

October 1937

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James J. Walsh

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Recommended Citation

Walsh, James J. (1937) "Steno-Anatomist, Geologist, Bishop," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 5 : No. 4 , Article 4.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol5/iss4/4>

STENO—ANATOMIST, GEOLOGIST, BISHOP

By JAMES J. WALSH, M.D., PH.D.
New York City

"Nicholas Steno (born January 1, 1635, died December 6, 1686) was the first to point out the true origin of fossil animals; he treated of the structure of the earth's crust, clearly portraying the prevalent stratification of rocks, and discriminating between their volcanic, chemical and mechanical modes of origination."—NEW STANDARD ENCYCLOPEDIA.

Those of us who paid any serious attention to anatomy recall very well the duct which runs along the cheek from the parotid gland, emptying into the mouth at the second molar tooth. It is called by the name of its discoverer, the duct of Steno or Stensen. He was a Dane and the Danish form of his name is Stensen, but his books were published in Latin, as were all scientific works at that time, since Latin was the language of scholars, scientific as well as literary.

Few men in the whole history of medicine have had so original a way of looking at things as Steno. Toward the end of his all too brief life after spending years as a student in Italy, he became a convert to the Catholic Church, was ordained a priest, and then consecrated bishop in the hope of converting his people. Hence the surprise that meets most people when they look over the portraits of the professors of anatomy in the anatomical room of the University of Copenhagen and find that one of these professors wears the robes of a Catholic bishop.

Steno was a contemporary of Harvey's, the great English physician, who discovered the circulation of the blood. This discovery attracted so much critical con-

demnation that Harvey declared it cost him half his consultant practice. One thing Harvey knew was lacking in his demonstration of the circulation, namely, the force that accomplished it. Steno demonstrated that the heart was a muscle, and thus supplied one of the important missing links of Harvey's demonstration of the circulation. Up to that time the heart had been thought of as an organ of the emotions and Steno was actually ridiculed a good deal for daring to suggest that this important organ to which was attributed not only love but also thought was just a muscle pump. Fortunately Steno had no practice to be hurt by criticism. He was occupied with medical science rather than medical practice. He would have suffered the same fate as Harvey for his originality; both of them learned the precious lesson that physicians do not readily accept new developments. Scientists have been much more inclined to refuse acceptance of scientific novelties than have clergymen or the Church.

The most surprising feature of Steno's scientific work is the youthful age at which it was accomplished. He discovered the duct named after him when he was only twenty-three. He was only a little more than twenty-five when

he made his observations on the glands of the eye and on muscles in which he proclaims the muscular nature of the heart. During the following years he did a good deal of work on brain anatomy and cleared up some very dubious physiology of the brain. When he was about thirty he went down to Italy in order to secure better opportunities for the study of anatomy than he could find anywhere else. It was his residence in Rome that brought about his conversion to the Church.

In the meantime he had devoted himself to the study of fossils, and had written some very interesting disquisitions with regard to the significance of geological appearances of various kinds so that he came to be known as one of the founders in geology. It would be easy to think that he had devoted himself to geological study and had made some discoveries, but that these might readily be presumed to be of very little significance. That is not the way that the geologists of his time and of ours think of him.

When the International Congress of Geologists met in Bologna in 1881, they prorogued the last session of the Congress in order to meet at Florence and unveil a bust erected in honor of Bishop Steno as one of the founders of their science. They unveiled a tablet with the following inscription in Latin in which was said:

"You behold here, Traveler, the bust of Nicholas Steno, as it was set up by more than a thousand

scientists from all over the world as a memorial. The geologists of the world after their meeting in Bologna, under the presidency of Count John Capellini, made a pilgrimage to his tomb and in the presence of the chosen representatives of the municipality and of the learned professors of the University, honored the mortal ashes of this man, illustrious among geologists and anatomists."

He was universally acknowledged as one of the greatest original thinkers of his time, and visitors to Florence were very proud of the opportunity to meet him. Toward the end of his life he confessed sincerely how much his conversion to the Church meant for him:

"Tomorrow I shall finish, God willing, the eighteenth year of my happy life as a member of the Church. I feel that my own ingratitude toward God, my slowness in His service, make me unworthy of His graces. I hope that I may obtain pardon for the past and grace for the future in order in some measure to repay all the favors that have been conferred on me."

He was noted for his devotion to poverty. He insisted on making the pilgrimage to Loretto on foot and refused to enter his diocese in a carriage which the Duke of Hanover had provided for him. Christ, the Son of God, had given Himself to poverty. Steno thought that all who were representatives of Christ, or claimed to be, should be devoted to this same purpose.