

Some preliminary musings on my future doctoral studies

Musings | 6/6/2017 @ 22:37

What made me think about doing a PhD?

If you asked me four years ago (~2013) as a super young part-time assistant teacher if I want to pursue a PhD in biblical or theological studies, my answer would be highly irresolute. I did like what I'm doing as an assistant teacher and I did want to do more of that, but raising my qualification was something that seemed too expensive and time consuming. I got my first university degree in 2014 and while I did want to pursue masters, I wasn't all that eager to apply for it because it wasn't required on my current position (Czech law allows accredited institutions of our kind to hire people with no degree at all). I had my own books, my responsibilities, my relatively secure place in school administration. Why would I want to add more labor and toil to it?



These lazy thoughts eventually didn't prevail and I went to CTS, which has expanded my horizons in an unexpected and tremendous way. I've met 8 great teachers. All of them were Pentecostals (at least to my best knowledge), but besides that they were all profoundly different. I've met a reformed Pentecostal, a Mennocostal (Mennonite Pentecostal), a bible geek Pentecostal, an enthusiast-genius Pentecostal, a liberal leaning Pentecostal, ... I could continue. This beautiful variegatedness of Pentecostal and evangelical thought is something that shaped my way of looking at my task within the gargantuan hodgepodge of the global not-only-Pentecostal Christianity. All of my professors had some mentionable achievements in both academics and ministry, which has helped me to see more clearly the connection between classroom and real life. It was a life changing experience and had CTS opened a PhD program, I wouldn't wait a second. I would just jump in.

But my CTS experience is finished, which makes me rather happy because I like getting things done. (Well... I like the feeling which arrives after getting something done.) It could, however, also mean that my education is finished. Just like most teachers on secondary level, I could just grab the diploma, celebrate, go back to work and remain that way till my retirement. This possibility feels unhappy and dim, because I do not feel "finished" yet. During the last part of my thesis writing, I began to see more clearly that this should not be the end. I this "enlightenment" has left me with the burning impression that I'm like a toddler who wants to explore farthest depths of the oceans, but has only dipped his toe in a little pool so far. (Well, this is a highly overstated metaphor, but you get the idea.) In other words, I don't think there's a way I could let my qualification remain like this. I have to go further.

So... In light of these thoughts, encouraged by a good feedback for my thesis and by some other recommendations to pursue further studies, I decided to apply for a PhD. I came to believe that this is my calling, this is what I want to bleed for. (Well, not literally, but you get the idea :-). Besides of this, I believe that doctorate could open some new possibilities for expanding my teaching platform onto places where it *is* required.

How, what, where, and how much?

Where and how much?

My decision brings about these questions. *Where* is directly tied with *how much*. I do not think that I'll be able to raise enough money to cover tuition at British universities, public or private. Yes, I'll talk to people and I'll be asking, but I just can't afford 5000+ £ a year. My job pays me satisfaction, not money. Of course, if you know where to ask for a full scholarship, please do tell me! So my initial criteria for a PhD program are:

- It must be part-time.
- It must be affordable, i.e. on state-sponsored universities.

Now I didn't make an extensive research within all possible institutions around all Europe (I've been looking [here](#), [here](#), etc.), but I don't think I'm missing something big. My initial criteria are leaving me with the following options:

- [Protestant Theological Faculty](#) of the Charles University in Prague.
- [Department of Theology and Christian Education](#) at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia.
- [Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies](#) at KU Leuven.
- [Faculty of Theology](#) at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

What?

At this stage, it is probably right about the time to introduce *what*. Over the past four years, I have delved in Old Testament studies. It was less of my personal choice and more of the present need in my job, but let's be it, I'm now an OT guy. Nonetheless, my overall interest lies in the field of biblical hermeneutics, intellectual history and in the related themes of systematic theology. I'm not a philologist and I don't want to be. I'm interested in all kinds of turns in hermeneutics, literary theory, historiography and in theological and philosophical underpinning of all of that. To put it very simply, I'm interested in the ways how texts become holy in a particular community of believers and my ultimate concern is theological, namely how does God speak to communities through their texts. I want to know what happens *between the text and its confession* [©] Michael Buban 2017, which by the way reads in the subtitle of this blog.

All of the aforementioned schools could probably accommodate this kind of interest, but I have a feeling that the first two (the Czech and the Slovak option) wouldn't do it as smoothly as I would wish them to. For example, Protestant Theological Faculty in Prague is a place of impeccable excellence in classical disciplines of biblical languages, systematic theology, etc. However, reading its publications sometimes feels like hearing an echo from a 10 or 20 years distant past. In spite of their huge erudition (or maybe because of it!) they do not seem to be keeping track of the bleeding edge developments in biblical studies. This is not necessarily bad! It is perhaps better to speak 5 languages and to go to Palestine for an actual dig than to tinker with fishy theories within not so well established fields of inquiry. However, I feel that I will need more of theoretical inquiry and perhaps less of drill in languages etc. I will need to keep track with recent developments, not to get swallowed by the dying leviathan of ponderous German scholarship.

For this reason, I think it shall be much better to seek a place in an English speaking environment. (At least I would Polish my English.) The most cunning reason of mine is that theological schools at VU Amsterdam and KU Leuven are among the top 10 theological schools in the world according to [this ranking](#). KU Leuven is my last resort, because [the faculty](#) doesn't seem to be all too close to my proposed area of research. Faculty of Theology at VU, on the other hand, seems to be offering just what I am looking for (e.g. [here](#)). Moreover, I have heard a number of good references to VU's theological faculty.

So why aren't you in Amsterdam yet?

Well, here comes the problem. First, they don't reply to my e-mails. Ok, I get it, my questions were stupid, but still... why don't they just tell me? (It might obviously turn out that VU is not an option – for whatever reasons. In such a case I shall look elsewhere.) Second, even if I called them and got accepted, I don't know how to conceive my research at all. My idea is too general. It is many strands of highly abstract theological concepts which I want to screw onto biblical studies. The relation between Bible (scholarship) and (systematic) theology was never easy, yet it is exactly what I want to ponder.

For now, I do not even know where to start and I don't think it's a good idea to apply for a PhD program and not to know what to write about! I would love to apply *after* I'll have a viable research proposal consulted with a supervisor, not *before* of that.

So... what do I do? What I need probably is a good preliminary research. I've already started with that. It's big, it'll take me months and it will hopefully help me to find what exactly do I want to do and to finally nail it down. Wait for the next

update!

<https://selah.cz/musings/some-preliminary-observations-to-my-future-doctoral-studies/>