

## Lee Sprinkle

Public acceptance of homosexuality has ignited a debate that draws emotional responses from all sides. To understand the concern that many have over the perceived intent of Resolution 6 we must put that resolution in perspective based on existing documents which the 2002 committee and Northern Province synod delegates would be aware. Glenn Hertzog writes that those who voted against the resolution did so because of a misinterpretation of the term “celebrate.” I think there may have been other misinterpretations at work.

To understand what the word “celebrate” was intended to mean, it is helpful to review the original Second Partial Report, from which Resolution 6 was lifted. This would have been the information that was given to delegates at the 2002 Northern Synod. Resolutions 7 - 9 appeared in the “original” Second Partial report and followed Resolution 6.

*Resolution 7:* Within the household of faith, those homosexual persons who have chosen to live within the bounds of a committed relationship, be recognized as committed and covenant couples, in full standing with other committed and covenanted relationships; and be it further

*Resolution 8:* The final paragraph of the Book of order, paragraph 202. (e) shall be amended to read: “Ordained ministers, while single, are called to a life of celibacy (sexual abstinence); those who have vowed with another to live in a committed life relationship are called to a life of sexual fidelity to their partner;” and

*Resolution 9:* The 2002 Synod of the Northern Province shall encourage “open and affirming” congregations, where homosexual persons may participate fully in the life of the church, where they would have equal opportunities to commit and covenant their relationships, and where their children may be baptized and raised in the Christian faith;

Glenn writes: “In this resolution [6] no person is directed to celebrate the life of another, and the Northern Province does not declare that it celebrates *anything*.” To those who interpreted the resolution as a directive for the church to “Celebrate the homosexual life style,” Glenn states his disappointment that people have 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.”

In response, the “original document” [The Second Partial Report ], that contained supporting resolutions 7-9, does not support Glenn’s interpretation that Resolution 6 was not a call to “celebrate the homosexual life style.” In fact, it was calling for the minister and church to participate in some of the most important celebrations in a person’s life. In order to agree with Glenn’s ascribed definition of “celebrate,” you would have to both disregard the supporting Resolutions 7-9 and acknowledge that the Resolution 6 statement is capable of being interpreted in more than one way.

Resolutions 7-9 were worded clearly enough to remove any ambiguity on Resolution 6. They clearly informed the church exactly what Resolution 6 would mean for the church to allow gays to “celebrate” their lives as individuals and couples. Churches were encouraged to affirm openly gay covenants performed by Moravian clergy and to baptize children born (artificially) to gays; all of which would be part of that meaning. Also, language in *The Book of Order* was to be adjusted to accommodate gay clergy and their partners.

The language was not ambiguous to those voting delegates who were aware of Resolutions 7-9 of the Second Partial Report, from which Resolution 6 was lifted. Synod was in the midst of a horrendous debate on Resolution 7 when a bishop asked for a halt to the bloodletting that was

taking place. When the synod reconvened the next morning, Resolutions 7-9 were effectively pulled from consideration by the synod with a series of motions to “postpone debate indefinitely” on each of them. The Northern PEC was faced with the need to interpret Resolution 6 without using the language of Resolutions 7-9 because the synod had not approved Resolutions 7-9. The PEC has interpreted Resolution 6 in the spirit of what Resolutions 7-9 would have allowed. For now, Resolution 6 remains the placeholder for 7-9 in a future synod.

Was Resolution 6 born out of misinterpretation of God’s Grace? It would seem clear that authors of Resolution 6 had taken license to call the church to now affirm that homosexuals expressing themselves homosexually is a thing worthy of celebrating. Not in 2000 years has the church ever said this because scripture itself does not say it.

The outcry from evangelicals who saw the clearly licentious nature of the complete Second Partial Report did succeed in having clarifying resolutions 7-9 stricken. The original language and intent of the word “celebrate” remained in Resolution 6 and continues to trouble those who have observed the language shift from the 1974 Synod statement asking for love for all people to a statement that comes dangerously close to dispensing with the call to holiness on the part of all who desire to follow Christ.

The church’s role in evangelism is not simply to call people to faith in Christ. We’re also to call them to grow in the “fullness of the stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13) by imitating and obeying him. There is a sugary sentimentalism in the Moravian Church that has replaced truth. When Glenn describes evangelism as inviting someone to walk alongside him, the question of where Glenn is headed is pertinent. Discipleship is the key component in evangelism, but without holiness, what is discipleship?

Dialogue on homosexuality today suggests that the church will not affirm what the Bible defines as sin in light of the hope provided by God’s grace. Indeed, it is only by the grace of God that any person is saved from his sin. Salvation does not come by convincing ourselves that what God declared to be sin can be transformed to virtue by legislative vote of synod.

As Bob Hoekstra, commenting on Jude, explains: “[Jude 4] warned of religious people who will misinterpret the Grace of God to license sin. He called all followers of Christ to engage in a zealous battle for the integrity of the word of God. *“I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith,”* Such contending is essential, because carnal religious people desire to alter grace, as they quietly operate within churches. *“For certain men have crept in unnoticed . . . ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness.”* Their intended modifications involved turning grace into license. Grace is God’s means of forgiving our sins, as well as transforming the sinner that he might sin less and less. Grace is *not* God’s sanction by which we plan and excuse our personal indulgence.”<sup>1</sup>

Unity Synod and the Northern PEC statements may have attempted to circumvent the warning of Jude 4 by continuing to acknowledge an uncertainty about Biblical instruction on homosexuality. Rather than affirming the biblical views on homosexuality, each simply offered a restatement of the reports and resolutions leading up to and including Resolution 6. The Northern PEC further distanced themselves from scriptural accountability by granting each congregation the freedom to interpret their own views and actions regarding homosexuality, a position some churches have already assumed.

Glenn writes, “Some people voted against the resolution because they believe that particular segments of the Moravian Church *should be* separated from the rest. And some voted against it

---

<sup>1</sup> Bob Hoekstra, “A Warning Against Changing God’s Grace,” *Day By Day By Grace*. Blue Letter Bible. 19 Mar 2004. 26 Mar 2004 <<http://www.blueletterbible.org/daybyday/02/0219.html>>.

because it *did* push them beyond their comfort zones.” To me, this is arrogant and condescending toward those Moravians who voted a principled biblical position against homosexuality. To suggest that such people are segregationists or that they want to remain in a comfort zone does a real disservice to those who took a position of conscience based in the clear teachings of scripture and 2000 years of Christian history.

Glenn states, “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.” We should also consider the possibility that some members may have dropped out or cut back on their participation and giving because they are disturbed that the Moravian Church seems to have a propensity to approve of sin. That's not a matter of intolerance of persons, but of a desire to be faithful to God's revelation.

It is not so much my intention to identify who misinterpreted the intent of Resolution 6 or what their motives may have been. I think it is far more important to realize from this that important statements and documents that relate to our faith and beliefs must avoid ambiguous and unclear statements that say one thing to one group and something else to another. Given the obvious concern that was evident at the 2002 Synod over the wording of Resolution 6, it would have been far more appropriate to have tabled it until the language could be written so that all could vote on a document that clearly said the same thing to everyone.

A core group of leaders in the Southern Province are working to conclude a four-year visioning process with the objective of agreeing on a simple statement that answers the question: “Who are we and what do we believe?” If that statement does not clearly and simply affirm our belief in the authority of scripture and its message of salvation through Christ, then I fear this demonstrates the Moravian Church is moving toward apostasy and heresy, in which case believers must call the church to repentance.

Maybe with clear directives from future Synods, PECs will be charged with guarding doctrine and policies related to our faith and beliefs. Maybe pastors will be encouraged by Glenn and other leaders of our church to offer biblical instruction on life issues. Maybe Glenn could find one more blessing to share with all God's children: the blessing that all Christians enjoy of being called to grow in the image of Christ, called to holiness and righteousness. (Eph 4:24).

*Lee Sprinkle is a member of Olivet Moravian Church in Winston-Salem, N.C. and is webmaster for [www.moravians.org](http://www.moravians.org).*