice the profession of teaching. Such academic credentials were initially considered irrelevant to preparing clergy. Eventually, however, a distinction was made between academic degrees (M.A., Ph.D., Th.D.) and professional degrees (B.D., M.Div., D.Min.). This distinction has been helpful, but it has also created new problems—especially in the recent global expansion of universities and colleges, whereby some churches have founded independent theological institutions to provide education for ministry.

What is the rationale for theological degrees in the preparation for ministry today, and how do they relate to the needs of the churches and the standards of the academy? The paper assumes that degrees “are the structured means of certifying the fulfillment of educational ends by a duly constituted third party.” The contemporary structure of degrees flows from the history of academic credentials in the world. Such certification also carries certain recognized rights and privileges, in order to reassure the church that credentialed graduates can effectively practice ministry. Furthermore, the competency that theological institutions are best able to assess and most qualified to certify is always limited and directly dependent upon a constructive relationship between the churches and academic institutions.

Recognizing that degrees increasingly mean different things in different parts of the world, and are used in different ways by universities and churches, the paper sets forth three standards for quality theological education: degrees should be “theological”; degrees should accommodate the real differences between and among theological institutions, e.g. pluralism; and at the same time there should be a global pattern of degrees to provide an overarching structure for all theological education.

The paper proposes eight (8) types of academic credentials that might be commonly embraced by theological institutions and ecclesiastical authorities to provide a consistent pattern for global theological education. These credentials seek to value the traditions of the academy and also to be responsive to the changing realities of the churches:

1. **Preparatory Certification** (preparatory programs devoted to preparing persons for university or college study)
2. **The First Degree** (general liberal arts education of two to four years beyond secondary education, building upon various patterns of secondary education)
3. **The Intermediate Degree** (one full year of full time study beyond the first degree)
4. **The First Professional Degree** (basic preparation of several years full-time study that prepares graduates for the practice of ministry as it is commonly recognized by ecclesiastical bodies)
5. **The Intermediate Professional Degree** (one full year of full-time study beyond the first professional degree)
6. **The Final Professional Degree** (the Doctor of Ministry in North America is the only degree that presently fits this category; it involves advanced study of ministry in the context of professional practice)
7. **The Academic Doctorate** (a multi-year program of academic preparation for teaching and research)
8. **The Post-Doctoral Degree** (additional academic work resulting in significant publications, thereby qualifying its holder for appointment to a university professorship)

It is hoped that some pattern of credentials similar to this one could be established and commonly understood by all theological institutions and all ecclesiastical bodies. Such a pattern would enable a conceptual framework of equivalents for all degrees and credentials in theological education. It could also challenge theological educators and ecclesiastical leaders to define more accurately the levels of academic achievement needed for appropriate recognition and service within various communities of faith.

The WOCATI CONGRESS 96 is asked:

1. To reach consensus regarding the ingredients of a general and defining system of theological degrees and credentials.
2. To authorize WOCATI to plan and initiate studies and discussions directed to the identification of global standards by which each level or mission of theological education should be defined and evaluated, and to devise means of engaging member associations and organizations in these efforts.

English Abstract by Barbara Brown Zikmund, president of Hartford Seminary, Hartford, Connecticut, USA, and Secretary-Treasurer of WOCATI.

ABSTRACT: Los grados académicos y el currículum en la carrera de teología

Este trabajo examina las distintas maneras de acreditar el currículum académico por las instituciones teológicas alrededor del mundo. Para ello se considera la naturaleza y el significado del currículum académico en la carrera de teología. (certificados, diplomas, grados, etc.). Se proponen varias maneras por medio de las cuales se valora e interpreta el currículum académico por instituciones de países y culturas diferentes a su fuente original.

La primera parte del trabajo compendia varios argumentos en contra del uso de los grados académicos en las instituciones teológicas: 1) Se estiman inconexos a la competencia por el liderazgo de las iglesias; 2) Los movimientos de “teología de las masas” piensan que los grados académicos no reconocen las cualidades de liderazgo desarrolladas fuera del ámbito académico; 3) Los grados académicos cultivan un profesionalismo sin relación con la obra del Espíritu Santo; 4) Inclusive, las iglesias necesitan un liderazgo nunca generado desde los programas tradicionales de desarrollo del currículum; y 5) La variedad de currícula que se ofrecen y su distinta representación hacen obsoletos patrones curriculares previos. Esta sección concluye con un argumento donde se contextualiza que la educación teológica requiere una nueva apreciación de las tradiciones del pasado y un renovado esfuerzo para incorporar los sistemas de conocimiento indígenas en la comunidad global de las escuelas de teología.

El trabajo procede a describir los orígenes del desarrollo curricular en Europa y su implementación en Occidente, para certificar la competencia académica y conferir el derecho a ejercer la profesión del magisterio. El currículum académico era considerado, inicialmente, como irrelevante en la preparación del clero. Sin embargo, finalmente, se hizo una distinción entre los diferentes grados académicos (M.A., Ph.D., y Th.D.) y los grados profesionales (B.D., M.Div., D.Min.). Esta distinción ha sido útil, pero también ha creado nuevos problemas—especialmente con la reciente expansión global de universidades e institutos de educación superior—por lo que algunas iglesias han fundado instituciones teológicas independientes para la formación del ministerio.

¿Cuál es la razón de los grados académicos en teología para la preparación del ministerio hoy en día, y cómo se relacionan con las necesidades de las iglesias y los estándares de las instituciones académicas? El trabajo asume que los grados académicos: “son las formas estructuradas de certificar el cumplimiento del término de la educación por un tercero debidamente constituido”. La estructura contemporánea de los grados académicos surge de la historia del desarrollo curricular en el mundo. Dicha certificación también es portadora de ciertos reconocimientos, derechos y privilegios, con el propósito de reafirmar a la iglesia que las personas certificadas pueden ejercer eficazmente la práctica ministerial. Por otra parte, la capacidad de las instituciones teológicas como los centros más aptos para apreciar y certificar el conocimiento siempre está limitada, y depende directamente de una relación constructiva entre las iglesias y las instituciones académicas.

Reconociendo que cada día más los grados académicos significan distintas cosas en diferentes partes del mundo y se emplean de diferente manera por universidades e iglesias, este trabajo establece tres estándares de calidad para la educación teológica: los grados obtenidos deben ser “teológicos”; los grados deben acomodarse a las necesidades reales de y entre las instituciones, por ejemplo, el pluralismo; y al mismo tiempo debe haber un modelo global de grados

de certificación para proporcionar una curva de medición para todas las instituciones teológicas.

El ensayo propone ocho (8) modelos curriculares que pueden adoptarse cómodamente por las instituciones teológicas y las autoridades eclesásticas para proporcionar un patrón global consistente para la educación teológica. Este modelo curricular busca valorar la tradición académica respondiendo simultáneamente a las distintas realidades de las iglesias.

1. **Certificación preparatoria.** (programas preparatorios encaminados a la preparación de las personas para los estudios universitarios o de educación superior).
2. **Primer grado.** (educación general en humanidades, de dos a cuatro años después de la educación secundaria, desarrollando más diversos modelos de la educación secundaria).
3. **Grado intermedio.** (un año completo de estudio de tiempo completo después del primer grado).
4. **Primer grado profesional.** (preparación básica de varios años de estudio de tiempo completo que habilita a los graduados para el ejercicio del ministerio como es comúnmente reconocido por los cuerpos eclesásticos).
5. **Grado profesional intermedio.** (un año completo de estudio de tiempo completo después del primer grado profesional).
6. **Ultimo grado profesional.** (El Doctorado o Ministerio de Estados Unidos de Norteamérica es el único grado que actualmente acomoda en esta categoría, comprende estudios ministeriales avanzados en un contexto de práctica profesional).
7. **Doctorado académico.** (un programa de múltiples años de preparación académica para la enseñanza e investigación).
8. **El post-doctorado.** (Trabajo académico adicional traducido en un corpus significativo de publicaciones, por lo tanto, calificando a quien lo posee para desempeñar un puesto profesional universitario).

Se espera que algún modelo curricular similar a éste pueda establecerse y entenderse comúnmente por todas las instituciones teológicas y todos los cuerpos eclesásticos. Dicho modelo permitiría un marco conceptual de equivalencias para todos los grados y currícula de la educación teológica. Podría constituir, incluso, un desafío para los educadores en teología y dirigentes eclesásticos; para definir con mayor precisión los grados académicos que deben ser alcanzados para el reconocimiento apropiado y el servicio dentro de diversas comunidades de fe.

Se le pide al Congreso del WOCATI 96:

1. Llegar a un consenso sobre los elementos para un sistema general de definición de los grados teológicos y el currículum.
2. Autorizar al WOCATI para planear e iniciar estudios y discusiones dirigidas a la identificación de estándares globales a través de los cuales deba definirse y evaluarse cada nivel o misión de la educación teológica, y para buscar la manera de comprometer a las asociaciones miembros en estos esfuerzos.

Spanish Translation of English Abstract by Diana Patricia Valencia, Graduate Fellow in Spanish, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, USA.

ABSTRACT: Les Diplômes et les Certificats Académiques dans le Cadre de l'Éducation Théologique

Cet article examine les manières dont les institutions théologiques à travers le monde utilisent les diplômes académiques. Nous considérons la nature et la signification des qualifications académiques (certificats, diplômes, etc.) dans l'éducation théologique. Nous proposons des réponses à la question de savoir comment les institutions peuvent évaluer et interpréter des qualifications académiques qui proviennent d'autres pays ou d'autres cultures.

L'article commence par résumer divers arguments contre le recours par les institutions théologiques aux qualifications académiques: (1) ces dernières sont considérées comme étant sans rapport aux compétences nécessaires à la direction de l'église; (2) les "mouvements de théologie populaire" maintiennent que les diplômes académiques méconnaissent des compétences et des qualités de chef qui peuvent se développer en dehors de l'académie; (3) les diplômes académiques favorisent un esprit professionnel qui est sans rapport à l'oeuvre du Saint Esprit; (4) les églises ont besoin d'une structure de direction inclusive, laquelle ne sera pas le résultat de programmes aboutissant à des diplômes traditionnels; (5) la variété des qualifications existantes et ce qu'elles représentent rendent dépassés les systèmes de qualifications précédents. Cette première partie de l'article termine sur un nouvel argument selon lequel il faudrait que l'éducation théologique réponde à ses contextes en combinant à une appréciation renouvelée des traditions du passé de nouveaux efforts de rattacher les systèmes indigènes de qualifications en voie d'émergence à la communauté globale d'écoles théologiques.

L'article continue en décrivant les origines des qualifications académiques en Europe et leur développement dans l'Occident pour certifier la compétence académique et pour accorder le droit d'exercer la profession d'enseignant. De telles qualifications académiques se considéraient à l'origine comme étant sans pertinence à la préparation du clergé. Progressivement, cependant, une distinction s'établit entre les diplômes académiques (maîtrise, doctorat, doctorat en théologie) et les diplômes professionnels (B.D., M.Div., D.Min.). Si cette distinction s'est montrée utile, elle a également créé d'autres problèmes—surtout dans le contexte de l'expansion globale qui s'est manifestée dernièrement sur le plan universitaire, et qui a entraîné la fondation par certaines églises d'institutions théologiques indépendantes ayant pour but l'éducation du personnel du saint ministère.

Comment les diplômes théologiques se justifient-ils aujourd'hui en tant que préparation au ministère, et comment répondent-ils aux besoins des églises et aux étalons académiques? Cet article présuppose que les diplômes "constituent les structures par moyen desquelles un tiers dûment institué certifie l'achèvement d'objectifs éducatifs." Le système contemporain des diplômes émane de l'histoire des qualifications académiques. Une telle certification comporte aussi certains droits et privilèges reconnus, pour assurer à l'église la capacité des diplômés d'exercer d'une manière efficace les fonctions du ministère. De plus, la compétence que les institutions théologiques sont les plus aptes à évaluer et à certifier reste limitée et dépend directement des rapports constructifs entre les églises et les institutions académiques.

Les significations disparates des diplômes, ainsi que la façon dont les universités et les églises y ont recours, se multipliant de plus en plus d'une région à l'autre du monde, l'article propose trois principes-étalons en vue d'une éducation théologique de haute qualité: les diplômes devraient être "théologiques"; les diplômes devraient

tenir compte des différences réelles qui distinguent les institutions théologiques, c'est-à-dire, du pluralisme des institutions; et en même temps il faudrait une structure uniforme de diplômes pour réunir sous un système global toutes les formes de l'éducation théologique.

L'article propose huit (8) types de qualifications académiques que pourraient adopter les institutions théologiques et les autorités ecclésiastiques en vue d'établir des modèles communs pour l'éducation théologique mondiale. Ces qualifications visent à valoriser les traditions de l'académie et à répondre en même temps aux réalités évolutives des églises:

1. **Certificat préparatoire** (programmes préparatoires consacrés à la préparation des individus destinés à l'étude universitaire);
2. **Le premier diplôme** (programme de culture générale comprenant deux à quatre ans d'études après l'éducation de deuxième cycle, reprenant certaines structures du deuxième cycle);
3. **Le diplôme intermédiaire** (une année entière d'études à plein temps après le premier diplôme);
4. **Le premier diplôme professionnel** (préparation de base comportant plusieurs années d'études à plein temps, pour préparer les diplômés à la pratique du ministère comme celui-ci est communément reconnu par les corps ecclésiastiques);
5. **Le diplôme professionnel intermédiaire** (une année d'études à plein temps après le premier diplôme professionnel);
6. **L'ultime diplôme professionnel** (le "Doctorate in Ministry" de l'Amérique du Nord est le seul diplôme qui corresponde à cette catégorie; il s'agit d'études approfondies dans le cadre d'une pratique professionnelle du ministère);
7. **Le doctorat académique** (un programme de plusieurs années qui prépare à l'enseignement et à la recherche);
8. **Le diplôme post-doctoral** (des études académiques supplémentaires aboutissant à des publications importantes et donnant ainsi au diplômé les qualifications requises pour devenir titulaire d'une chaire universitaire).

Nous espérons qu'un système de qualifications comportant les éléments exposés ci-dessus sera établi et communément interprété par toutes les institutions théologiques et tous les corps ecclésiastiques. Un tel système permettrait la conception d'une structure d'équivalences de tous les diplômes et toutes les qualifications dans le domaine de l'éducation théologique. Il pourrait également pousser les éducateurs théologiques et les autorités ecclésiastiques à définir plus précisément les niveaux de compétence académique nécessaires pour parvenir à une appréciation convenable et pour effectuer le service au sien de différentes communautés religieuses.

Au Congrès WOCATI s'adressent les deux demandes suivantes:

1. De parvenir à un consensus à l'égard d'un système généralisé de définition des diplômes et des qualifications théologiques.
2. D'autoriser WOCATI à proposer et initier des études et ces débats visant l'identification d'étalons globaux selon lesquels chaque niveau et chaque but de l'éducation théologique devraient se définir et s'évaluer, et à développer des moyens d'engager les associations et les organisations membres à participer à ces efforts.

French Translation of English Abstract by Jennifer Gage, a professional translator in Providence, Rhode Island, USA.

神學教育的學術性學位及資歷

本文章探討世界各地神學院採用學術證書的各種方法。它考慮到學術證書(如畢業證明書、文憑、學位等)的本質和意義,並提供方法讓世界各國在不同文化背景的神學院能夠索取及了解各類學術證書。

文章第一部份講述針對神學院不應採用學術證書的各種言論:(一)它們看來與帶領教會的才能無關;(二)「人民神學運動」認為學術性學位未能認明在學院以外所培育出來的領導才幹;(三)學術性學位所栽培出來的專業才幹與聖靈的工作無關;(四)傳統的證書課程永遠不能涵蓋出教會所需要包括性的領導能力;(五)一切所頒發各類的證書及其所代表的內容使早期證書的模範變成無效。這一部份最後闡明要重整神學教育,必須要對過去的傳統有新新的認識,更要用新的方法把新興的本土裁定學位水準的制度聯繫到世界各地的神學院。

文章繼續描述到學術性的證書始源於歐洲,及至在西方的發展用以證明學術上的水準,並授予教學專業的權利。此等學術證書初時被認為與訓練聖職人員無關,最後還是把學術性的學位(大學碩士、哲學博士及神學博士)與專業學位(道學學士、道學碩士及教牧博士)分開。此等分類雖然有幫助,但也產生了新的問題——尤其是近期大學與學院全球性的擴張,有些教會更自與獨立的神學院來訓練聖職人員。

今天為了預備教牧人員而頒發的神學學位理由何在,它們又如何與教會的需要及學院的水準相連?文章假定學位是「由一個僉定認可而組成的第三者以有系統的方式來證明學業上的成就」。因世界學術水準裁定的歷史而形成近期學位的結構,此等證明也同時帶有認定的權利與利益,好像能再次給教會保證凡是被承認資格的畢業生都能有效地擔任事奉,再者神學院在稽核及證實神學生資格的能力,往往局限於神學院與教會的良好關係上。

正因學位世界各地代表著不同的意義，在大學及教會也有著不同的用法，所以文章提出三項標準來表明神學教育的質數：學位當是「神學性」的，學位須適應各神學院真正不同的地方，如多元化主義，亦同時應有一系列環球性的學位來指繫著所有的神學教育。

文章建議神學院及教會機構可採用下列八類學術資歷，俾能世界各地的神學教育都能有同一的方式來議定證書，此八類證書不單珍重著傳統的神學教育，亦同時適應到教會的實在需要：

- 一、預科證書（預備課程給大學或學院的深造）
- 二、第一學位（中學以後有二年至四年的通課教育，課程視不同中學質境而定）
- 三、中級學位（第一學位以後再多一年的全時間進修）
- 四、第一專業學位（數年的全時間進修，用以培育畢業生在教務事工上事奉）
- 五、中級專業學位（第一專業學位後再多一年的全時間進修）
- 六、資深專業學位（只有在北美的「博士」學位才代表著此類的學位，學生需在專業崗位上有深入的研究）
- 七、學術博士（數年的課程宗旨在培養教學和研究的人才）
- 八、博士後學位（繼續學術上的進修有重要的著作，能有資格當大學教授）

希望所有神學院及教會團體都能明瞭以上或類似裁定資歷的方式，此等方式可成為構議神學教育上同等學位及資歷的基礎，更可驅使神學教育家及教會領袖再仔細地分析各類神學教育的需要，進而更能符合各宗派團體的要求。

WOCATTI CONGRESS 96 應詢要：

- 一、達成一普及並定義神學學位及資歷的制度內容。
- 二、授權 WOCATTI 去計劃並推行研究及討論如何建立環球性的神學教育標準，用以定義及評量神學教育的各層次和目標，並採用各種方法去促使有關會員單位及團體向這方面共同努力。

Chinese Translation of English Abstract by Amos Lee of Malaysia, a Master of Arts student at Hartford Seminary, Hartford, Connecticut, USA.

ACADEMIC DEGREES AND CREDENTIALS IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION ENTIRE DRAFT DOCUMENT

I

The purposes of this paper are threefold: (1) To contribute to the understanding of the various systems, structures, and roles of academic credentials used by theological institutions throughout the world; (2) To foster discussion regarding the nature and significance that academic credentials should have in theological education; and (3) To propose ways whereby academic credentials can be assessed and interpreted by academic institutions and communities in countries and cultures other than their sources of origin.

Consideration of these purposes will constitute a part of the agenda of the convening of WOCATI CONGRESS 96. This paper is intended to provide a basis for consideration by the CONGRESS of the issues involved in current systems and practices of theological credentials.

II

Despite the long history of academic credentials, current attitudes, practices, and problems pose new questions regarding their use and significance in theological education.

1. Some find the idea of academic credentials incongruent, if not inimical, to the purposes of theological education. In many respects this critique of academic credentials is a form of the age-old claim that "Jerusalem has nothing to do with Athens," and that the standards by which the academic community is structured have no place in determining the competencies that are required for church leadership. In a more general sense, questions regarding the significance of academic degrees undoubtedly reflect the growing separation between the church and the academy in our time.

2. Many advocates of the "theology by the people movements" are critical of traditional, institutionally based, degree-structured forms of theological education and the values these place on academic credentials as certification for church leadership. They charge that the tradition of valuing academic degrees leads to serious failures to acknowledge leadership competencies that are developed in other ways than academic study.

3. Others view the practices and uses of academic credentials as fostering the professionalization of the ministry, which is considered to be in sharp contrast to the concept of calling, servant leadership, and spirit-filled graces.

4. From the standpoint of practice, the relation between academic credentials and ordination is increasingly problematic for many churches. Churches without firmly established educational requirements for ordination tend to minimize the significance of academic degrees. Many churches which traditionally have required a graduate seminary degree or its equivalent for ordination have been moved to reassess such degree

requirements out of concerns for feminist and minority interests and commitments to foster more inclusive leadership that reflects the pluralism of church constituencies.¹

5. Developments within theological education add to the mounting issues and problems related to academic credentials. The diversity of degrees that are currently used throughout the world and the absence of universally accepted criteria by which degrees are governed give rise to serious problems regarding the significance of degrees, their equivalencies, and their utility for the world community of theological schools and scholars. These problems are further complicated by the growing proliferation of degrees by theological schools, a trend that is most pronounced in the United States. In addition, in the effort to serve a more inclusive constituency, theological schools in many parts of the world are devising both programs and educational methodologies that are alternatives to degree structured theological education. For example, special certificate programs are being instituted for persons who either do not have the academic prerequisites for established degree programs or are in no position to follow formal programs of study. Still others are adopting educational strategies that acknowledge and build upon forms of learning and experience that may not be based on formal academic study. Finally, attitudes and practices within the academic community, especially the tendency to define academic degrees according to the number of course units accumulated rather than educational competence acquired, add further motivation and reason to question the significance of academic degrees.

But there are other, more positive mandates for reassessing theological credentials. It is implicit in the ongoing task of contextualizing theological education. This task consists of at least a two-step process. First of all, the signification and uses of theological credentials should reflect and serve the educational and ecclesiastical needs and influences of their indigenous cultural contexts. In order to accomplish this end, the academic traditions that have been inherited from the past need to be critically reviewed and revised as needed. Secondly, as this task is carried forward effectively, it entails a correlate one. The indigenous systems of theological credentials need to be related to the global community of theological schools. Both elements of this mandate, contextualization and globalization, constitute timely challenges to theological educators seeking to advance their callings both locally and in concert with their peers throughout the world.

III

Academic degrees are related to both the ends and the means of theological education.² For the degree recipient, degrees signify the completion of formal courses of study or the certification of educational achievements. As such, de-

degrees may serve as proof of acquired abilities, qualification for professional position or appointment, or a requisite for further study. For theological institutions, degrees are formal mechanisms for structuring the pace, type, duration, and sequence of courses of study.

The social role of theological schools is twofold: to educate and to certify the recipients of education.³ In the latter case, theological schools function on the presumption that they are the appropriate and qualified agents of confirming to the church and the world at large that degree recipients have fully attained the educational purposes to which the credentials bear witness.

The terms, academic degrees and academic credentials, designate the formal means that institutions use to recognize and certify academic accomplishments. For such purposes, theological schools use a variety of forms. *Certificates* are used to recognize completion of courses of study that are often more limited in scope and subject matter than are degree programs. *Diplomas*, on the other hand, are documents that formally confirm the degree and the privileges that pertain to the degree, regardless of whether or not a formal system of degrees is in effect. In its more limited sense, *degrees* signify a rank or distinction conferred by an institution as mark of proficiency or completion of a designated course of study.⁴

This paper focuses on the academic degrees that are distinctive to theological institutions and which are granted on the basis of the authority and jurisdiction that theological institutions have in their own right.

IV

In the West, theological degrees were well established as early as the 13th century at the universities of Paris and Bologna.⁵ They were conferred on students who completed designated years of study, passed exams, and were formally admitted into the guild of teachers. Degrees were titles that carried certain rights regarding the teaching office, the most important of which was the right to teach. Thus, degrees originally bore the significance of certifying to academic competence and conferring the right to practice the profession of teaching. Throughout the Middle Ages, the terms master, doctor, and professor were synonymous and remained so until modern times.

At Paris and later at Oxford, the master's degree was the prevailing rank. At Bologna, it was the doctorate. Both carried the right to teach anywhere without further certification. However, later in the development of universities, the prerogatives of the degrees changed. The right to teach was no longer automatically conferred with the degree. Hence, the titles came to designate not the conferral of an office but the certification of academic accomplishment or completion of formal courses of study. By and large, it is this meaning of degrees that has continued into modern times and is dominant for theological schools.

Seven or eight years of study were required for the doctor or master's degree. The baccalaureate or bachelor's degree was conferred after four or five years of study and qualified a student to perform limited teaching responsibilities in a master's school. From the beginning, it designated the completion of the first course or period of study leading to the more senior degree. As such, the baccalaureate was not considered an end in itself but the initial stage of formal university studies.

In France, the baccalaureate came to signify the completion of secondary schooling, and the license became the first university degree. In England, the Bachelor of Arts became the major university degree and the Master of Arts something of a formality based upon informal study or research. In Germany, the bachelor's degree disappeared and the doctorate became the first university degree.

In the United States, the English model of degrees prevailed. The Bachelor of Arts was awarded after four years of study, and in the beginning, the Master of Arts was granted "in cursu" to students who remained for three years and paid regular fees. As early as 1853, however, the Master of Arts was established as an earned degree and was termed "pro meritis" to distinguish it from the Master's Degree offered "in cursu." The Doctor of Philosophy degree was introduced in 1860 and rapidly became mandatory for faculty appointment to leading universities. However, it was not until the beginning of the 20th century that the granting of the Ph.D. as an honorary degree was ended by American universities and colleges.

V

The granting of degrees by theological seminaries, as distinguished from university faculties of theology, is a relatively recent innovation in the history of higher education in the West. It represents the development of theological education designed primarily to prepare persons for the church's ministry. The introduction of this form of theological education resulted in the distinction between academic and professional theological degrees, and this distinction continues today throughout the world. The point that should be stressed is that until approximately the beginning of this century, theological degrees were quite insignificant, and in many instances, considered irrelevant, to educating clergy.

Until the middle of the 18th century, state churches existed throughout Europe. Theology was taught by state-supported universities as part of the general curriculum, and with the exception of Roman Catholic seminaries, no institutions existed uniquely for training ministers. The Council of Trent in 1563 made provision for the establishment of Roman Catholic theological seminaries, the first of which was not founded until the 17th century. None functioned as degree-granting institutions. Throughout the Protestant world during the latter part of the 18th century, the churches became convinced for a variety of reasons that they could not depend on colleges and universities for the training of their ministers. As the academy sought

freedom to pursue the dictates of scientific knowledge and as the separation of church and state increasingly affected all forms of education throughout the world, the churches lacked confidence that state supported colleges and universities could serve fully the educational needs of ministerial leadership. They responded by establishing their own theological institutions to provide the kind of education deemed essential to an adequately educated ministry.

As independent churches developed alongside established churches, preacher-seminaries were founded first by nonconforming churches and then by state churches.⁷ In Germany and Scandinavia they were called preacher-seminaries. In England and Scotland, they were known as public colleges, and in the Church of England as diocesan seminaries. In Germany, preacher-colleges existed as early as 1677.⁸ All followed in some fashion the Tridentine seminaries, offering first a philosophical course followed by theological study of one or two years, for which no academic degrees were awarded.

In colonial America, colleges were founded after the British model essentially to “assure a literate ministry.” The study of theology was mingled with general education, and the traditional Bachelor of Arts degree was granted, followed by the master’s degree where such was provided.⁹

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, no professional theological degrees were granted in the United States. This did not change with the founding of graduate theological seminaries, which began in 1808 with the founding of Andover Theological Seminary. Graduates of seminaries, upon completion of their studies, often returned to their college or university for the Master of Arts degree. Despite the fact that seminaries were organized as graduate institutions, no provisions were made at first to award degrees. Instead, seminaries awarded certificates confirming the completion of theological studies. These certificates were significant in that they were often required by ministerial associations and ordaining councils. It was not until the latter third of the 19th century that provisions were made for seminaries to grant degrees in their own right. Harvard, for example, instituted the Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1869, which was recognized as a degree of the divinity school rather than the university. Since the B.D. degree carried special requirements, those who completed only the regular course of study continued to receive certificates. It is interesting to note that during the first 10 years, only 39 B.D. degrees were awarded by Harvard. The majority of students continued to receive certificates only. This was largely true for all theological seminaries in the United States and reflected the prevalent absence of any significant role of academic degrees for the training of clergy.¹⁰

In Canada, theological schools followed a similar pattern. The traditional practice was to award only a diploma for the three-year post baccalaureate course in divinity. This was all that was required for ordination by mainline churches.¹¹ The Bachelor of Divinity degree became an optional post-graduate degree and required the equivalent of a fourth year of study and

major thesis. This pattern began to change in mid-century. For example, in 1950 Victoria University (Toronto, United Church of Canada) altered requirements for the B.D. degree, making it possible to qualify “in course” after three years of study, a thesis, and at least one biblical language. Provisions were also made for those with a diploma to receive the B.D. degree upon completion of a thesis. In English-speaking Canada, this system prevailed.

In many sectors of the world, theological degrees are university degrees and conform to the academic traditions of the country. This is especially the case where theological schools are the theological faculties of universities. In other sectors where seminaries are autonomous and issue their own degrees, their credentials are either recognized as the appropriate credentials for education devoted to theological purposes, or they are independent of university degrees and often without recognition by central educational authorities. For example, in Brazil and most Latin American countries, the B.D. degree is not recognized by governmental authorities. The degrees offered by theological schools are under the rule of their church bodies, and their significance is generally limited to the values placed upon them by denominational constituencies. However, recently the Brazilian government instituted the means of recognizing the Master’s and Doctor’s degrees offered by theological schools which are annually evaluated by the Ministry of Education.¹²

It is important to note that in the Roman Catholic Church, degree-granting theological education takes place in three institutional settings.¹³

1. The first is an ecclesiastical university or faculty. In these instances, degrees are awarded on the authority of the Holy See and are governed by the Apostolic Constitution “*Sapientia Christiana*” (1979). The program of study, intended for both ordinands and lay persons, is divided into three cycles. The first, a three-year program preceded by two years of philosophy, leads to the Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology (S.T.B.), the second cycle of two years with specialization in theology, to the Licentiate in Sacred Theology (S.T.L.), and the third terminating in a doctoral dissertation to the Doctorate in Sacred Theology (S.T.D.).

2. A second institutional setting is the seminary devoted primarily to preparing men for the ordained priesthood. Seminaries are governed throughout the world by the “Basic Norms for Priestly Formation” (1983), by regional adaptations of individual Bishop’s Conferences of the world, and by the Code of Canon Law. While most seminaries confer degrees, by nature they are not necessarily degree-granting institutions. Students in seminaries affiliated with an ecclesiastical faculty of theology can be awarded the S.T.B. by the affiliate faculty. In other cases, seminaries confer what is recognized as civil degrees in their own right, usually by virtue of their membership in such associations as The Association of Theological Schools in the U.S. and Canada.

3. Departments of Theology of Catholic universities constitute the third setting for theological education, and these confer civil, university degrees. These departments, together with the entire college or university, are governed by the Apostolic Constitution “Ex Corde Ecclesiae” (1990) and by the local ordinances of the regional Bishops’ Conferences. In some countries, there are also Higher Institutes of Religious Studies, connected to faculties of theology, providing programs that lead to diplomas and other similar credentials.

VI

The awarding of academic degrees by theological institutions not associated with universities, once started in the late 19th century, was unregulated or monitored. Consequently, a plethora of different degrees was developed without commonly agreed upon standards or nomenclature. Efforts were made in various regions around the world to institute some uniformity of degrees related to theological education.

For example, in South East Asia, prior to the Second World War, theological education was conducted essentially by Bible schools that operated at various levels of higher education. As these institutions advanced, various forms of academic degrees developed. In 1957 the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESA) was established with a major purpose of accrediting theological degrees. Today, ATESA accredits the licentiate (diploma), Bachelor of Theology, Bachelor or Master of Divinity, the Master of Theology, and the Doctor of Theology.

In Brazil, the Association of Brazilian Theological Schools (ASTE) accredits the *Bacharel em Teologia* (B.Th.) and the *Mestre em Teologia* (M.Th.) at the request of member schools and according to the Association’s standards. In addition, Protestant evangelical schools have established their own system of accreditation. Similar systems of accreditation by associations of theological institutions have been established throughout Africa, Asia, and other parts of the world.

In 1932, The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada established firm definitions and standards for theological degrees to which all accredited institutions were required to adhere. They included the following:

1. The *Bachelor of Divinity* degree was established as the first post-graduate degree for a theological course of study, normally of three years duration, and designated as a “professional degree” focusing on the ministry and its practice.

2. The *diploma* was to be awarded for three years of study that did not conform to the requirements for the B.D. degree.

3. The *certificate* represented one or more years of study that did not fulfill the requirements of either the diploma or B.D. degree.

4. The *Master of Theology* (M.Th.) was established as

the second theological degree and required at least one year of study beyond the B.D.

5. The *Doctor of Theology* degree (Th.D.) was to be the highest degree awarded by institutions without university affiliations and was equivalent to the Ph.D.

6. The *Master of Arts* and *Doctor of Philosophy* degrees (M.A. and Ph.D.) were recognized as the highest academic degrees to be awarded by university-related theological schools.¹⁵

These definitions have remained normative for theological degrees in North America. However, several changes were made subsequently to the nomenclature and inventory of the theological degrees.

1. During the 1960s, the M.Div. was accepted as an alternative to the B.D. In 1972, the M.Div. replaced the B.D. as the preferred first, professional, theological degree.

2. In 1970, the Doctor of Ministry degree was approved as the “highest professional degree” for which ordination is required.¹⁶

3. In 1986, the Doctor of Missiology (D.Miss.) degree was approved as “a professional degree designed to prepare persons for leadership roles in specialized cross-cultural ministries...as well as teaching.”

4. A number of degrees primarily related to specialized ministries were added such as the Master of Religious Education (M.R.E.), the Master and Doctor of Sacred Music (M.S.M. and S.M.D.), the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), and a number of M.A. degrees in specialized areas such as pastoral counseling, youth ministries, etc., intended for persons not committed to ordained ministry. The recommended designation of the specialized M.A. degrees is “M.A. in (specialization).”

5. Alternative designations of degrees have been approved. Among the most prevalent alternatives are the Master of Sacred Theology (S.T.M.) as substitute for the M.Th., and the S.T.D. for the Ph.D. or Th.D.

One additional change has occurred especially in the United States regarding the academic doctorate. As indicated above, in 1932 The Association of Theological Schools designated the Ph.D. as an appropriate degree for university-related theological institutions and the Th.D. for freestanding schools. In 1974 this distinction was removed, and subsequently theological schools that offered the academic doctorate in theology were free to adopt either the Ph.D. or Th.D. nomenclature. Subsequently, the Ph.D. designation has been preferred almost without exception by North American theological schools. The reason for this change, simply put, was to make the highest academic doctorate offered by theological schools competitive with those awarded by colleges and universities.

This change reflected in its own way a major shift that has generally occurred throughout the world in the significance of academic degrees for theological education. During the past century, the credentials issued by theological schools, whether they were certificates or degrees, were significant to the extent

that they served important purposes and functions of the church. Throughout the present century, however, theological seminaries have increasingly fashioned their academic degrees according to the degree standards, nomenclature, and rationales held by colleges and universities. At the same time, they have sought to base theological degrees upon their own degree-granting authority and hence to make them independent of the rest of higher education. In short, theological schools have tended to import the logic of academic degrees from the rest of higher education while developing a system of degrees in their own right. In doing so, it can be said that the degrees related to theological education have taken on added academic, as distinguished from ecclesiastical, significance.

The result of this development has been twofold. On one hand, theological institutions have attempted to import the logic of academic degrees from the rest of higher education in the attempt to increase their academic significance. On the other hand, by seeking to establish and maintain an independent system of academic degrees, theological schools have sought to preserve the role and significance of academic credentials for the church. The tension between these two motivations is the source of much of the current problematic nature of academic degrees.

VII

What case can be made for theological degrees today? There is reason to believe that many of the current practices and use of academic degrees by theological schools have developed without clear rationale. Any assessment of the current state of theological degrees must take into account the twofold significance they have, that is for the church on one hand and the academic community on the other. Academic degrees are the clearest symbols of the fact that as agents of both the church and the academy, theological schools seek to exist with integrity in both worlds.

The theory of academic degrees can be stated quite simply: *They are the structured means of certifying the fulfillment of educational ends by a duly constituted third party.*¹⁷

Based on this formulation, the case for academic degrees in theological education should take into account the following elements.

1. The *structure* of academic degrees. The use of academic degrees by theological schools is informed by long historical precedent and practice. The weight of these historical traditions bears upon both the church and academy, and to propose alternate systems of certifying academic accomplishment would incur the burden of proof. There seems to be no sound reason for either denigrating the use or significance of academic degrees in theological education or for displacing them with some other system.

There are, however, at least two conditions that should be met in the future development and utilization of theological degrees. First, the system of degrees should be coherent, tying

together the different levels of educational accomplishment and proficiency that are significant to the church's ministry. Theological degrees should be sufficiently complex to calibrate the different levels and forms of education required for church leadership. They should also provide for sufficient flexibility to allow students to move from level to level without undue barriers or obstacles. In other words, no theological degree should be terminal in nature and prevent qualified students from having access to advanced degrees. Secondly, as a system, theological degrees should become global in nature and applicability. There is much to be gained by both worlds within which theological degrees function, the church and the academy, from a global system of theological degrees. As is argued later, there is no reason, in principle, to preclude the possibility of establishing a global system of theological degrees based upon broadly defined educational objectives which could be implemented without detriment to local systems, traditions, and practices.

2. *Certification*. This is the principle of academic credentials. They are intended to certify the academic accomplishments of the degree holder. Within the academic community, such certification is significant in that it carries certain rights and privileges that by tradition accrue to each degree. For example, the right to engage in higher studies is limited to those who possess degrees that are considered requisites for advanced study. In some professional areas, the right to practice is based upon educational requirements, the fulfillment of which the degrees certify. By means of degrees and the certification they represent, theological institutions provide significant services to constituents within the academic community and society at large.

Within the life and work of the church, certification by degrees is significant not for the rights, privileges, or social and professional prestige that may that may be claimed for them. Rather, they are means of certifying the fulfillment of educational goals that are considered by the church as essential to the practice of ministry. Such evaluation is vital to the church, and especially to the ordaining councils that are guided by educational and intellectual criteria and expectations. There are profound theological justifications for these educational and intellectual expectations. Obviously, theological degrees will have significance for the church only to the extent that these intellectual and educational expectations or requirements are valued.

3. *Duly constituted third-party assessment*. Academic or educational achievement is not the only type of competency that is important to the church and its leadership. However, *it is the form of competency that theological institutions are best capable to assess and most qualified to certify*. Academic degrees are the formal means by which this jurisdiction is exercised, and as argued above, certifying this form of achievement by means of degrees is one of the basic services rendered by theological schools to the church and to society as a whole.

The authority by which theological schools issue degrees is vested in a number of sources. In most countries, theological schools are corporate entities and exercise their legal functions including degree-granting rights by means of state charters. Within centralized, state systems of higher education, the significance of theological degrees is dependent upon state certification. In countries with decentralized systems, theological schools function in their own right, and the significance of theological degrees is often based upon some form of institutional accreditation or recognition. Regardless of the overall educational system within which theological schools operate, academic credentials are significant only to the extent that the certification they offer is well founded and fully acknowledged by the major constituencies served by the degrees. In short, the certification contained in academic credentials is valued in direct proportion to the confidence that theological schools enjoy as certifying agents within both the church and the world of higher education.

This confidence is dependent upon a number of factors. Among the most significant are the strengths of the faculty and the adequacy of educational, physical, and financial resources. As institutions of higher education, these factors are important for theological schools and the degrees they issue. Increasingly, the value of degrees is enhanced by forms of accreditation or assessment by a community of institutional peers. But in very special ways, the value of theological degrees and the certification they represent are dependent also in no small measure upon the excellence and character that graduates demonstrate in their ministries. Although every educational institution is known by its graduates, this is especially the case for theological schools. The intimate relation between church and seminary, and the concrete manner in which this relation is expressed and served by graduates, are peculiar to theological schools and determine in profound ways the significance of their degrees. All other graduate and professional schools are related to the institutions served by their graduates in quite different and far more general ways than is the case in theological education.

VIII

So far we have addressed only the formal nature of theological degrees. In summary, they are the established means by which theological schools certify the fulfillment of educational ends. As has been argued, this certification is significant and relevant to fundamental purposes served by theological schools. We now turn to the material significance of theological degrees by asking the question: What do theological degrees attest to? In other words, what are the educational ends the fulfillment of which are certified by theological degrees? What follows is a proposal that is intended to foster discussion among theological educators regarding the future course and development of theological degrees.

A system of theological degrees, if it is to serve the worldwide community of theological schools, should conform to the following criteria:

1. It should reflect the theological nature of theological education.¹⁸ This is not to suggest that questions concerning theological degrees are in themselves theological questions. They clearly are not. Logically, they possess secondary or even tertiary signification. However, assessments of the significance of theological degrees must reflect in some ways that which makes theological education distinctive. Questions concerning that distinctiveness (or to restate the matter, what makes theological education *theological*) are theological in nature, and responses to these questions should provide rationales by which the significance of academic degrees is informed and assessed.

2. It must accommodate the pluralism of theological schools and their educational systems. To speak of pluralism is very much in vogue among theological educators. It has become so commonplace as to mask critical issues inherent in many uses of the word. For example, at times it is used to express a very noncontroversial observation that various forms of theological schools do in fact exist throughout the world.¹⁹ At other times, the concept “pluralism” shifts from a descriptive to a normative term and is used in ways that imply, without supporting argument, that all cases of differences are in fact equally valid. In this context, pluralism is used in order to focus on the concreteness of theological educational systems and the differences that characterize them. A global system of theological degrees must take into account the differences that not only exist but that may be inherent in the nature of theological schools and their educational enterprises.

3. It must provide an overarching structure that is consonant with the unity of theological education. How might this be formulated?

Criteria two suggests that a system of theological degrees should be compatible in meaning and general character with indigenous degrees used by higher education at the local level. Criteria one, however, refers to the basis by which the distinctive character of theological degrees is to be determined. This third criteria assumes that all theological schools share a common reality. They all are or seek to be theological. The viability of a global system of theological degrees will ultimately depend upon the extent to which this unity is operative, either explicitly or implicitly, throughout the world.

David Kelsey has characterized the issues of unity and pluralism as the most critical to the current debate concerning the theological nature of theological education.²⁰ There is little question but that the manner in which these issues are resolved will shape the future of theological education in fundamental ways.

As to the viability of a shared system of theological degrees, the issues concerning unity will also be determinative.

From such resolutions will come the theoretical foundations upon which a system or potential systems of theological degrees can be based.

In keeping with this claim, this paper puts forth two proposals. The first is a proposal concerning the general principle by which the unity of theological education should be conceived. The second pertains to a system of theological degrees based upon the proposed principle of unity.

IX

As indicated above, projecting an inclusive system of theological degrees requires a conceptualization of the unity that is common to all theological schools. This is in itself a theological undertaking and is not the purpose of this paper. However, some notion of the nature of this unity, however rudimentary and tentative, is required in order to undertake a serious discussion of a global system of theological degrees or to establish a framework within which existing theological education can be assessed and interpreted on a universal scale.

Accordingly, we propose that the principle of unity that should guide considerations of a system of theological degrees should be stated as follows: *Focus on the purposes or ends of theological education*. In other words, the unity of theological education should be conceived teleologically.²¹

By definition, the proposal excludes other alternatives. It precludes efforts to conceive of the unity of theological education in terms of structures, systems, programs, content, or educational methods. Such an approach would enable theological schools to participate in wide-ranging discussion regardless of the theological, philosophical, or cultural differences that may exist within the community of schools. Whether the ends or purposes of theological education are conceived in relation to the dynamics of faith (e.g., faith seeking understanding or other forms of witness) or the community of faith (e.g., preparing church leadership, Christian identity and praxis, etc.), such differences need not curtail serious consideration of an overarching system of theological degrees.

The second proposal sketches the rudiments of a degree structure for theological education. But before doing so, it would be well to summarize key points addressed above. Academic credentials are the formal means of acknowledging educational or academic achievements. As official instruments, they certify the fulfillment of educational ends and are valued in proportion to the confidence that is enjoyed by the certifying institution. A global system of theological degrees must reflect the theological nature of theological education, and the concreteness and pluralism of its implementation. Finally, it is argued that a global system of degrees is viable only to the extent that theological schools share some identifying unity underlying institutional differences, and that this unity should be conceived and interpreted teleologically.

In keeping with the foregoing, a proposed system of theological degrees should include the following characteristics:

- a. It should be inclusive of the fullest range of educational missions, each of which constitutes the fulfillment of a discrete educational goal appropriate to theological education.
- b. It should include a sufficient number of degree titles as required to fully recognize the different goals and purposes of theological education without redundancy or duplication.
- c. It should be systematic in character; that is, degrees should be structured in such ways as to flow from one to another providing maximum flexibility and freedom of transition.
- d. Each degree should mark the successful completion of a level of academic achievement without precluding following steps or stages. Each degree should be based upon its own requirements and goals and made available to all who successfully fulfill them.²²

A global system of theological degrees should include eight modes of academic achievement. Although each local educational system may engage only in one or some of the following degrees, it is proposed that this system be accepted as the means for a reciprocal understanding of theological degrees offered in areas throughout the world. The proposed designations and general specifications for each are as follows:

1. Preparatory Certification

Theological education may begin with programs devoted to the preparation of persons for study at the university or college level. Ordinarily, this form of theological education is recognized not by a degree but by such other forms of academic credentials as certificates or diplomas.

2. The First Degree

As an undergraduate degree, the baccalaureate should signify the completion of a general, liberal arts education as defined by the educational and cultural heritage of the certifying theological institution. As a theological degree, it should be directed to the critical understanding of the religious heritage of one's culture, including introduction to its religious writings, theology, and traditions, both in historical and contemporary contexts. Although it should not be determined by professional educational objectives, it should represent the completion of studies that constitute a sound basis for additional theological studies. Examples: Bachelor of Arts (representing three or four years of university, college, or Bible school study; the U.S., Canadian, and English systems), Diploma (two years of university study, French system), Statexamen (two to four years of university study, German system), etc.

3. The Intermediate Degree

This degree signifies the completion of at least one year of full-time study beyond the undergraduate level resulting in the

acquisition of the requisites for independent study and research directed to the doctorate or a critical theological understanding and interpretation of one's religious and cultural heritage. Examples: Master of Arts, License (French system), Magister Artium (German system), etc.²³

4. **The First Professional Degree**²⁴

The primary purpose of this degree is to prepare persons to begin the practice of ministry as defined by the religious communities that are served by the theological institution. The degree recognizes the completion of both academic and practical studies that are directed to at least four sets of educational objectives: (a) a thorough and critical understanding of the scriptures, theology, historical tradition, and ministry of the religious heritage and faith of the religious community; (b) an understanding of the social and cultural structures and realities within which religious bodies and institutions exist and carry out their missions; (c) the nurturing of basic arts of ministry; and (d) the growth and maturing of personal and spiritual formation. This degree should represent at least three years of full-time study beyond the baccalaureate. Examples: Master of Divinity or Bachelor of Divinity, License (French system), Diploma (German system), S.T.B. (Roman Catholic), etc.

In the history of theological education, the normative degree for ministry has required at least three years of graduate study. However, there is a growing trend of awarding as a first professional degree recognition of two-year studies directed to specialized ministries. Such degrees as the Master of Religious Education and the Master of Sacred Music have the longest history. More recent innovations, especially in North America, have been degrees designated as Master of Arts in (Name of specialized ministry added, e.g. "Pastoral Counseling"). In other regions, this form of education may be recognized by certificates or diplomas.

5. **The Intermediate Professional Degree**

It is generally acknowledged that the first professional theological degree is intended to certify an initial level of educational achievement and development required to begin the practice of ministry. Many schools offer programs that focus on the fuller mastery of one of the theological disciplines or on a particular form or aspect of ministry. These programs are intended for holders of the Master of Divinity degree and usually require at least one year of study beyond the first professional degree. Examples: Master of Theology or Master of Sacred Theology (North America), S.T.L. (Roman Catholic), etc.

6. **The Final Professional Degree**

As the general educational levels of society have increased, theological schools especially in North America have developed educational programs for ministers beyond those provided by the first and intermediate professional degrees. These programs have been designed at the doctoral level and are intended to provide a "level of knowledge, theoretical clarity, and competence of practice commensurate with the

highest earned degree for the profession and practice of ministry."²⁵ As the final professional doctorate, this degree is intended to certify the acquisition of advanced knowledge and understanding of ministry in relation to the basic biblical, historical, systematic, and practical theological disciplines. In addition, the degree represents the additional development of competencies required for effective ministry informed by a comprehensive and critical theory of ministry, and a contribution to the understanding and practice of ministry as evidenced by a doctoral level project. Examples: Doctor of Ministry (North America). There are no equivalents in other national systems.²⁶

7. **The Academic Doctorate**

In some cases as in Germany, the doctorate is the first earned degree. In most other systems, it is the culmination of the degree structure and presupposes as requisites the various forms of academic accomplishment represented by all related degrees. In both cases, the system of degrees and academic credentials are so structured as to come to termination in the academic doctorate. As theological degrees, the Ph.D. and the Th.D. are intended to certify academic preparation required for teaching and research, and in this regard represent educational purposes that have been in effect since the middle ages.

In many parts of the world, the Ph.D. and Th.D. have become indistinguishable as theological degrees. However, there are substantial reasons for maintaining differences between the two. Theological education requires faculty prepared in the context of religious studies with its focus on what is identified as the academic or nonconfessional study of religion in all of its manifestations. In addition, it needs faculty who reflect the distinctive approaches and orientation embodied in theological degrees. Therefore, the distinction between the Th.D. and the Ph.D. should be maintained. The Th.D. should presuppose the first professional theological degree and be structured accordingly. Either doctorate should certify achievement required for teaching and research.

Examples: Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Theology, Doctor of Sacred Theology, Doctorate de Troisieme Cycle (French system), etc.

8. **Post-Doctoral Degree**

In North America, the Ph.D. and Th.D. are considered the highest earned academic degree. In Europe and elsewhere, a higher doctorate has been established. Almost without exception, these post doctorates are awarded on the basis of published scholarship, are intended to recognize mature scholarship, and usually are awarded after the onset of one's teaching or scholarly career. In France and Germany, the higher degree involves additional study and qualifies one for appointment to a professorship.

As theological education faces the future, there may be good reason to adopt a system of post-doctoral recognition based upon specialized study and published research. In the sciences, formal programs of post-doctoral study and research

are well established, and in some fields of natural science, it is not an insignificant qualification for university faculty appointment. Although this is not generally the case in theology, post-doctoral recognition could provide very significant impetus and support for advancing theological scholarship. It could serve to acknowledge in very special ways those scholars who in extraordinary ways advance the knowledge and teachings of the church regarding its faith and mission. If so, the post-doctoral degree would need to reflect achievement that is clearly distinguishable, on one hand, from the Ph.D. and Th.D. and, on the other hand, the plethora of honorary degrees ("honoris causa") that are currently awarded by many theological institutions for reasons other than academic, educational, or scholarly achievements. Examples: Doctorat D'état or Agrégé (French system), Habilitation (German system), Livre Docencia (Brazil). It should be noted that in England, Wales, and Scotland, the Doctor of Divinity is awarded as the highest theological degree. This nomenclature is not recommended in view of the fact that especially in the United States and other regions, the D.D. is an honorary and not an earned degree.

X

In conclusion, the following comments are offered. First of all, discussion regarding the structure of theological degrees should have as its purpose not the creation of a single, uniform, all embracing system to which all must conform but rather the emergence of a conceptual framework of equivalents in terms of which individual systems of theological degrees can be interpreted and assessed. Such a framework would be of considerable practical value to the world community of theological schools.

The second intention of a thorough review of degree structures would be to undertake a far-ranging consideration of the general standards that should define each of the levels of academic achievement by which theological education should be structured or ordered regardless of degree systems that may prevail in various regions of the world. This is by far the more substantive, if not formidable, task. Again it must be made clear that the intention of such a task would not be to establish or mandate a single, uniform, worldwide set of standards to which all regional or local institutions should conform. Instead, the purpose would be an invitation to undertake a mutual search for commonalities that both reflect and constitute the unity of purposes shared by all theological institutions. Such a discussion could be of immeasurable value to theological education as a global enterprise for it would focus attention on the most decisive questions confronting theological educators; namely, what is theological about theological education? What makes theological education different from closely related academic enterprises? How can the nature and distinctive purposes of theological education be translated into educational goals and standards that will serve as norms for the

enterprise? From such explorations might come the benefits of conceptual clarification concerning the nature of theological education and mutual understanding, if not agreement, regarding a number of very important instrumental practices as theological degrees.

If such undertakings require justification, let it be argued that the future of theological education will be charted by movement from local or regional boundaries to global contexts. In this transition, it will be imperative that theological educators become more critically self conscious about their distinctive mission and purposes. Although degree structures possess only instrumental significance and value, as seen above, they reflect matters of primary importance to the entire enterprise. As such, they can be instruments for the kind of reflections and engagements that are essential to the ongoing agendas of theological educators.

WOCATI CONGRESS 96 offers a unique opportunity for theological educators to consider seriously and productively the potential values, issues, and defining characteristics of a global framework of theological degrees and credentials. Accordingly, there are at least two challenges that confront the CONGRESS in this regard:

1. To reach consensus regarding the ingredients of a general and defining system of theological degrees and credentials (see Section IX above).
2. To authorize WOCATI to plan and initiate studies and discussions directed to the identification of global standards by which each level or mission of theological education should be defined and evaluated, and to devise means of engaging member associations and organizations in these efforts. These two recommendations are put forward in the conviction that such actions by the CONGRESS would provide an agenda for WOCATI with long-range implications for advancing theological education as a coherent, global enterprise.

Endnotes

1. For example, in 1961 the American Baptist Churches, USA specified that the educational standards for ordination are the possession of the Bachelor of Arts and the Master of Divinity degrees awarded by accredited institutions. Exceptions to these degree requirements were approved in 1973 to include experience, carefully defined, as an equivalent to formal educational preparation. The purpose for this change was to foster diversity and inclusiveness in the church's ministry.
2. See Clark Kerr, "Foreword," in Stephen H. Spurr, *Academic Degree Structures: Innovative Approaches*, (McGraw Hill: New York, 1970), p. v.
3. Spurr, p. 1.
4. Ibid, p. 4.
5. Historical references are based primarily on Rashdall, Hastings, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, F.M. Powicke and A.B. Emden (eds), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), and Spurr, pp. 9ff.

6. Spurr, p. 10.
7. Abdel R. Wentz, *History of the Gettysburg Theological Seminary*, (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1926), pp. 104ff.
8. See George W. Richards, *History of the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in the United States*, (Lancaster, PA, 1952), p. 16.
9. The charter of the first university in Massachusetts, Harvard, established in 1636, includes the following purpose: to insure the perpetuation of an educated ministry "when our present ministers shall lie in the dust."
10. Union Theological Seminary, New York, established the B.D. degree in 1896. The General Theological Seminary (Episcopal) of New York, authorized the granting of the Bachelor of Sacred Theology in 1876. Gettysburg Theological Seminary (Lutheran) introduced the B.D. degree in 1894. Auburn Theological Seminary (Presbyterian) was authorized to grant the degree in 1904. An exception to this history is Bexley Hall (Episcopal), which conferred the B.D. degree for two years in the 1830s, but discontinued it thereafter until 1876. In the beginning, the B.D. degree was granted only upon the fulfillment of requirements such as a comprehensive examination and final thesis in addition to the regular course of study. Those only completing the regular course of study continued to receive a certificate of study.
11. Information provided by Dr. C. Douglas Jay, former principal of Emmanuel College of Victoria University, Toronto. My dependence on Dr. Jay's letter of October 28, 1993 reflects the almost total absence of documented study of theological degrees throughout the world.
12. Information provided by Dr. Jaci Maraschin.
13. Information provided by Msgr. Walter Endyvean.
14. Information provided by Dr. Yeow Choo Lak.
15. Minutes of the Eighth Biennial Meeting, Conference of Theological Seminaries and Colleges in the United States and Canada, June 7-9, 1932, pp. 14-15.
16. For an account of the history and assessment of the D.Min. degree, see Jackson W. Carroll and Barbara G. Wheeler, "Doctor of Ministry Program: History, Summary of Findings and Recommendations," *Theological Education*, Spring, 1987, pp. 7-52.
17. This formulation of the theory of academic degrees is based on the suggestions of Spurr, pp. 1 ff.
18. For the past decade, theological educators throughout the world but especially in North America have conducted what has been described as "the most extensive debate in print about theological schooling that has ever been published." David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), p. 1. Kelsey offers the most comprehensive and incisive analysis of the major publications produced by this debate since Farley's important and influential work, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). The most recent contribution is by Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological About a Theological School* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992).
19. Kelsey, p. 116.
20. For a brief summary of his argument, see *Between Athens and Berlin*, pp. 221-225.
21. I am dependent upon David Kelsey for this formulation of the proposal. See Kelsey, p. 224.
22. See Spurr, pp. 26-28.
23. The academic master's degree poses a serious conceptual problem. Unlike professional masters' degrees, there are no clear, distinctive educational goals or levels of competence that set them apart as degrees. The practice has been to define them either in terms of additional units of study completed beyond the baccalaureate level of at least one year duration, or in recognition of completing the first stage of a doctorate. In either case, it is not clear what specific level of achievement such degrees certify.
24. The term "professional" is controversial and ambiguous when applied to theological education. For a very helpful discussion of these issues, see Hough and Cobb, *Christian Identity and Theological Education* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985), especially pp. 77-94. Also Browning, "Toward a Fundamental and Strategic Practical Theology," in Wheeler and Farley, *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991) pp. 295-328. In this regard, a very influential source has been Donald A. Schoen, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publications, 1987).
25. The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, *Bulletin 40*, Part 3, p. 44.
26. In the United States and Canada, the Doctor of Missiology is a two-year, post-M.Div. professional degree intended to prepare persons for cross-cultural ministries. Although only recently adopted in North America, it has been granted by the Gregorian University in Rome since 1932. In this latter case, it is a research degree related to the work of missionary orders. In the North American setting, the degree is defined by goals that are directed either to transcultural teaching or ministry.

WOCATI News

is published by

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