

Many Here Hold Doctorates of Unaccredited College

By LINDA CHARLTON

A number of people in the fields of education and mental health in the New York City area — some in responsible academic positions, many others treating emotional problems or teaching others how to — are equipped with doctorates from an unaccredited Bible college in Canada.

The “degrees” and the various uses to which they are being put do not seem to involve matters of legality. But particularly because persons with such doctorates are deeply involved in mental therapy and counseling, Dr. Morton Schilling, incoming executive director of the prestigious New York State Psychological Asso-

ciation, said yesterday that he considered them “a serious professional and ethical problem” and a “significant hazard to the consumer.”

The school, Philathea College, was set up in 1946 in London, Ont., by Benjamin C. Eckardt, a clergyman in the Church of Christ who also has the title of Bishop of Ontario in the Free Protestant Episcopal Church.

It was chartered as a religious training school that could grant only such diplomas as “Licentiate of Theology.” When Philathea applied last April to the appropriate provincial agency to have its charter amended to include degree-granting powers, the request was rejected.

In fact, said H. H. Walker, Deputy Minister of the Ontario Department of Colleges and Universities: “If Philathea were to apply today for incorporation, we would not approve of their use of the word college.”

In its latest catalogue, however—it is the 1969-71 cata-



The New York Times/Frank Lodge
A Philathea College building in London, Ontario



On the college seal is the Latin motto, “God made all things.”

logue, with a 1971-73 supplement and a new date pasted to its cover—Philathea offers three kinds of bachelor’s degrees as well as the degree of doctor of philosophy. These degrees have been offered for some years at the college, which has a small three-part campus in London.

A survey by The New York

Times reveals that the holders of Philathea doctorates—either “honorary” or “earned” — include the founder of a Long Island school for gifted children; faculty members at Fordham University and the City University of New York and the former director of a city - fi-

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nanced drug program whose contract was allowed to lapse after his program was evaluated as offering "pseudo-psychotherapy." Also holding Philathea "doctorates" are many people involved in promoting and dispensing forms of therapy for emotional disorders.

Asked for comment, spokesmen for several of the colleges with Philathea (pronounced "fil-LAY-thea") doctorates on their staffs said that they were aware of the dubious authenticity of the degrees. But, in general, they said that the doctorate was irrelevant to the person's job or was outweighed by other considerations.

An inquiry to the office of State Attorney General Louis J. Lefkowitz about Philathea and the use of its degrees here elicited this response yesterday from Stephen Mindell, deputy head of the Consumer Frauds Bureau: "The matter is under inquiry by the Attorney General's office." He would not comment further.

A 'Convenient Way'

One Philathea "graduate" is Joseph Wysong, who lists himself in the Manhattan telephone book with "Ph.D" after his name. He said he worked as "human relations consultant" for the city Health Department last year and now practiced gestalt therapy. Dr. Wysong said he chose Philathea because it "seemed like a very convenient way to get a degree—the minimal attendance requirements."

While there was some commuting necessary to attend classes at Philathea itself, Dr. Wysong said there was also a good deal of "extension-type" work involved, that is, correspondence work.

Another graduate is Dr. Roger Bell, director of the Institute of Applied Psychotherapy, whose \$98,000 contract with the city's Addiction Services Agency was not renewed after an evaluation by an outside licensed psychologist concluded that the program being offered was pseudo-psychotherapy that might be dangerous to patients.

Dr. Bell has said he had received his degrees—both undergraduate and a doctorate in religious education—by attending classes held here by Philathea.

The violet-and-white Philathea catalogue displays the college seal—a circle stuffed with such symbols as the lamp of learning, a bishop's crook and mitre, a bearded "student" in approximate Renaissance dress taking notes with a quill pen, a lion and a cross. It offers an array of nonreligious courses, from modern Russian history to cultural aspects of mathematics, but its emphasis is on theological matters.

The catalogue lists the president and chancellor as the "Most Rev." Benjamin C. Eckardt, with "LL.B., Ed.D., D.D., L.H.D., L.L.D.," following his name. The sources of the degrees are not given.

The name "Philathea," according to Dr. Eckardt, means "knowledge with God." According to Peter Smith, a member of the classics department at Columbia University, "philathea" is a nonword, meaning nothing.

Bishop Eckardt, as he prefers to be called, is visiting friends in New York and staying at the Picadilly Hotel. He said in an interview Tuesday that Philathea was "phasing out" its doctoral programs and produced a newspaper clipping about the recent commencement, at which he was quoted as warning the graduating students: "Don't misrepresent your degrees."

'A Bit of a Joke'

The 1972 commencement followed shortly after a series of articles on Philathea that had appeared in The London (Ont.) Free Press. The series prompted questions in the provincial legislature, to which George Kerr, the Ontario Minister of Colleges and Universities, replied that Philathea "is more or less considered a bit of a joke."

In the interview, Dr. Eckardt attributed the phasing out of the doctoral program to "misrepresentation" by "two or three" former students now in New York, whom he would not name. "They were exposed," he said, after inquiries about their credentials.

The college president, a short man who wore a well-cut dark blue suit with a lively violet "rabat" (the buttonless sort of shirt-front worn by clergymen) and an amethyst-studded cross around his clerical collar, said that the school gave degrees only "in religious education, major, and a minor in pastoral counseling or psychology."

All the other courses, he said, were not for credit and were offered to students "only to enlighten their minds and increase their knowledge." Nevertheless, the catalogue assigns each course credits.

Despite an undertaking he signed in 1946 agreeing that the college "will not attempt to offer the degree of Doctor of Philosophy," Dr. Eckardt insisted that the authorities "allow me to give any degree as long as it is in religion."

He produced a small bundle of Xeroxed letters from various officials in the provincial government in response to inquiries. They indicated at least some ambiguity about Philathea's status—that it was not specifically empowered to grant degrees, but that it "may be" within its rights to do so.

All, however, include the



The New York Times
Benjamin C. Eckardt is founder and head of Philathea College.

caveat that Philathea is not a member of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, membership in which is tantamount to accreditation. (Canada does not have a formal accreditation system comparable to that in the United States.)

Gesturing with his ringed right hand—his knuckle-depth Episcopal ring bears a canary diamond, an amethyst, and the figure of a unicorn—Dr. Eckardt said he was expecting a new letter saying that "I have the right to do what I'm doing."

Insists on Legality

He was asked about some Philathea's past and present associates, such as the late Jacob List, the former chancellor. List was a New York City man who was convicted of practicing medicine without a license and of income-tax evasion; he was a practicing psychologist here until his license was revoked in 1942. The present chancellor is L. Lester Beacher, a New York City and East Orange, N. J., optometrist.

Dr. Eckardt said there were "about 200 students" now enrolled at Philathea, of whom 15 are Americans, and 52 faculty members.

Many of Philathea's faculty members have Philathea degrees, but these, Dr. Eckardt explained, are teachers of non-credit courses.

The 1971-73 "addenda" notes that Philathea is "associated with Indiana Northern Univer-

sity," a nonaccredited institution in Gas City, Ind., whose founder and president is Gordon A. DaCosta, a bishop in the Free Protestant Episcopal Church.

Dr. Eckardt insisted, again and again, that "we're not doing anything illegal." In the State of New York, the use of the degrees as credentials for practitioners of various forms of therapy is not illegal, nor is the practice of therapy without any degree at all. It is this that prompted Dr. Schillinger of the New York State Psychological Association to describe the situation here as "what Southern California used to be."

Only the title "psychologist" is protected: It may be used legally only by people who have been licensed by the State Education Department after having fulfilled explicit requirements, including a Ph.D. from a recognized institution, two years of internship and successful completion of a day-long series of examinations.

During the last year, according to Dr. Morton Berger, executive secretary of the state licensing board, "seven or eight" Philathea doctorate-holders applied for the licensing examination and was rejected.

Tightening Rejected

A bill that would have tightened the licensing procedure in the state was defeated in the last session of the Legislature—in large part, according to Dr. Schillinger, because of the concentrated lobbying efforts of several groups in which Philathea graduates figured importantly.

In some cases, it is unclear why those involved—people with otherwise good credentials—spent the time and money—\$1,200 in tuition a year—for the Philathea degree. But because schools are not in session many of them are traveling and could not be reached for comment.

One such graduate is John M. Lowe, associate dean of the School of General Studies at City College, with the faculty rank of assistant professor in the classics department. Dr. Lowe is a summa cum laude graduate of City College and taught at the School of General Studies until assuming his present administrative assignment.

City College "did have some questions" about Philathea, said I. E. Levine, the college public-relations director, "but decided to ignore it and not take it into account as criteria for promotion." Dr. Lowe, out of the country on vacation, could not be reached.

Another graduate is Carl Fields, who was assistant dean of students at Princeton University from 1964 to 1971, and

is now at the University of Zambia in Africa. He had a bachelor's degree from St. John's University and a master's from New York University, and did not need a doctorate for his nonfaculty position, according to a Princeton spokesman.

Clifton E. Kew, a 1971 Philathea Ph.D., is listed as director of research by the Blanton-Peale Graduate Institute of the American Foundation of Religion and Psychiatry, Inc. Mr. Kew, reached for comment at his office, said he was interrupting a session with "a patient." He said he had not known of Philathea's status. Asked about his doctorate in education, he said it came from "Burton College." Told such a college did not exist, he said: "I know."

He returned the call later in the day to say he also had a master's degree in education from Harvard University. He also added that he had "just resigned" from the foundation, and that he was a licensed psychologist; at one time, only a master's degree was required for licensing.

An honorary doctor of letters from Philathea supplies Mrs. Marie Fetsch, the founder of the Sands Point Country Day School-Fetsch Academy on Long Island, with her title of "doctor." Mrs. Fetsch also has honorary doctoral degrees from the Ohio College of Podiatry and the National Police Academy in Venice, Fla., both unaccredited institutions.

School Being Sued

Since she does not teach, Mrs. Fetsch is not required to have academic degrees. The school, and Mrs. Fetsch, are currently being sued for \$600,000 in damages by a group of parents who say the school misrepresented itself. Mrs. Fetsch maintains that they are disgruntled because their children were expelled.

Dr. Schillinger, who said he began "looking into" Philathea after many of its graduates showed up among the lobbyists against the licensing bill, said the danger in such unlicensed practice is that licensing itself is no guarantee of anything more than the "minimum requisite" of scientific training in a "complex, relatively indeterminate" field dealing "with human feelings and experience..."

He estimated there were "several dozen" Philathea graduates—"at least," he said, in the New York City area—were involved in some form of mental-health practice.

Dr. Beyer of the state licensing board added:

"As things stand now, they have a lot of freedom, the whole thing is exceedingly vague, and there's an awful lot of money to be made."