

## Notes from the Editor

### In this Issue

One of the enduring controversies in the history of Christianity involves the relationship of the church and the state. This old debate has special relevance in the United States since ours is the first nation in history to be founded as a secular government. This was a radical departure from the common wisdom that religious authorities must validate the ruler and that religious symbols must be united with the symbols of government. Since the dawn of civilization, it has been assumed that religion is necessary to insure social stability and basic morality. In the distant past, kings were seen as the sons of gods. In Christendom, kings were anointed by archbishops in order to establish their “divine right” to rule. Not only the Bill of Rights but also the actions and attitudes of the founders of the revolution and the writers of the constitution established the U.S. government as a secular government. The first President was sworn in by a justice, not a priest or minister; there was no test of religious beliefs for government office; and George Washington assured Catholics and Jews that they would be tolerated and protected by the new government. The Bill of Rights was such a radical departure from the common wisdom of the ages that two hundred years later, we are still working out the meaning of the disestablishment clause.

Since the middle of the last century, the Supreme Court has increasingly been asked to rule on the legal aspects of the First Amendment: from required prayer in public schools to wearing religious symbols while in uniform. The terrorist attacks on American soil on 9/11/01 and the United State’s response has again raised the issue of what it means to be a Christian and a citizen. Is there any conflict between patriotic and Christian values, or is the church the “praying arm” of the state? Can we even imagine a time when we, like Bonhoeffer, would feel called to pray for the defeat of our country rather than for victory? Do Muslims have the same civil liberties as Jews and Christians? What does it mean that the Pledge of Allegiance (since the 1950s) states that we are “one nation, *under God*, indivisible?”

*The Hinge* asked the imminent Baptist scholar James Dunn, who also maintains an active presence in the halls of Congress, to address the basic issues of religious freedom and civic responsibility in the United States. Dr. Dunn’s article is informed by years of study and political debate, and it raises important questions for us Moravians. Our respondents include active pastors in both provinces, lay persons, and a Moravian who has a life-time of service in state government. They approach Dr. Dunn’s challenge in a variety of ways: some give a ringing “Amen” to his position, while others take opposition to his views. It is clear there is

no apparent consensus on this matter, but such open debate and discussion seems to me to be its own endorsement of the Bill of Rights.

## Announcements

### **Free copies of *The Hinge* for Moravian clergy!**

*The Hinge* continues to develop and grow. Our relationship with the Center for Moravian Studies is bearing rich fruit. Thanks to the generosity of the Center, *The Hinge* will now be provided to all ordained clergy free of charge. If you are listed in the *Daily Texts* as clergy, you will automatically receive *The Hinge* unless you tell us to remove your name from our database. This will allow *The Hinge* more effectively to serve as a forum for the entire Moravian Church.

### **Lifetime subscriptions!**

Laypersons can still subscribe to *The Hinge* as well. If you are already receiving *The Hinge* you will continue to do so without the need for renewing your subscription. New subscriptions will require a one-time fee of \$30. You will remain on the mailing list until you either indicate to us to remove your name or you move and do not change your address! Changes or corrections in addresses should be directed to Jane Burcaw at Moravian Theological Seminary (1200 Main St., Bethlehem, PA 18018). New subscribers should use the form at the end of this issue.

### **New Publication schedule:**

In the future, *The Hinge* will be published three times a year. It was intended to be a quarterly journal, but as long-time subscribers know, the goal of four issues per year has rarely been met. Since everyone involved in *The Hinge*, including the editor, does this as a voluntary service to the Moravian Church, it is difficult to maintain a rigorous publishing schedule and maintain its quality. You can expect to receive issues in the spring, summer, and fall from now on.