

# Regarding the Interpretation of “Resolution 6”

Glenn Hertzog

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On June seventeenth and eighteenth, 2002, during its fifteenth and sixteenth plenary sessions, the Provincial Synod of the Northern Province of the Moravian Church adopted the Second Partial Report of The Committee on Church and Society, regarding *Recognition of Homosexual Members of the Moravian Church Northern Province*. The focal point of a great deal of discussion, both within and beyond the Northern Province, is found in the resolution identified as *RESOLVED: (6) Homosexual individuals shall be supported and affirmed by being allowed to celebrate their lives as individuals and/or couples completely within the bounds of the church and under the grace which our Creator imparts to all persons.*

Continuing a series of resolutions that reaches back to Northern Province Synod of 1974, it became the Northern Province’s latest attempt to legislatively create an environment wherein church members and friends who identify themselves as same-sex oriented might feel less isolated or segregated within the province’s Moravian Christian community. It will remain the last attempt for some time, because our Unity Synod met in August of the same year and was invited to review the Northern Province action. Unity Synod addressed the issue, determined that the question of homosexuals in the church is a biblical, theological, pastoral issue that “*does not rise to the doctrinal equivalent of the New Testament*

*confession, ‘Jesus is Lord.’”* Unity Synod then declared a moratorium on additional pertinent legislation pending further study of the broader subject of homosexuality by the Unity Board.

It is with a clear understanding of the need (and various Synod directives) for continuing dialogue that I offer these personal comments. My contribution of this article to *The Hinge* is a matter of some concern for the Provincial Elders’ Conference, North, where we have discussed the advisability of reviving some of the strong emotional reactions Resolution 6 generated. I am grateful for their concern, but I believe that, given an issue over which church opinion is clearly divided and unlikely to change, the passing of time may enable us to bring our anger under control, affirm the commonality of purpose that binds us together, and permit us to understand and appreciate some of the pain that fuels the anger. Based upon that belief, and with a reminder that the issue being discussed here is Resolution 6, not any larger issue, let’s move along.

There are several *Lebenslauf* events that stand out in my memory as being formative to my ministry as a Provincial Elder in the Northern Province. I share some of them here because they might help you understand my perspective and some of my attitudes. One of those events occurred in 1969, as I am best able to recall. I completed ten years in the US Navy Submarine Service, and my wife, children and I returned

home to the Schoeneck Moravian congregation, near Nazareth, Pennsylvania. I was elected to serve the congregation as an elder, and during the early part of my term several items were stolen from our sanctuary. We were faced with making a decision about locking the church doors. We could not determine if, in our two hundred years as a congregation, the doors had ever been locked; and we were deeply concerned about changing the “open door” tradition. I can remember several sleepless nights, and several other nights filled with vivid dreams about sacrifices people had made, some giving up their freedom and others giving up their lives to *open* doors for worship. My anxiety was heightened by my awareness that people in other places were being denied the freedom of public Christian worship at that very time.

It was a difficult and emotional debate; practicality finally dictated that the doors should be locked, and opened only for “authorized” access. It was a bitter lesson for me in the changing of times, because I was fortunate to grow up with a sense of personal security that was far more open. I remember that when I was a child we left our house one day and I asked my mother if she was going to lock the door. She replied, “No, it looks like it might rain and someone may need to get inside quickly.” When the door *did* get locked, the key was placed beneath the welcome mat immediately in front of it. In that place, at that time, thoughtfulness and our sense of personal security had not yet fallen victim to doubt and fear.

While some Moravians may see the primary function of their provincial elders as being guardians of church doctrine and policy, we are more inclined to see ourselves as facilitators

and implementers of church vision. If I am, of necessity, placed into a role of doorkeeper, I will look for reasons to keep the door open before I accept a reason to close it. I am certain that to do otherwise would limit my effectiveness as a leader and may obscure some opportunities for evangelism. I cannot think of an adequate reason for trying to deny any of God’s children the blessings I enjoy. And I define an *adequate* reason as one that might suffice on *my* day of judgment.

In May, Pastor Rick Beck organized an inter-faith dialog opportunity at Schoeneck Church. A Muslim layman, Dr. Mohamed Bugaighis; a Jew, Rabbi Jonathan Gerard; and Rev. Dr. Gordon Sommers, a former Moravian provincial president formed the panel. Surrounding communities were invited to attend the event. Each panelist spoke for a few minutes about the basic elements of his belief and worship tradition, and then the audience, comprised of members of a variety of Christian denominations, was invited to ask questions.

It was my impression that all three speakers affirmed the existence of one God, and, even though our belief systems and traditions are very different from each other, we all worship that same God. Feeling secure in that perception, I was happily learning something about the history, beliefs and worship traditions of Muslims and Jews, when two men rose, in turn, and moved to the floor microphone. Each proceeded to verbally assail Dr. Bugaighis and Rabbi Gerard, sometimes very personally, about their beliefs. Both men invoked scripture by chapter and verse. I must admit that the scripture was familiar,

but their unilateral arguments were carefully scripted and were delivered so rapidly that I was unable to follow, much less analyze their logic. The monologs degenerated into name-calling and the use of harsh, abusive language, until the moderator stepped in to curtail the embarrassing tirades. Having said what they came to say, both men left before the event concluded.

My purpose for describing the event is to say that, at the end of the evening, despite vigorous “righteous” condemnation of their “erroneous ways”, neither the Muslim, nor the Jew was converted to Christianity. My conviction that introduction and/or conversion to Christianity should be by *invitation* was reinforced, and I renewed my determination to make my attempts at evangelism be invitations to walk beside me and share the blessings I enjoy.

And I pause to wonder, if this principle is valid, can it not also work *within* the Christian community? I encourage you, if you have not already done so, to read the booklet *Resolution 6 An Interpretation of Moravian Church Northern Province and Unity Synod Actions Regarding Homosexuality*, prepared by the Provincial Elders’ Conference, Northern Province, and dated January 4, 2003.

I have found it helpful to my understanding of “Resolution 6” to see it as containing two distinct statements, one addressed to the homosexual individual, and another to everyone else. Paraphrasing Resolution 6, to the homosexual person it says, “You shall be supported and affirmed by being allowed to celebrate your life as an individual and/or as part

of a couple within the bounds of the church and under the grace which our Creator imparts to all persons.” To everyone else it says, “You shall support and affirm a homosexual individual by allowing him/her to celebrate his/her life as an individual and/or as part of a couple within the bounds of the church and under the grace which our Creator imparts to all.”

A great deal of discussion and controversy has taken place around the use of the word “celebrate” in the resolution. Some people have objected to the erroneous perception that they have been directed to celebrate a form of sexual expression which they cannot support. That particular controversy is unfortunate and unnecessary, in that it arises from misreading the resolution. Referring to my two-statement understanding above, I maintain that the homosexual individual is told, “You shall **be ... allowed** to celebrate **your** life ...” To everyone else it says, “You shall **allow** him/her to celebrate...”

In this resolution no person is directed to celebrate the life of another, and the Northern Province does not declare that it celebrates *anything*. In adopting Resolution 6, the Moravian Church, Northern Province recognized and reinforced the basic human right of a homosexual child of God in the Northern Province to celebrate his, or her own life. This is a freedom that is frequently, if not typically denied a homosexual member of the Moravian Church. But, it is one that everyone else takes for granted.

I must admit that my attempt to clarify the use of the word “celebrate” in Resolution 6 is done with some sense of hopelessness. It appears that misstating and/or misinterpreting

the intended message of Resolution 6 may result from emotional stimulus as much as from the absence of accurate information. As recently as the date of publication of the January/February (2004) edition of *The Moravian* magazine, in a letter to the editor a learned person wrote, “When the Northern Provincial Synod passed a memorial which said they, “*celebrated the homosexual lifestyle,*” . . .” This line is most likely misquoted from Resolution 6, the full text of which you have just read.

Please read the text again, and draw your own conclusion about Resolution 6 being the source of the “quotation” as it is seen in the published letter. I am disappointed that a well-meaning person has chosen to base an argument on misinformation, possibly from a third party’s emotional misinterpretation, rather than referring to, and quoting from the original document. Regrettably, my sense of disappointment extends to the editorial staff of *The Moravian* magazine, who chose to perpetuate error and propagate disinformation by publishing the poorly researched letter.

About a year and a half have passed since that Northern Province synod committee crafted its Second Partial Report, and I believe my sensitivity to political correctness has heightened during that short period of time. With a reminder that each synod resolution must pass rigorous testing to ensure that it can “stand on its own,” I ask you to read the resolution which follows Resolution 6 in the same partial report: RESOLVED: (10) *The church shall continue to enter into dialogue in a Christian manner with homosexual persons in order to understand their lives and their spiritual walk.*

Fully appreciating the rapidity with which most synod legislation must be drafted, and with no criticism intended, I draw our attention to the wording of Resolution 10: “The church shall . . . dialogue . . . with homosexual persons . . .to understand their lives and their spiritual walk.” The wording can easily be misinterpreted to mean that a “we and they” relationship exists between the church, which would appear to include no homosexual persons, and another, “homosexual persons”. I can see that, despite the love and care with which the resolution was crafted, a homosexual Moravian might perceive it to say, “The Northern Province does not consider me to be part of the church, and wants to dialogue with me as an outsider.” I believe the most immediate need for pertinent conversation and understanding lies *within* our membership, and I encourage each of us to search out and adopt the most inclusive interpretation of all legislative language.

The “celebrate” discussion addresses one of the nine points in the PEC(N) booklet’s concluding Interpretive Summary. Another statement found there is: “*they do not make judgments about the homosexual sexual act. This interpretation remains a pastoral issue to be discerned through study of scripture and as the Holy Spirit guides us.*” The statement leads me to make two comments. First, the word *pastoral* is used here in its broadest sense, and I hope no one understands it to mean that judgments about specific non-abusive sexual acts should be sought from congregational pastors.

I have no formal training in the study of human sexuality, but my reading leads me to

believe it is an extremely complex equation. We do not provide specialized seminary training sufficient to prepare a pastor to offer objective counseling in support or condemnation of any specific, non-abusive sexual act; and I believe there is significant potential for advice, offered without benefit of appropriate training or guideline, to cause great harm. Second, I sincerely hope the Moravian Church never adopts as part of its mission listing, defining, or commenting upon the acceptability of individual sexual acts.

I will share another personal enlightenment that occurred as I recently prepared to write a stewardship sermon. While reviewing *The Parable of the Talents*, in Matthew 25:14-30, I discovered a lesson that had until then escaped my notice, even though I have read it often and listened to many sermons based upon the text. It speaks of a master entrusting servants with assets, and describes two entirely different ways the assets were managed by the servants. The first two servants worked hard and invested wisely, doubling the amounts entrusted to them, while the third buried his portion in the ground, producing a zero return on the master's investment. When he returned, the master received the reports of the two profitable servants with high praise and promise of promotion, while the third, the unprofitable servant was harshly reprimanded and severely punished.

The parable is frequently understood to be a simple comparison between "good" and "bad," with hard work and profit being "good," and laziness and lack of profit being "bad." The experience I have gained while working

with congregational debate and conflict, first as a member of the Eastern District Executive Board and then as a member of the Provincial Elders' Conference, North helped me to see an additional lesson in the parable. It may speak to us Moravians about our relationships with each other and how they affect our ability to carry out our ministry.

As I took a fresh look at the parable, a picture emerged of a wealthy man who made use of a planned absence as an opportunity to test three servants he was considering for promotion. To do that he entrusted them with various sums of money, then went away for a long time. The first two servants increased the master's investments, and were rewarded with praise and promotion. The third servant gave back the master's money, which he had kept hidden away, stating clearly that he knew the master to be a hard man. He accused the master of harvesting where he had not sown and gathering where he had not scattered seed, implying that the master did not deserve to profit from his ill-gotten wealth. Some of us might agree with the servant, believing that the dishonest businessman got just what he deserved. Some might see the servant's reasoning as being very righteous.

The master, however, became enraged, seemingly because the third servant brought him no profit. But I think there is more to it than that. The master was a wealthy man whose enterprise was probably not endangered by a loss of profit on the smallest of these three investments. His testing of the three servants had served its purpose; two were found to be worthy of promotion, and one was not. So, if he

didn't need the money, and his testing was successful, why did the master become so angry that he had the third servant stripped of money and influence and thrown outside to his certain demise?

I suggest that the master responded to something that was more important to him than his money. I think the master saw the servant's righteous accusations as *self-righteousness*, and a product of the servant's judgmental attitude. *The servant had presumed to judge*. Even worse, he believed himself to be "better" than his master. And the master's retribution was swift and decisive. The parable's message to *me* is clear ... only my Master may judge! Any "righteousness" that I might feel, if it is derived from my judgment of another person, is *self-righteousness*. And, if I let myself be judgmental and self-righteous, I risk my Master's great displeasure.

What might the importance of this kind of message be to us Moravians in our current circumstance? The membership of the Moravian Unity finds itself divided over a number of issues. In the Czech Republic, and to a lesser degree in North America, we are divided over differences between styles of worship. The Moravian church in North America is struggling to understand issues surrounding sexual orientation. In Africa we are in vigorous debate over the place of women in ordained ministry. All of these topics readily produce differing opinions and emotional responses. The topics are worth discussing, and we must talk to each other about them, but I believe we walk on dangerous ground when one group of us sees that another group will not change its collective mind to agree with ours, and we begin to judge the *people* who hold the opposing view.

This realization has had a profound effect on me. It causes me to take a critical look at the way I have approached my work, both in the Moravian Church and in private industry. Most notably, it has led me to see how dramatically our attitudes and responses affect the quantity and quality of our ministry as Moravian Christians. Our intolerance of each other has caused some members to stop coming to church activities (even worship services), some to withhold their tithes and offerings, and others to withdraw from membership altogether. These people include both laity and clergy. The resulting cost to the church is a reduction in our ministry. I concluded that portion of my stewardship sermon with the statement, "In a world as needy as ours, any decrease in ministry is inexcusable, probably sinful, and an outrageous example of bad stewardship!"

I am a US citizen, a husband, father and a veteran of US military service. I respect and live by the US Constitution, and admire the wisdom of the people who wrote it. Resolution 6 provides no civil right or liberty that I have not already put my mortal life on the line to serve and protect.

I am a Christian, a Moravian and a servant-leader in the Moravian Church. I trust fully in the ability of our synods to discern, interpret and implement the leading of the Holy Spirit. Resolution 6 provides no human right to God's children that I am not willing to put my eternal life on the line to serve and protect.

What should we do now? Some people who voted in favor of Resolution 6 did so because they believed it improved the status of a small isolated, segregated part of the Moravian Church.

Others voted for it because it did not push them beyond their personal comfort zones. Some people voted against the resolution because they believe that particular segment of the Moravian Church *should be* separated from the rest. And some voted against it because it *did* push them beyond their comfort zones.

Unity Synod has told us (wisely, I believe) that we are not yet ready to enact additional legislation. Perhaps the Holy Spirit wants us to *listen* for awhile. In the meantime, Resolution 6 stands strongly on its own. It passes that test.

I feel led to view it as literally as I can, let it be everything it says it is, and not make of it anything it is not. We can look to the PEC(N) interpretive booklet and its concluding summary to help guide us in that process.

Just how *essential* is Resolution 6? Will the subject of Resolution 6 come up when we stand before God to be judged? It could! But, I think God may judge us less on its content than on the way we treated each other while we discussed it.

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SECOND PARTIAL REPORT  
COMMITTEE ON CHURCH AND SOCIETY

**RE: Recognition of Homosexual Members of the Moravian Church Northern Province**

Whereas, Scripture affirms the inclusion of all persons in the community of faith; including those once believed to be sexual outcasts, the unclean, and others as set forth in Isaiah 56:1-8; and

Whereas, Scripture affirms that all who hold the Sabbath and choose what is pleasing to God will be given within the household of faith; a name better than that of sons and daughters, and never be cut off from God as set forth in Isaiah 56:1-8; and

Whereas, God's house may truly be a house of prayer for all people; and

Whereas, The Holy Scripture illuminates the heart and guides the soul; providing in both Old Testament and New Testament examples of God's acceptance of the outcast and the inclusiveness of God's outreach, i.e., Ruth the proscribed Moabite — Deut. 23:3 — an ancestor of David; the inclusion of proscribed eunuchs — Lev. 21:18-20, Acts 8; Jesus' inclusion of tax collectors, lepers, foreigners, harlots, sinners, the Samaritan woman in John 4: 7-15; and

Whereas, The spiritual journey of homosexual Christians is a valid journey of faith, and the same journey of walking with the Lord as is the faith journey of all baptized believers; therefore be it

RESOLVED (5) The 2002 Synod of the Northern Province shall recognize that persons who are homosexual can be members of our church because they are children of God and seek to know God's grace which is freely given to all people who have faith in God; and be it further

RESOLVED (6) Homosexual individuals shall be supported and affirmed by being allowed to celebrate their lives as individuals and/or couples completely within the bounds of the church and under the grace which our Creator imparts to all persons; and be it further

RESOLVED (10) The church shall continue to enter into dialogue in a Christian manner with homosexual persons in order to understand their lives and their spiritual walk.

June 17, 2002