

The Author Responds

I’m grateful to all the respondents who took the time to write thoughtful comments on my article, and so to reinforce what I think is one of the great strengths of *The Hinge* — that it not only encourages discussion of significant issues in the church, but actually initiates it within its own pages. Since the opinions expressed by the respondents were largely in accord with one another, I would like to lift out a few salient themes that I find running through their comments, and that could serve as a springboard to the next round of discussions.

- There are, in fact, plenty of people in our churches who would relish the opportunity to discuss matters of theology, and who look to their pastors to help them do this with integrity and responsibility, but in a safe place where they can bring their honest doubts and half-baked theological formulations without having to apologize for them. To use that word again, we need to provide places in the church where people can be *exploratory*, even playful, in their appropriation of the faith. As Truman notes, this makes something like the *Moravian Covenant for Christian Living* the beginning of a conversation, and not the “last word.”

- This entails the notion that there are lots of ways to do theology (including, yes, “puppet theology” — one of the resident theologians at my own church is a hand-held hippo named Augustine who assists my wife with the children’s sermons and other occasions). Many of these draw from deep places in the heart and soul, as well as the mind, and we need to create the kind

of environment, through spiritual formation and the arts, to enhance the more typically linear approach that we tend to employ in preaching and teaching.

- As congregations, we need to encourage our pastors to be spiritual leaders, not simply administrators, counselors, mediators, etc. This, in turn, requires more than paying lip service to the biblical claim that there is “a variety of gifts” in the church with which *all* members are endowed. It also requires pastors to disabuse themselves of the notion that any one person can do it all. The pastor will always be a generalist (indeed, this is one of ministry’s attractions), but whatever he or she does needs to radiate out, first and foremost, from a sound theological core. Congregations, in turn, need to recognize and affirm that cultivating this theological core is part of the proper work of ministry, and not an add-on to it.

Thanks again for the opportunity to reflect on this important topic. Let the conversation continue!