

Notes from the Editor

Changes You may have noticed that *The Hinge* has a new title. It is now *The Hinge: International Theological Dialog for the Moravian Church*, and there will be more attention to the broader Moravian Unity. For years the Moravian Church in America was blessed with a unique international journal called *ITD: International Theological Dialog for the Moravian Church*. What made *ITD* unique was that there was both an English-language version published in Bethlehem, Pa., and a German-language version published in Bad Boll. There were separate editorial boards in each country, but the content was the same. The goal of *ITD* (originally titled *TMDK*) was to foster theological discussion among clergy and laity on both sides of the Atlantic as a way to strengthen Moravian identity and the bonds of the Unity.

ITD was born through the efforts of Arthur Freeman in America and Hartmut Beck in Germany. In addition to being a professor of New Testament at Moravian Theological Seminary, Br. Freeman taught courses in the theology of Zinzendorf and spiritual formation. He is one of the leading authorities on Moravian theology, and spent much of his career helping the Moravian Church learn from and apply its theological heritage. Hartmut Beck is a retired Moravian missionary who has published a definitive history of Moravian missions. Until recently, he was the editor of the German version of *ITD*, which has been the mainspring of theological discussion for Moravians in Europe.

After many years of voluntary labor, Brothers Freeman and Beck have now retired from their roles as editors of both versions of *ITD*. The Moravian Church owes both men a debt of gratitude for the contribution *ITD* has made to the life of the contemporary Moravian Church. Rather than simply appointing someone to replace them, it seemed wise to all concerned to explore new ways of fulfilling the mission of *ITD*. The amount of translation required led to frequent delays in publication in America. Also, the costs for production and distribution rose sharply over the years. Many people questioned whether it was good stewardship to have two journals, *ITD* and *The Hinge* serving similar goals and audiences in the Moravian Church.

Though the format and style of *The Hinge* is different than *ITD*, the mission of the two journals is very similar. In recent years, articles from *The Hinge* have been translated and published in the German-version of *ITD*, and many authors have been published in both journals. After a long period of discussion, the editorial board of the North American *ITD* and the editorial board of *The Hinge* decided to merge these two English-language Moravian theology forums into a single journal now titled *The Hinge: International Theological Dialog for the Moravian Church*. The European edition of *ITD* will continue to be published under the guidance of a new editor, Rev. Volker Schulz of Basel, Switzerland.

The Hinge will work closely with brothers and sisters in Germany, but there will no longer be an English translation of the German *ITD*. Instead, the two journals (*The Hinge* and *ITD*) will freely share content. Articles from either journal may be translated and republished in the other, but no longer will all content appear in both languages. The editorial board of *The Hinge* now includes representatives from England, Germany, Canada, and the Caribbean, which will expand our perspective considerably.

The Hinge will continue to be published by the Center for Moravian Studies, which is part of Moravian Theological Seminary. *The Hinge* is grateful for the assistance of Dean Frank Crouch and Jane Burcaw at Moravian Seminary.

In this Issue *The Hinge* will continue to address controversial issues in a spirit of brotherly and sisterly love and respect. It is appropriate that we begin this new endeavor with an article supplied by our brothers and sisters in Europe. In this issue Elizabeth McOwat, a member of the British Province, challenges Moravians in the United States over the issue of the death penalty. The death penalty is a very controversial issue in the United States, particularly since the Innocence Project has successfully overturned the wrongful convictions of dozens of inmates, saving dozens from execution. Several states have issued moratoriums on executions while they review hundreds of cases to insure that innocent people are not falsely executed. Though eroding, public support for the death penalty remains high in the United States, and most government officials support the practice.

In contrast, most “First World” nations view this practice as a barbaric anachronism from a less civilized age. After World War II, most European nations gradually abolished the death penalty. Having seen the depths of evil that a government could commit with a legal death penalty, there was widespread opposition to the death penalty throughout Europe. Now, as Sr. McOwat points out, no nation can join the European Union without abolishing the death penalty. In Canada, the last execution was carried out in December 1962 and the death penalty was formally abolished in 1984.

There are many issues surrounding the question of the death penalty, as the respondents to Sr. McOwat indicate. We can approach this issue primarily in terms of public policy and effectiveness. Does the death penalty lower the rate of violent crime and make citizens safer in their homes and workplaces? Or we can approach it from the perspective of the law and ask if death is administered fairly. Are we executing people who are truly guilty of heinous crimes? We can even approach it from the perspective of common decency as is demanded in the US Constitution. Is it possible to terminate lives in a humane manner or is it always a form of “cruel and unusual punishment”?

These are all important questions that need to be discussed openly, honestly, democratically, and with the best research available, but Sr. McOwat challenges Moravians to think deeper. She asks us to consider the death penalty from the perspective of our Christian faith and morality. Is the death penalty a denial of the essential humanity of another individual, whether innocent or guilty? Is it possible to fulfill Jesus’ commandments of love for neighbor and radical forgiveness while advocating for the execution of a neighbor?

Obviously, Christians through the centuries have had different opinions on whether the death penalty is justice or state-sanctioned murder, but we should be able to agree that every execution represents a failure and a tragedy. The fact that our society feels the need to kill wrong-doers is an indication that our system of justice has not made us safe and secure. The fact that so many people have committed capital crimes is itself a sign of failure.

Christians may disagree over whether the death penalty is a necessary evil, but I think we can agree that it is an evil. Moravians may be particularly interested to learn that John Hus preached against the death penalty, and the Ancient Unity did not want its members to serve on juries lest they unwillingly participate in the destruction of another human being. This past summer, the bishops of the Unity issued a unanimous statement opposing the death penalty in every situation.

We live in a complex and dangerous world, and it is hard to express our Christian morality in the political and social arena. Some Moravians, like Sr. McOwat, do stand alongside Quakers and Catholic nuns protesting executions in the United States. Others quietly express their views in the voting booth. Still others are content to let the state function according to its own rules without interference from the church. And many Moravians, like Christians of all churches, simply do not reflect on what the differences are between being a citizen and a follower of Jesus.