

Honorary Doctorates

Let's Talk About It

A SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM THE DESK OF THE
GENERAL OVERSEER



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A TITLE WITH A STORY

Most every time someone refers to me as Dr. Hill in a one-on-one conversation, especially at the beginning, I'm quick to say, "please drop the Doctor thing and just call me Tim. I'm not doing brain surgery until next week." Someone with a doctorate in psychology can tell me the real reason I do that, but here's the deal:

In 2006, while serving as Secretary General of the Church of God, I was notified by the Church of God School of Theology (now the Pentecostal Theological Seminary) that Dr. Stephen Land, then President of the Seminary, had recommended to the Board that I have conferred on me an honorary doctorate degree (or "honoris causa" - Latin for the sake of honor). It was stated that this honor was being bestowed to recognize various aspects of my ministry, particularly the songwriting and musical compositions I had created over the previous 30 years. This incredible honor was given to me during the commencement activities in the Spring of 2006.

During the weekend of activities associated with commencement, I was called upon to make some remarks at the Friday evening dinner recognizing faculty and student achievements. I stood behind the podium and looked into the faces of men and women who had "earned" doctorates, in the sense that is typically recognized. Those good folks also had "earned" school bills that tipped the scales anywhere from \$60,000 to \$100,000, depending upon their unique experiences.

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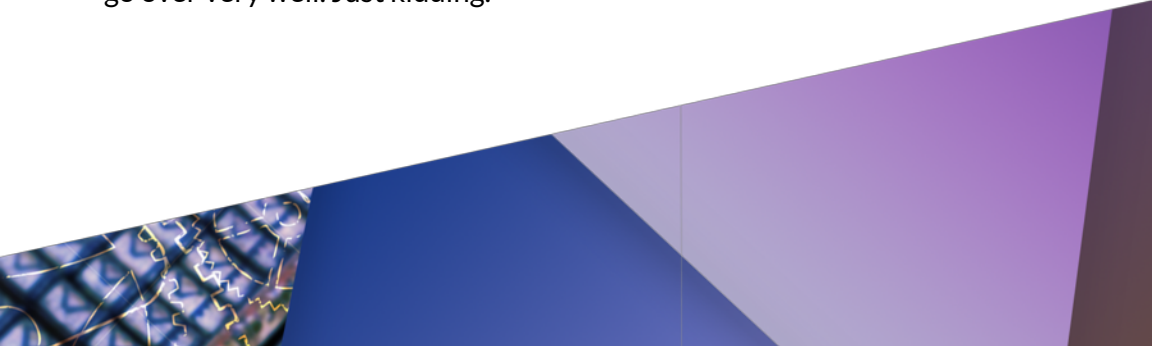
I remember saying that night, and almost to the very word, “thank you, President Land and faculty. I am indeed honored and certainly feel affirmed that you would recognize that my songs are viewed as outlets of ministry that have touched people’s heart and reaped a harvest. I don’t take this lightly but I assure you, I receive this honor for what it is. You have honored me and I am deeply moved. However, I commit to those of you that have walked these halls, set at these desks and spent countless hours in research and years in study, I will not abuse this privilege by loosely touting the nomenclature of ‘Doctor.’”

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I had previously notified those in charge that I would decline to speak the next day at the commencement exercise, simply because those gathered had come to honor the deserving students. As planned, I did not speak, but I allowed the stole to be placed around my neck while the certificate was placed in my hands. I was indeed highly honored.

A RELUCTANTLY USED TITLE

To this day, I don’t sign my letters “Dr. Hill.” I don’t sign books “Dr. Hill.” My wife doesn’t call me “Dr. Hill.” I tried to enforce that once and it just didn’t go over very well. Just kidding.



Now granted, when you see my name on a publicity piece or video coming from the Church of God or other organizations, you've likely seen "Dr." preceding my name. I don't ask for that and certainly don't require it. Everyone at the office usually refers to me as "Brother Hill." I've even indicated that I still like the name "Pastor." I'd even be fine if most of the time just my first name was used.

Out of deference to the Office of the General Overseer, a lot of people now use the term "Bishop" to refer to me. The bottom line is I'm not hung up on it. As my good departed friend, Kenny Hinson, used to sing, you can just call me "Gone," and that'll be fine with me.

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Now, I have no problem at all with anyone who has received an honorary degree allowing the title to be used reasonably. I do agree, however, with those who say that it has been abused too often, regardless of whether it came from a "degree mill" or a high and honorable institution, like the Pentecostal Theological Seminary.

We all have gone to school. Some have passed through the Ivy League hallways of higher learning while other have gone through the school of hard knocks. Whether we have an earned degree on the wall or bear the marks of life's experiences on the walls of our heart, we each have a story to tell and a contribution to make. But with that said, many who have invested the time and money to earn their advanced degrees may be strongly offended at anyone who would carelessly lay claim to the title of "Doctor," especially if they established a pretense of equal degree standing. On the other hand, many who have received honorary doctorates may feel that their life's work and achievements speak for themselves, and therefore have given them the same privileges of those with an earned degree.

SO WHAT CAN OR SHOULD BE DONE?

So, taking all this into account, what can or should be done?

- *Be up front and truthful about your honorary degree. It is what it is. Nothing more and nothing less.*
- *Recognize the significance of an honorary doctorate. It means a lot to the recipient, as well as the granting institution. Credible institutions don't hand them out every day.*
- *Don't abuse your honorary degree. If you want to let people refer to you as "Doctor," that is fine, but it should not be demanded - or even expected.*
- *Remember that not everyone knows the difference. That is why those of us who have been conferred an honorary degree need to be careful. I'm not trained in psychology or a thousand other things, so I don't need to act like it. There is no doubt that I've learned a lot by experience, but I know my limits and I won't pretend or hide behind a piece of paper, regardless of where it came from.*
- *Be appreciative. If you have an honorary degree, there is usually a very good reason. You did something that deserves recognition, but accept it, be grateful, and move on.*
- *Don't use your honorary degree as an excuse to quit pursuing academic excellence. Any degree recognizes a person's accomplishments up to that point in time. If you have been conferred an honorary degree, who's to stop you from advancing further? If you have an "earned" degree, again, who's to stop you from advancing further or gaining another degree in a different field?*
- *Give mutual respect. Everyone has a story that we should appreciate. The academician has a story that led to their success. Those who couldn't, or didn't, take advantage of higher educational opportunities also often have an equally compelling story.*

EARNING A TITLE

While the word “earned” in the degree sense is clearly understood, it’s probably not a good thing to discredit anyone who may not have walked the traditional educational path by telling them they haven’t “earned” what they have.

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Admittedly, I do not have an “earned” doctorate degree in the traditional sense. Fresh out of high school, I attended Weatherford College. Then while pastoring a small church, I attended Tarrant County College. I later attended classes at Texas Christian University and then transferred to Lee University, where I graduated in 1988 with a Bachelors of Science degree. Afterwards, I was a student at Pentecostal Theological Seminary - and have high regard for their level of instructional guidance.

To be overly honest and open, I do not consider myself worthy of any honor I have had bestowed upon me. God has been better to me than I deserve and I’m sure you could say the same. The truth is, many have earned degrees of one kind or another - and some of us have earned some things by degree, a little here and a little there.

CONCLUSION

We've all earned the gray in our hair, if we have any hair left. We've all earned the wrinkles that mark our brow. We've all earned the callouses on our knees from midnight prayer. And by our fallen nature, we've earned the right to admit with Paul, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't."

Thankfully, God conferred upon us all the cap and gown of his mercy and matriculated us into the kingdom of his dear Son. And now we go from "Glory to Glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Let's Keep Talking About It....

Tim Hill

General Overseer



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