

positions (or at least openly campaigning for the positions) has been rendered out of the question by the invisible code.” I am glad that we retain the tradition of electing the President of the PEC and its members without nomination. To do otherwise, would speak against all we believe about the Holy Spirit’s guidance in the election process. I trust that the Chief Elder knows who is needed in leadership for His Church at a particular time and he reveals this to any given synod in a balloting process that is free of nomination. Thomlinson says, “such a practice would be absolutely unimaginable in any other kind of organization.” That is well and true, but the Church is not called to be an organization.

The Church is the living body of Christ, and He reveals his will even in the weakness and fallibility of our human structures.

In closing, I want to thank Brother Thomlinson for his thoughtful and stimulating article. I pray that his insights will continue to provide the Church with challenge and points of discussion as we seek to be good stewards of the various structures God has given for the governance of His Church.

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The Author’s Final Word

I must begin by saying how delighted I am that my article sparked such thorough and thoughtful responses from Doug Borwick, Milton Fenske, Jeff Mortimore, Ken Schwanke, and Lane Sapp. I’m also pleased that the responses covered so much disparate territory within a subject area that is so much bigger than this issue of *The Hinge* can hope to explore. I hope that these contributions will provide a basis for — and perhaps fuel — a much more wide-ranging discussion within the Moravian Church.

I am glad that Lane Sapp chose to share with us his experience of initially “balking” at my use of the word “politics” and then understanding

why I did. On that front, I do hope his experience is shared by many readers because, to “order their ways” effectively and appropriately, people must first recognise that they have some degree of power in so doing. The instant that such recognition dawns, a political process is begun.

I’m grateful to Doug Borwick for pointing out the distinction between the consorial and the congregational policy and to Milton Fenske for contributing a classification of structural studies. I agree with Doug Borwick that the dynamics of political interaction are quite different at the level of denominational decision-making than they are within an individual congregation. And in general I agree with his sketching of the

differences. But there are similarities too, the most obvious of which is attitudinal. Milton Fenske highlights this point in summarising his observations of individual behaviour and organisational change. Certainly the need for formal structure and vigorous debate — together with a recognition that “Rome wasn’t built in a day” — are common to both the congregational and the denominational practice of church politics.

I cheer Milton Fenske’s recognition of the need for vigorous debate; Ken Schwanke’s celebration of the willingness to have conflict as “a sign of organizational health;” and Doug Borwick’s reminder that Christians are not called to be docile nor to “exhibit quiet agreement.” We are however, called to treat each other with respect and dignity, something that is a good deal easier to accomplish through full and frank discussion undertaken within defensible and well-understood processes than it is when disagreements — often profound disagreements — are driven underground by an invisible code. This is particularly true if the bases of the invisible code are more about protecting power and privilege than about dealing directly and lovingly with conflict, commitment to discussion and consensus, or about seeking redemption and reconciliation. Patrick Lencioni (quoted by Ken Schwanke) had it right in observing that people must feel free to engage in passionate and emotional debate without fear of reprisal. The invisible code undermines that both by proscribing passionate and emotional debate, and by hinting at the prospect of repercussions.

Like Jeff Mortimore, I’m concerned about approaches that he calls “free-market” and “ends-

oriented” on the part of members and prospective members. My concern, though, is that those two approaches — particularly when taken together — produce a lack of “brand” loyalty, and with it a loss of understanding of what the “brand” is about in the first place. But the solution to this problem is surely not to have “the church ... enforce any political structure on a membership ...” The challenge is to get the membership to realise that we are “the church” (at least in the sense of its governance), and that we have to develop, respecting the traditions of the “brand,” political structures that we both understand and respect. That is the basis of legitimacy, and legitimacy is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to ensure “buy-in” by members. This, in my view, is the link between method and content, and it fits neatly with Martin Marty’s notion (which I thank Jeff for highlighting) of “counter-intolerance.”

Brother Mortimore also raises an important question, when he asks “Why, in light of our essentials, should members want to hold to a process that puts them at risk of having things said and done that are in conflict with what they believe?” The answer is easy to articulate, but much more difficult to put into practice. On a purely political basis, they should want to hold to a process that produces decisions that are widely accepted as legitimate. On a theological basis, they should want to hold to a process that permits, within the confines of civility, exploration of “what they believe.” This requires also some real exploration of the sense of purpose described by Ken Schwanke.

The real problem here is an attitude that fears any exploration of belief, and therefore puts such some things beyond the reach of sensible — and

hopefully informed — discussion. Even more than is the case in civil society, too many people of faith are inclined to say, “Don’t confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up.” Jeff Mortimore is quite correct that reforms to “method” are not going to deal with that problem of “content.” My point, however, is that without having legitimate “method,” there is no way to even explore “content.” Not surprisingly, then, I totally agree with Jeff in his support for *The Hinge* and the Moses Lectures as appropriate places to explore what we believe.

Similarly, I agree totally with Brother Sapp about the need for continual education about the processes of governance but I’m not at all sure that the need is confined to the laity. I have a nagging fear that the reluctance of many of our clergy to engage their congregations in discussions of church governance stems from their own ambivalence toward the subject, as much as it does from their fear of pushing parishioners to consider things deemed boring or inconsequential. But in any case, it is important for lay people to seize the agenda here and not wait for clergy to do all the heavy lifting. The government of our Church is the collective responsibility of all of us — laity and clergy together. As Doug Borwick correctly notes, “the deference that congregants feel toward the clergy on spiritual matters inevitably carries over to temporal ones.” This is a trend to be resisted.

I share with Bishop Sapp affection for the historical Moravian commitment to community and, like him, I hope that the Moravian Church can (continue to?) “find our unity in a relationship with Christ and agree to disagree on other issues in a spirit of love.” Also like Brother

Sapp, I believe that our motto [which, I should confess here, was one of the major features that drew me to the Moravian Church in the first place] gives us a roadmap to “living in Christ,” which Lane beautifully suggests is “a willingness to live with the questions of life, to explore them together and even to disagree.” Sounds a bit like “counter-intolerance,” doesn’t it? But I worry when individuals or congregations are allowed to almost decide for themselves what is “essential” — and thus subject to the demand for “unity.”

Where Bishop Sapp and I clearly differ is on the way in which the PEC and its President are chosen, and perhaps about the role of the Holy Spirit in the election process. Lane says “I trust that the Chief Elder knows who is needed in leadership for His Church at a particular time and he reveals this to any given synod in a balloting process that is free of nomination.” “Free of nomination,” in the Moravian context, means that delegates write a name on a piece of paper and the votes are tallied. The names and number of votes are read aloud, and then people vote again until there is a majority for one person. A nomination process normally involves interested parties putting their names forward (or a nominations committee actually soliciting names to put forward) well in advance, allowing full campaigns for the position. However, it is not necessary to choose between these binary extremes. For example, the first ballot could be conducted just as it is now: a process intended to identify the individuals in consideration but to forestall lengthy — and possibly divisive — “campaigns.” But then those individuals could be invited to make a public statement of belief and platform. And then the run-off ballot could

continue until one person has a majority of the votes cast. I don't think that inserting into the process a public statement by candidates in any way diminishes the capacity of the Chief Elder to reveal to Synod what is needed in leadership.

The current system assumes that everybody voting at the given synod is a blank slate passively awaiting the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Is that true? Can PEC members and Presidents past and present truthfully say that no "campaigning" was undertaken by them or on their behalf? Can delegates (especially experienced delegates) truthfully say that they went to Synod with no preconceived notions? If not, where did those notions come from in a system where "campaigning" is supposed to be forbidden? And on what basis did inexperienced delegates cast their ballot? Finally, how often do those with the most votes on the first ballot win? Does the answer to that question suggest the agency of the Holy Spirit, or that the decidedly human voters engage in "trending" in order to bring the

process to conclusion more quickly? I don't, of course, know the answers to these questions, but it occurs to me that it would be very interesting to interview a number of first-time delegates as they are leaving a synod and ask them whether they felt moved by the Holy Spirit or manipulated by human agency during the election process.

Finally, I'm a bit uncomfortable with Lane's suggestion that being an organisation and being the "living body of Christ" are somehow mutually exclusive. I totally accept the idea that the Holy Spirit can prevail over the "weakness and fallibility of our human structures," but I don't think this realisation should give us license to retain human structures that have easily-identifiable weaknesses and fallibilities.

Thanks to Craig Atwood for initiating this conversation, and thanks to Doug Borwick, Milton Fenske, Jeff Mortimore, Ken Schwanke, and Lane Sapp for their insights, wisdom, and thought-provoking responses. May the discussion continue!

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