



All About Doctoral Programs¹

What's Happening Today

Interview with Ted Ward

Dr. Ted Ward has extensive experience with doctoral programs both in a secular university and in a seminary setting. While at Michigan State, he was responsible for mentoring 90 doctoral graduates, the majority of whom are in Christian ministries and missions. For the past nine years, he has directed doctoral programs in educational studies and intercultural studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

SGSH:² *There are so many different doctoral programs in existence at seminaries and Christian graduate schools. How do they differ?*

Ward: Generally, there are two different types of doctoral programs in Christian institutions: One is a research degree and the other a ministry degree. People in academic careers almost invariably need a research degree. People in ministry roles who intend to stay in ministry—pastors, missionaries, and those who work in support ministries in the church or para-church organizations—commonly find their needs met in a ministry doctorate.

There is a nomenclature issue which must be addressed if one is to begin differentiating between the various doctoral programs in existence. The Doctor of Philosophy is presumed to be something that everyone understands but, in reality, hardly anyone does. The Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) came from the latter 19th century, at which time the highest study in any field was study of the philosophy of that field. Thus, the highest study of theology would be presumed to be the study of the philosophy of theology (Ph.D. in Theology.)

Some schools, however, call their program the Doctor of Theology. This comes from a long tradition, dating back to the early 1900's, of specialized fields using the name of their field instead of Ph.D. as in Doctor of Science (D.Sc.) and Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.), both names of widely established research degrees. The Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) began this way at major American universities as a degree specializing in the academic and research study of education. Consequently, the Ed.D. had the same status at most universities as a Ph.D. in Education. More recently, the structure of the Ed.D. has changed and is now a degree for “practitioners” in various educational areas.

SGSH: *How are the requirements for a ministry doctorate different from that of a research doctorate?*

Ward: There is a substantial difference between the two doctorates in both time and effort. In general, research degrees are far more demanding and intensive. They also involve a residency requirement. In the United States, the typical research degree is nominally 2-3 years of full-time study.

The major value of a research degree is that it provides for the development of the research skills necessary to extend and develop a field into new areas of understanding. A person should not go into a research doctorate unless he or she expects to join the frontier of a field. A research degree requires much reading and research to understand the field, and then to extend it into new areas of inquiry and understanding.

¹An Interview with Ted Ward in 1994 by Carol Swemline, Program Administrator and Director of Special Projects, First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, Hollywood, California

²Seminary and Graduate School Handbook

By contract, the ministry degree is limited to the cultivation of understanding of literature and research already in existence. It is generally composed of some 10-15 individual courses taken over a number of years. Ministry degrees are a useful means of continuing education, generally spread over 5-7 years with a person taking a few courses per year.

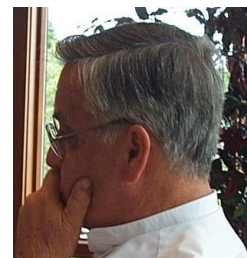
I've known people to take as many as 11 years to complete a ministry degree. They may come to a campus or teaching center for a week or two for each course. Their reading is done ahead of time with papers and follow-up work completed afterward. Sometimes this follow-up work is closely related to the ministry task. In fact, one of the more important qualities of a ministry doctorate is that it can be closely related to the actual tasks and needs of ministry.

Unlike the research degree, the ministry degree has little standing in the academic community, and is not the degree needed for professorial recognition and advancement in the field of higher education. Previously, Bible colleges have commonly accepted the ministry degree, but today they tend to look for faculty members with academic research degrees.

SGSH: *What types of programs are generally offered by seminaries and Christian graduate schools?*

Ward: There are several kinds of doctoral programs currently available in Christian institutions. There is a shortage of schools offering a solid research doctorate in the field of Religious Education. The largest program is at Southwestern Seminary (Southern Baptist) in Fort Worth, Texas. Trinity probably has the second largest. Many schools offer research degrees in theology and its several divisions such as the Ph.D. in Old Testament, the Ph.D. in New Testament, or the Doctor of Theology. The ministry doctorate (D. Min.) is also offered by a number of schools.

In the field of missions, there are a number of schools that offer the research degree in missions. Accreditation standards for the research degree in missions were established less than 10 years ago. At that time, accreditation standards were built on the research degree models existing at Fuller and Asbury. I believe a number of schools which had a ministry-model D.Miss. program weren't able to shift their resources to the research degree. Some changed it to a Doctor of Ministry degree in Missions, a missions-related ministry degree.



There are still some ministry-type D.Miss. programs in existence, although probably fewer than 15 of them in the United States and Canada. The new nomenclature for the research degree in missions is steadily becoming the Ph.D. in Intercultural Studies.

SGSH: *What should individuals look for in a doctoral program?*

Ward: While a good academic doctorate must provide for a broad and multidisciplinary understanding of a field, a good doctoral program must have a great deal of flexibility—allowing individuals to identify and pursue very specific and, perhaps, narrow aspects of a frontier. The student must be provided with a breadth of understanding, as well as narrowness and precise focus of new inquiry. It's also crucial to find at least one faculty person and at least two other students who are clearly interested in the same things that motivate the doctoral student. It is important to be in a small community of scholarship with like-minded persons.

In looking for a good D.Min. program, look for one with good leadership within the program—good ministry-oriented leadership. A person should not be simply coached into taking courses, but should receive counsel and assessment to help plan for a program of continuing education individualized to fit one's strengths, weaknesses, and ministry situation—even if it means stretching out the program until the right courses become available.

SGSH: *How does the classroom format for a doctoral program differ from that used at the master's level?*

Ward: Most doctoral programs use a mentoring model for at least the dissertation research. The dissertation is a narrowly focused research paper which usually involves an investigation in the disciplines and technical aspects of the field. In education and in missions, the social science model

is generally used for field research. Some programs require a great deal of library work and research. Others emphasize fieldwork.

SGSH: Should a person pursue a doctoral program at the same school where he or she has received a master's degree?

Ward: Generally, it's not recommended yet it isn't wrong. It depends on whether one is dealing with a large enough faculty to get a variety of input. If a person uses the same small faculty cluster for both programs, it is very narrowing.

SGSH: What is the future of doctoral programs?

Ward: Much of formal education is not very creative, and doctoral programs are no exception. I like to think our program at Trinity has a creative edge. I really believe there is one emerging value in doctoral study that may ultimately affect much of formal education. This is the emergence of a true sense of a community of learners.

The best doctoral programs today place a great deal of emphasis on peer community and a minimal amount of competition. One of the lovely things about completing a doctoral program is that people are interested in what one can do, not in degrees and grades. At Trinity, we put tremendous effort into building a community of scholarship for faculty and students. This type of learning really changes one's orientation.

SGSH: What is the benefit of professional doctorates to a field of study?

Ward: It's hard to measure, but there's a generalized hope that it does make a difference. The main thing one would expect from a D.Min. graduate is that this person has built a habit of life-long learning, of continuing to learn, and to stretch through systematic reading and learning. The key question is, "What kind of sustainable habits have been built into a person's life?"

An example of the benefit of a professional doctorate on a field of study can be seen in the D.Miss. degree. This degree program has brought a much more careful understanding of the contextualization tasks of modern missions to the field of missiology. There isn't much room in the mission world today for the raw amateurism of the past that made great contributions without careful preliminary effort in preparation and study.

Another benefit of the D.Miss. degree is the development of research competencies so that the research base continues to expand. The quality of literature in missions today is growing rapidly. And a significant number of people in the field are well-grounded in good theoretical material.