

embrace the opportunity to share their hearts and souls with others.

The John Hus Class at Messiah is an extremely diverse group theologically, coming from very different backgrounds. That is why all class members are asked to sign and embrace *The Covenant for Christian Living* as the model for how we reflect and share with one another despite our differences. And, much of our growth in numbers at Messiah has come from those who have left the Church for years, because they longed to go deeper and to not be ridden with guilt for having doubts and questions. We Moravians have long seen “missions” as who we are. Our mission statement at Messiah truly does reflect our mission: “*Messiah Moravian Church seeks to be a window to faith and service in Christ.*”

Brother Simmons, I’m with you! Theology matters. It matters deeply to many, many Christians. Let’s open the windows to faith and allow the Spirit to take us where it will!

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Lisa Mullen

Theologians aren’t the only obscure people around. “Have you heard of Wilco?” I asked my husband. “Oh yea, they played with Billy Bragg.” Doing a little hermeneutical Google browsing, I found the rest of the words to *Theologians*, in where I encountered some pretty obscure lines. The little I know of this art/rock genre of singer/

song writers is they sing songs of protest. They sing of the “Common man,” capitalistic bullies, war, and slag heaps. Their version of theology might just ring true with the “pedagogy of the oppressed,” albeit for a limited audience. So my guess is that this is not slur against the guild of theologians, but against anything that smacks of elitism or anyone paid by the “establishment” to think. Maybe we have entered the time when theologians, pastors and teachers are dismissed as irrelevant. For many, it’s a simple issue of who has the power, or perceived power, and, well, who doesn’t.

Some of my most formative years were at the Presbyterian School of Christian Education (P.S.C.E) and Union Theological Seminary. We shared a dining hall and library, and whenever we needed to journey from one campus to another, we would have to “cross the brook,” that is Brook Road. At times that road might as well have been an ocean. Some people on one side of “the brook” viewed P.S.C.E. as a place where students actually used puppets to tell the story, a community for the “not so serious” student. PSCE eyed Union with equal disdain, a place where disconnected, “heady” professors nourish students to focus their energy on mental gymnastics with little or no regard for truly communicating the faith. A goodly portion of these “slurs” were perpetrated by some of the faculty, but perhaps these attitudes were born out of a sin of neglect—neglecting to notice the whole body of Christ. I didn’t feel whole until I “crossed the brook” and attended both schools. For the sake of the congregations we serve, we needed to ask, “how can I communicate this to a kindergartner, a middle schooler, the “person in

the pew?” But this gap seems to be everywhere — between thinking and feeling, theory and practice, priests and laity, academicians and well, the rest of us pastors.

I admit it. I haven’t cracked a book of theology from my seminary days for at least five years. I do miss Brunner, C.S. Song, Moltmann and, maybe even hmmm... Barth. I loved theology. I took eight theology courses, some even at the “playground” they called P.S.C.E. I love ideas, the leaven of intellectual ferment. Theology is like good music. I can’t always remember the tune, but it is beautiful while it lasts. But, there are seasons in our life and, as of late, my diet now consists of books like, *Crazy Busy*, *Overstretched*, *Overbooked and About to Snap*; *Moravian Women’s Memoirs*; *Get out of My Life, but first could you drive me and Cheryl to the mall*; *In Praise of Slowness*, *Challenging the Cult of Speed*; *Leaving Church, a memoir of faith*, and *A life like mine, How children live around the world*. I generally carry in my book bag of six or seven books to read, between matching socks and answering e-mail. All this is to say that theology, while it does matter, takes different expressions in our lifetime. In this season in my life I read God through a very different lens. But I wouldn’t trade any of these seasons, one for the other, and I count all of the education afforded me as a blessing.

My thanks to Steve for his thought-provoking article. I find in Steve a kindred spirit, for we are both Presbyterian pastors who have received the hospitality of the Moravian community. I, too, am deeply disturbed by self-righteous anti-intellectualism, such as the flippant attitude of a former U. S. president who

dismissed the consensus of the environmental scientific community with the quip: “this guy is so far off in the environmental extreme we’ll be up to our neck in owls and out of work for every American.” The truth is “inconvenient.” It takes precise, faithful labor, time and sustained labor. The church does not have the corner on the general “dumbing down” in our culture. The intellectual communities bring much to the table, which we ignore at our peril.

I resonate with much of what Steve explored. Probably the most salient point for me is that “serious reflection, like digestion, takes time and energy.” For years I’ve wondered: what is it about our citizens? Are we too lazy? Are we too busy? Too soft and flabby in our thinking? Have we enjoyed sports more from the sofa than actually moving around on the ball field? Are we simply consumed with our own “devices and desires”? “Spare me the details.” We who have little tolerance for ambiguity say, “just cut to the chase!”

But I, too, am guilty of “catching nourishment on the run.” I have so much to do and miles to go before I sleep. Intentional reflection takes time... pondering time. Time, these days, seems to be our chief commodity. Perhaps this is why so many people have become so interested in spiritual formation. We just want to slow down, ponder and be. There is so much information to digest, so we are hungry for a slow, but simple mantra... something like, “Jesus loves me this I know,” or “Jesus Christ, have mercy on me”... one that reminds us to breathe. My neighbor has taken to repeating Buddhist chants. Never mind that she doesn’t understand a single word of what she is chanting, she likes the way they

sound and she is intent on meditating. She is no dummy, just a recovering Catholic, and she really is ardent about Buddha. This confirms Steve's suspicions that we need only invoke the name of Jesus, and incarnate him with a dance, or in her case Buddha and yoga. We do incarnate God in different ways.

I'm not sure I understood rightly Steve's claim that churches are opposed to theology because they are afraid. I see anyone's aversion to theology as an issue of how we appropriate and make meaning of God, what gifts we are given to express our love, enjoyment and worship of God. That same seminary theology professor who poked fun of puppets was teaching about how important it is to cognitively appropriate the meaning of the Lord's Supper. I asked, "Then how does someone who is mentally challenged ever appropriate our Lord's body and blood?" To his credit, he didn't try to give answer, but the next day said that he had to rethink his position about how the children of God understand.

I must concur with Barbara Brown Taylor, "There is no substitute for a primary (first-hand) meeting with the divine," even if it means sweating it out in the sweat lodge of ordinary life. No matter how much I resonate with the beauty of such encounters in books, I am most alive when I can taste my friendship with Christ Jesus. And while I'm suspicious of any cheap substitute or "Cliff Notes" of worship, I still feel my way through most theological discoveries and believe that I sometimes need to get knocked off my horse and be led by a child or some other "least-likely" candidate. There are simply different stripes of Christians, each with diverse gifts. There are those who are not rhetoricians

but are so pure in heart and truly learned in the 'first order' experience of the Holy Ghost that even scholars know to "sit silently at his feet and learn the wonders of the word of God."

"Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received," we read in I Peter, and in Ephesians 4: 7, "for each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift." While we all "do theology," systematic theologians and those who have the gift of discerning their wisdom, bring to us a certain gift. Artists, archivists, economists, ecologists, musicians, nurses, scientists, farmers, framers, mechanics, sales people, mothers, cashiers, police, poets and children also bring wondrous gifts to the body of Christ and the body politic. The pastor shouldn't say to the theologian, "I have no need of you," or visa-versa. Theologians, take comfort, the church needs you. Of course, language is always borrowed; the key is helping the children of God experience God's fullness in manifold languages, as they seek to incarnate God. These days, however, we all might want to heed the prophet Habakkuk: "Write the vision; make it plain, so that a runner passing by may read it."

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