

When Principles Are Abandoned

“When an organization or nation, abandons the principles that sustain a wholesome condition, stability, harmonious and correct function of its constituents and the advancement of superior levels of development, it opens the doors to confusion, chaos and moral and institutional disintegration.”

Recently, from September 14th to 18th, the Unity board meeting of the of the Unitas Fratrum or the Moravian Church took place in Winston-Salem North Carolina and Bethlehem Pennsylvania, United States of America.

It was, without any doubt, a very important event in which the participants, leaders of provinces of the Unity and Mission provinces discussed and came into accord about multiple themes relating to the organization and work of the Moravian Unity.

We must recognize the excellent job done to ensure that logistics be carried out by leaders and hosts; the Rev. David Guthrie and the Rev. Betsy Miller and their teams; the efficient performance of board members during the event’s sessions: the Rev. Cortroy Jarvis, Rev. David Guthrie, Rev. Jorgen Boytler and Rev. Judy Ganz, and the very special leading of devotionals by the Bishops of the Unity who supported this meeting, standing out among them, as he has accustomed us to, Bishop Samuel Gray who provided a multifaceted contribution. We cannot fail to point out however, something that happened, or to be more exact something that should have happened but did not, something which threw a dense shadow over the lights of this event because it meant another censurable occurrence on the way towards the abandonment of essential principles such as that taken by a portion of our church four years ago, in 2014.

In that year, 2014, as we all know, the Northern Province of the Moravian Church of America in open contradiction to what is expressed in Scriptures, “our only standard in faith doctrine”, in documents guiding the life of our church, such as The Covenant For Christian Living of the Moravian Church and in the pronouncements of the Bishop’s Conferences of 2007 and 2014, made the unfortunate decision during their Synod of legitimizing the practice of homosexuality in their congregations and to include in their church practices the marriage and ordination of homosexual people.

We all know how the decisions of that Province shook our World Unity and the reactions of disapproval that originated in many places where Moravian works are carried out. Posteriorly, during deliberations about this matter in the meeting in Jamaica in 2015, the Caribbean and Latin American Region called for a pronouncement in which their position was clearly expressed and further on, during the synod of the Unity that was celebrated in Kingston in 2016, it was approved with an immense majority of delegates in favor of Resolution 44 "Message to the America North Province" in which it was posed in a categorical way that: *that "the decision of the American Northern Province in 2014 concerning the ordination and/or marriage of same sex couples does not involve only the American Northern province since the issue of ordination and marriage concerns the very essence of practice and life of the worldwide Unitas Fratrum"*; that *"the practice of homosexuality is in contradiction to the Unity Synod's 2016 understanding of Scripture"*; *"that Christian Marriage in the Moravian Church is between a man and a woman, and be it"*; that *"the actions of the Northern Province in the June 2014 Synod concerning the marriage of same gender couples and the ordination of homosexual people is not in accordance with the 2016 Unity Synod's understanding of the marriage based on Unity Synod's understanding of the COUF, the Moravian Covenant for Christian living and the Scripture, and be it further"* and that *"the Unity Synod of 2016 commissioned the Unity Board to observe the development of the Northern Province, to take necessary measures"*. Being that the next Unity Board meeting would be in 2018, it would correspond to this meeting to carry out what was indicated in Resolution 44.

It cannot be left without pointing out that although the position of the Unity Synod of 2016 in respect to the practice of homosexuality and marriage and the ordination of homosexual people in our church and that although Unity Synods are the maximum organisms which make decisions in the Moravian Unity, therefore whose resolutions have a binding or obligatory character for all Provinces and Mission Areas that make up our Unity, in what has been another very regrettable episode on the way to the abandonment of principles, The Southern province of The Moravian Church of America resolved during their Synod of this year, 2018, through Resolutions 13 and 14 to leave their congregations open to the possibility of accepting the same practices of the Northern province which were rejected by the Unity Synod in 2016.

The moment for the 2018 Unity Meeting arrived, and the expected time to carry out the commission of Resolution 44 from the 2016 Unity Synod, to observe the development of the

Northern Province and take the necessary measures. This was the RESPONSIBILITY of those who organized the agenda for this meeting and whom directed its development; to ensure that this matter which was ordered by Synod be brought to discussion (which would place it in a more complicated context now because of the decisions taken by the Southern Province during their past Synod), but NOTHING HAPPENED, there was no reference whatsoever in the agenda nor during the course of this meeting of Resolution 44 from the 2016 Synod. "Message to the America North Province", which gives us the right to think that there was a desire to evade the discussion, which would surely have been intense and very embarrassing for our hosts because the Northern Province has absolutely not retracted in their decisions (and clearly does not think of doing so) because now joining them is the Southern Province in this mistaken line of conduct.

It was mandated by a Unity Synod, therefore, IT WAS OBLIGATORY TO CARRY OUT, to follow up during this meeting as to the situation of The Northern Province but with a step forward – or more like, another step back- in this trajectory of abandonment of principles this was not done. Ignored totally by those presiding over this meeting was the cited resolution. The word of God tells us "But all things should be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40). It is unacceptable and very reproachable to have omitted an important point that should have been observed from the order during this meeting of the Unity by not following the commission given to this meeting by the 2016 Synod in Resolution 44.

Wrong, very wrong are those who in this matter of homosexuality place first the preferences and arguments of humans to the will of God as expressed in His Word, and wrong very wrong is a church if to satisfy the criteria, wishes and interests of some, break principles and rules that never should be violated because to do so opens the doors, as pointed out at the beginning, to confusion, chaos and moral and institutional disintegration.

What should we do in face of this? Should we remain in pervasive and complicit silence? Or should we walk firmly in the narrow way that we are called to by He who tells us: "Be holy because I am holy", and with our prayers, words and actions put an end to this nefarious race toward sin and spiritual darkness, towards moral and institutional cracking, and make our loved Unity of the Brothers to show itself and shine everywhere it is as the faithful Wife of the Lamb and honor in this way its precious legacy of over 560 years of history? It depends on us. The people wait for us. The Lord waits for us.

In the service of the Lamb who conquered and yours,
Bishop of the Moravian Unity
Armando Rusindo