

Letters to the Editor

I am writing in response to Andrew Lumpkin's article in the most recent issue of *The Hinge* entitled "Religion and Violence." In trying to write historically about religion and violence, Mr. Lumpkin uncritically repeats an historical canard that has itself been the cause of great violence done in the name of religion. The first of his historical examples is that of Jesus. He says the following on pg. 2: "Throughout the Gospels, the embittered Jewish elite conspired to destroy Jesus and his emerging movement. With inside help, the chief priests, elders, and scribes captured Jesus and charged him with blasphemy and treason. Their plan succeeded...and Jesus was tried and crucified." This claim is decidedly *not*, as Mr. Lumpkin claims, "plain and simple." When will we as a church stop repeating a calumny that critical scholarship has set aside? Romans killed Jesus, and for a Roman crime. Even the idea that a "Jewish elite" (in an apparent attempt to separate the "elite" from "Judaism" and all other Jews) was the cause of Jesus' death completely overstates the historical evidence. Jesus was not crucified for either blasphemy or treason. For a variety of reasons, the gospel writers felt it necessary to shift the responsibility for Jesus' death from Romans to Jews (and at the same time to absolve Rome of guilt), and with devastating consequences in the history of Christianity. But we have a responsibility to bring more than a surface and uncritical reading to the gospel narratives. As a scholar of ancient Judaism, I hear claims like this one made time and again, by students, by pastors and by churchgoers. Whether it is in publications like *The Hinge*, in the pulpit, in the Sunday school, or in the classroom, theological violence perpetrated by Christian anti-Judaism—especially when it is derived from naive readings of the gospels—cannot be overlooked. We have both an historical and a theological obligation to bring the conclusions of modern scholarship to bear on historical issues related to the biblical text, and in our universities, churches, and seminaries we need to be clear about how we ought to go about answering them. On the basis of such uncritical readings of the gospels, we Christians have for too long both wittingly and unwittingly demonized Jews and Judaism as the "other." To continue to do so is not worthy of us either as Christians or as Moravians.

Benjamin G. Wright, Professor and Chair
Dept. of Religion Studies
Lehigh University

Letters to the Editor (continued)

I thank you for presenting another excellent issue of *The Hinge*. There are many provocative ideas expressed which deserve comment. My observations, however, concern the article by Br. Angetile Musomba (“The Jubilee: 550 Years of the Moravian Church and 275 Years of Moravian Mission”).

Br. Musomba raises a number of significant issues from the Tanzanian perspective as he expresses his “personal view.” I wish to focus on his comments regarding homosexuality which he presents in 5 long paragraphs. He is to be commended for raising this issue. It is one that the Unity has avoided or struggled with too long. It is good to have his clear statement of opinions about this issue. And his opinions are clear!

His objections are centered on a biblical argument: “We have biblical reasons for not accepting homosexuals,” and a cultural argument: “According to African religious, cultural, and moral values, we can not accept homosexuality as part of the normal living standard.”

I find both arguments unconvincing.

Though he does not cite any specific biblical references in support of his view, I suspect that most readers know what they are. To cite only those texts rests upon a fundamentalist proof-texting interpretation of the Bible. It also raises questions such as: are Christians to follow the Levitical law code because it is in the Bible or are we to accept slavery because Jesus did not specifically condemn it? Are we to deny the role of the Holy Spirit in continuing to unfold anew the richness of scripture for every generation?

To seek support for a theological position in one’s cultural values is a very risky approach. It may lead to the assumption that one’s cultural values provide a comfortable home for the Gospel. I cannot believe that any Christian anywhere would want to make that claim about any culture in our contemporary world.

The discussion about homosexuality is very important but I would like to see a more nuanced theological discussion about our (Moravian) understanding of how the Spirit leads the church (even when it does not want to change) in the world.

David A. Schattschneider
Bethlehem, PA