

Letters to the Editor

Editor's note: Though the first letter is a personal letter to an author, it is printed here by request for the sake of all.

Dear Brother Hertzog: Your response to my words in the Summer 2004 issue of *The Hinge* took me by surprise. I wish to be very clear to you and everyone who read your words, that you have never been one of the closed doors that I experienced in my young Christian life. Quite the contrary. You have always been a most positive influence on my life at Schoeneck, both then and now. If ever there was a closed door between us, it would have been my own closet door that I guarded so closely from within. I did not fling open that door until some thirteen years after those first experiences that I shared. By that time, my father had already passed beyond the ability to comprehend my revelation to him when I finally emerged from that closet. So your public apology is both unexpected and unwarranted. You have never kept your light hidden in my presence, and I have always known you to be extremely supportive to both me and my family. Please continue to lift your light high for all to see!

Lorin Miller, Schoeneck, Pennsylvania

I read with disappointment your inference as editor of *The Hinge* that the reason persons did not choose to express their opinions contrary to Resolution 6 is due to a lack of courage. I emphatically state that I am opposed to Resolutions 5 and 6, not because of a fear of, hatred toward, or lack of love for persons practicing homosexuality, but because the resolutions and their accompanying “where-ases” are so clearly out of character with the heart of God as depicted in the whole of scripture. I am thoroughly convinced that if I agree with the conclusions of the resolutions on homosexuality, then I am guilty of not loving persons whom God has placed in my life with the truth. Many Moravian leaders do argue such a conclusion with me. Personally, I do not care what such opinions mean to “my career” or reputation. But the unproductive nature of the conversation is precisely why many of those labelled “conservatives” refuse to continue the argument. Endless dialogue without conclusion is a costly distraction from the mission of the church and only succeeds in exacerbating what little unity we have. Instead of pushing forward a culturally popular agenda for church acceptance, I would rather have us all fall on our faces together before the Lord and beg for His mercy and a new beginning.

Kevin Frack, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

We just saw The Hinge for the very first time it was shared with us by a member of our congregation. We're excited that The Hinge is willing to tackle such an emotional topic within the life of the church. As Moravians and Christians, we are all caught between a rock and a hard place. Either follow Jesus' example and embrace all sinners who are willing to walk the journey of faith, or attempt to enforce the code of ethics which was written down many centuries ago. I pray that through conversation and listening we come to a place where we can be comfortable opening our doors to everyone, and we embrace our challenge of bringing others to Jesus. I believe if we fulfill our mission of reaching out to those in need, God will provide us the answer of how to come together as Christians and deal with all of the challenges that non-traditional families bring to our communities. Fear of rejection is keeping many Gays and Lesbians away from traditional congregations. Many of those who participate do so from behind the "closet" door. Faced with a choice of living life by Love or Fear, my partner and I have chosen Love.

Ken Forney, Brian Hermann, Glenwood Moravian, Madison, Wisconsin

I was very distressed to read in your "Notes from the Editor" in the Summer 2004 issue of The Hinge that conservative clergy felt that they could not express their views without it affecting their careers. It shows the seriousness of the issue of homosexuality for our church and so I plan to rush in where angels apparently fear to tread and express my understanding of the conservative view of the issue. I am an Elder of the Canadensis Church and have read extensively all material I could get on the subject. I taught one of the seminars on "The Church and Human Sexuality" as required by the Eastern District Board, before the Synod of 2002 which adopted Resolution 6. In addition I have read and prayed over Resolution 6 as well as the entire report of The Committee on Church and Society as presented to the Synod.

I would like to commend Brother Hertzog for his excellent essay. He showed me how those in favor of this resolution could hold their position. I really had not been able to get a clear statement of this from anyone who was involved in the debate. I understand him but I do not agree with his position. I find Lee Sprinkle's concern with the term "celebrate" to be most cogent. The term as defined in the dictionary would only apply in the third possible definition given. The first two definitions relate to services such as marriage, baptism and even the Catholic Mass and caused me to choke on the implication of this to same sex relations within our congregation. I'm sure that Lee is right that it bothered others who did not hear Glenn's view. I think the use of "celebrate" posed a real problem in view of the controversy going in other denominations, and the press, over same sex marriage and ordination. We do not live in a vacuum so the outside controversy spills over into our own views.

Personally, my heart goes out to Lorin Miller and Jon Barnes as well as all those who feel ostracized or, worse, persecuted by something they feel they can't help. They should be welcome in the church in the same way any newcomer is, with friendship and love. They need a savior no

more or less than we do do and we need to present Jesus as Lord and Savior in the same way to everyone. I have read both sides of the genetic question and am not persuaded either way as yet, so I follow God's word until He comes. This is may not satisfy the militants on either side but I can only pray for insight as I have been.

To begin a conservative's look at the issue, we have to start with "Jesus is Lord" defined as "essential" by the Unity Synod. Where do we learn that Jesus is Lord but from the Bible? No other book claims to give the Word of God directly. The Bible claims to be written by holy men who were directly guided by the Holy Spirit of God. I believe this to be true since, if it is not, we can rewrite Scripture to suit ourselves and change whatever we don't like. My belief that the Bible is God's Word comes from Our Lord Himself when he quoted it in his answer every time He was challenged by Satan or the Scribes and Pharisees. If it wasn't His Word why would he have used it rather than answering directly? Certainly, He used it in a special way and not in a confrontational, Bible pounding or finger-pointing way such as some would do today. Jesus did it with love and that is what we all should be doing. He said to his followers: "If you love me keep my commandments." Once again He sends us to the Bible to find out what the commandments are.

Throughout the Bible are verses condemning sexual immorality. This immediately raises the question of judging one another. Glen raised this question. The Bible says that we are all sinners and have fallen short of the Glory of God. So how can we judge someone else or imply that their sin is somehow worse than something we are hiding? We are told to "judge not that ye be not judged." Peter admonishes us in his first sermon, to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. This is how we acknowledge that "Jesus is Lord." Further, Christ said that He would return to judge everyone. So He is to judge and not us. When believers are judged Jesus will claim us as his own since he paid our punishment by the cross and resurrection. With our emphasis on "in all things, love" we must not fail to warn people of what the Bible teaches concerning the judgment together with the fact that faith in Christ brings forgiveness. I feel that celebrating same sex relationships is an abrogation of our responsibility to warn people that the Bible says this is sin. If I were to say this just because I think I am right, it would have no meaning. When I say it to people because God said it, I believe I am doing part of the great commission to get them to understand their need for Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

My great problem with all of the pro-homosexual writing that I have read is that they see themselves as not needing forgiveness for something that God has condemned. I really can only welcome them into our church as sinners like myself and pray that God's Spirit will show them what He wants of them. I remember Christ's warning that not all who say "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven! I pray that this letter may help to express the conservative's basis for concern on this issue. I also thank God for the decision of the Unity Synod to require a cooling off period for prayer and reflection on the problem.

Lyman L. Parks, Canadensis, Pennsylvania

Lee Sprinkle writes in *The Hinge*, 11:2, “Given the obvious concern that was evident at the 2002 Synod over the wording of Resolution 6, it would have been far more appropriate to have tabled it until the language could be written so that all could vote on a document that clearly said the same thing to everyone.” Is it possible to word a resolution so unambiguously that there can be only one interpretation? The Bible itself, our source document, is far from unambiguous. There are at least two threads that run from beginning to end in the Bible, one of Law, the other of Grace. One theme of Grace deals with the inclusion of the outcast. According to Deuteronomy 23:3, Ruth, a Moabite, should never have become the great-grandmother of David, a king of Israel and an ancestor of Jesus.

Contrary to the Law in Deuteronomy 23:1, God’s message to eunuchs (Isaiah 56:4-5) gives them “within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters.” In Acts 8:26-39, an angel of the Lord directs Philip specifically to an encounter with an Ethiopian eunuch, who is subsequently converted and baptized. Isaiah 56:6-7 speaks of the Lord bringing foreigners “to my holy mountain... for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” Jesus quotes this last verse when he has driven the money-changers from the Temple (Mark 11:17).

Jesus’ ministry throughout was one of inclusion of all the outcasts who wished to become his followers: tax collectors, lepers, foreigners, harlots, sinners. Even though “Jews have dealings with Samaritans” Jesus spoke to the woman at the well of Sychar in Samaria (John 4:7-15). According to Jewish law she was a sinner — an adulterer. Acts 8:5-17 tells of Philip’s going to a city in Samaria and proclaiming Christ to them, after which Peter and John are sent there, and in response to prayer and the laying-on of hands these ancient outcasts from the Jewish faith receive the Holy Spirit. This is soon followed in Acts 10 by the story of Peter in a trance being shown that he is to call none of the foods forbidden by Jewish law common or unclean. Immediately following this vision he is called to the house of Cornelius the Centurion, where the Gentiles gathered there have already received the Holy Spirit.

Jesus tells a story (Matt. 22:1-14) likening the kingdom of heaven to a king who gave a wedding feast, but those invited would not come. So he sent his servants into the streets to gather in anyone they could find. The king provided the necessary wedding garments for these attendees. If God provides the “wedding garment,” shall the church provide exclusionary rules? Paul twice gives us the best brief statements about inclusion, one in Galatians 3:28, the other in I Cor. 13:1-3. God does not speak unambiguously in the Bible, but we would be well advised to take into consideration the thread of Grace as well as the thread of Law as we deal with our same-gendered members, their families and those who look to the church, wondering if there might be home for them there.

Mary Borhek, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

I'm so glad you presented this topic. We know nothing about Jesus' own sexuality but if he was "fully human," as the Bible says, then he must have had sexual urges. Did he act upon them? We don't know; we have no record of Jesus being married; we have no record of any sexual activity on his part. Is that because there was none or because it wasn't important to his message? Some have hypothesized a relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. If this is the case, does it change who Jesus was and what he taught? He spent most of his adult life in a group of twelve men. Is this significant? Twelve men or twelve women or some of each, does it matter? The Bible tells us that Jesus understood and reached out to the misunderstood, the humiliated, and the belittled. He himself was a victim of prejudice on more than one occasion. What painful life experiences shaped him? What kinds of rejection did he encounter other than the ones we read in the Bible? As a 65-year-old mother and grandmother, friend of both straight and gay, I have often wondered: If we discovered tomorrow that Jesus was gay, would it matter? Would it change the way we as Christians respond to the world?

Dell James, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

The Summer *Hinge* on Resolution 6 worked out well, it seems to me. I appreciate greatly that you have the spiritual energy to keep trying to bring blessing from all this Moravian flux. Thanks for the book review of Hampton's recommended *Christianity Rediscovered*, which I intend to read. It reminds me of an even earlier book which has informed my cross-cultural ministry, John V. Taylor's *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence Amid African Religion*. Also, thanks for your previous review article on Zinzendorf and Judaism. Your information came in handy on Monday in a conversation with a rabbi when she and others from her synagogue attended a rally at Prince of Peace Moravian Church. This is for a community justice organization to which Prince of Peace belongs. The reference to Yom Kippur in Bethlehem was timely.

But you should not be surprised "that anyone in our community feels that they cannot speak openly and honestly on sensitive issues." Wow, Craig, consider what happened to Hampton specifically concerning Resolution 6, as well as what happened to Truman and Luke Bell! I'm not just referring to Interprovincial and Provincial official responses either. There was shrillness all around, by the people mentioned and frequently disproportionately by others who responded.

I have re-read the section of Levering's History of Bethlehem dealing with John Antes' leaving Bethlehem during the administration of John Nitschmann (pp. 250-251). Antes "felt that less harm would be done by his quiet withdrawal than by the possible further centralizing of factions *pro* and *con* if he remained in Bethlehem." And then the passage that moves me: after getting in order the building and mill on which he had been working, "before daybreak, when few were astir, in order to avoid painful scenes — he started with his wife and some of his children for Fredericktown. Cammerhoff accompanied him, weeping, across the river and some distance on the way, and then took an affectionate leave of him and turned sadly back to Bethlehem."

I hope that we — North American Moravian Church — can talk, not necessarily withdraw, but at least step back, wait, shed some tears, and not push for resolution. What if, officially, we leave the flux in flux? What if the action taken regarding Truman, Luke, and Hampton had been just the requests from PECs that they choose their co-participants to join with those appointed by the PEC or volunteers to carry on in bi-monthly earnest discussion? The model is the group gathered by Truman and Kevin Frack with chosen colleagues. The strength was that the colleagues were chosen for their strong participation, not for representing some vague middle ground. This made that particular group discussion more congenial to evangelicals, who wanted/want clear response to Truman and to a number of other issues. What if the action regarding Greg Little and the Macedonia congregation had been just to continue all the meetings? What if the proposal had been announced to give Macedonia delegates full voting rights at the next Synod, despite the financial non-participation, just as has been done for poor dying congregations. Fight fire with coals of fire. What if that invitation and proposal were given even now to the breakaway part of the Macedonia congregation for next Synod? Invite Hampton and Luke to participate. The Unity delegation of bishops to the conflict in Honduras has proposed a similar inclusion of breakaway congregations and alienated Moravians to join in the 2005 Honduras Moravian Synod. Hmm, we only send Unity delegations to other provinces.

Ted Wilde, Miami, Florida

After reading the recent issue of *The Hinge*, I have a few curmudgeonly reflections. I do not believe that homosexuality per se is *the* divisive issue of the century. Rather, it is the place where some people who are distressed with changes in the church draw the line in the sand and say, “Enough!” Issues around homosexuality — welcoming, ordination, marriage — are just one example of the much larger and more important issue of relating a biblical, God-centered understanding of the world and a secular, usually scientific understanding of the world. Sometimes we can put these together without much trouble; sometimes — for example, with many questions of sexuality — it is difficult or impossible.

A few examples. The Bible often talks about children as a gift of God and conception or barrenness as the work of God. Science tells us that some persons, both male and female, are unable to share in creating a child, a quite different understanding. But we manage most the time to live with both interpretations. The Bible tells many stories of God calling persons — Isaiah and Paul, for example — to a specific task. Psychologists may discuss the same experiences in terms of the church replacing a dysfunctional family or a person finding an expression for a desire to be needed. We manage, sometimes with difficulty, to live with both interpretations. Biblical prophets speak of the conquerors of Israel and Judah as God’s instruments of judgment. Secular historians find geopolitical and military explanations. Again, we manage to accept both or perhaps just live with dissonance.

The area of sexuality is an area in which it is probably more difficult to live with the different understandings. By and large the New Testament and Christian tradition teach monogamy, with sexual expression within marriage. Dominant Western secular teaching is (1) that any sexual expression is welcome, so long as it is consensual, mutual, mature, and not violent, and (2) that lifelong commitment is probably unrealistic. It is harder to reconcile these two ways of interpreting life in the area of sexuality, because they are more prescriptive, while the other examples given are more descriptive. Homosexuality is but one aspect of a larger question, sexuality, which is part of a much larger question, how do we live with these competing ways of understanding life?

I think we complicate things more by our talk about judgment. While Jesus does say, “Judge not, that you not be judged,” our tradition, including the Gospels, is full of judgment. Read Jesus’ words about the Pharisees, “whitewashed tombs.” The Decalogue judges adultery and murder. Early Bohemian Brethren excluded wealthy persons. A half century ago remarriage of a divorced person in the Moravian Church required PEC approval. Current standards of appropriate sexual conduct judge an unmarried pastor dating a member. My point is that we cannot simply imply, as we often do, that judging is bad and we used to do it and now we don’t because we are smarter or more Christian. The larger question — relating biblical views and secular, scientific views — has no simple answers, perhaps no answers at all, but we need to wrestle with this issue, which is at the heart of many contemporary polarities.

Hermann Weinlick, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Letters to the editor are always welcome. Normally we have a 500 word limit, and we do exercise basic decorum in language. Please send letters by email, if possible, to zinzenhof2002@yahoo.com.

In the next issue of *The Hinge*:
Reflections on “The Ground of the Unity.”