

## A RETURN TO MORAVIAN ORIGINALISM

My favorite theologian, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, during his pontificate, called for a “ressourcement” – which is a French term that Pope Benedict used in calling for a “return to the beginning, the source, the foundation.” It defines for us the reason why we are here. For me personally, it is a call for a return to “Moravian Originalism” and a firm foundation in the “Word of God,” the Bible.

In any gathering of Christians, one will always find those who accept some parts of Scripture, while rejecting other parts. This pick-n-choose type of person is called a “cafeteria Christian.” The celebrated and noted 4<sup>th</sup> century Church Father from North Africa, Augustine of Hippo, wrote this of such Christians: “If you believe what you like in the gospels, and reject what you don’t like, it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself.”

Chester Davis, in his book “Moravians in Europe and America – 1415-1865,” writes this of the early Moravians: “They (the Brethren) lived by the words of the Bible, distrusting theology or the meanings that other men read into the words of the Bible. They felt that where doctrine attempted to say more than the Bible itself said in plain words, that doctrine was misleading and to be avoided.”

Everyone loves to quote Scripture to support their own personal morality. For those who rely on Scripture to support their position of “loving the sinner, but hating the sin,” this

phrase is nowhere to be found in Scripture. It is a man-made phrase written by none other than Augustine of Hippo. Perhaps a proximate Scriptural reference for some might be found in Ezekiel 33:11: “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways. (NASV)” Some may have other references, but the fact remains: the phrase: “Love the sinner, but hate the sin” is nowhere to be found in Scripture.

In essence, we are being asked to love a homosexual while hating his/her active and willfully-continuing lifestyle, and who has no intention of adhering to the command of Jesus to “go and sin no more.” The late Jesuit theologian, Thomas Green, complicated this dilemma even further when he wrote: “We cannot love what we don’t know.”

In April, 2018, at the Southern Province Synod, the highest administrative officer in the Moravian Church (Rev. Boytler) appeared before the Community Committee where same-sex marriage was being debated. A lay delegate, who was a committee member and in attendance on that day, in a written and signed testimony, had this to say about Rev. Boytler’s appearance: “He (Rev. Boytler) testified that in other places of the world, and more specifically Tanzania, that Christians (and others) can be persecuted extensively for even discussing LGBTQ+ issues.”

Some Southern Province clergy have uttered similar words. One member of the Winston-Salem clergy clearly wrote very similar words expressed by Rev. Boytler, for which I have a written document. I cannot reveal the name of this person nor the contents of the document because I have imposed a “seal” on the document for the next 70 years, and in doing so, I am merely duplicating a silly practice imposed on me recently by Rev. David Guthrie, president of the Southern Province PEC.

In terms of these clergy statements, nothing can be further from the truth. The proof in my accusation can be found in the book “Moravian Voice.” It contains statements from 15 Tanzanians:

Congregational Pastors, Teofilo Kisanji University faculty and students, and faculty from a theological college.

All are united in their individual statements that homosexuality in Tanzania is against the African culture, and that same-sex marriage is not allowed in their country. I need to tell Rev. Boytler and those Southern Province clergy that not one of these Tanzanians has been persecuted, arrested, prosecuted, or imprisoned. It is important to note that more than 70% of worldwide Moravians are Tanzanians.

The book, “Moravian Voice,” has been translated into Swahili and 1,000 copies have been printed and are presently

being distributed in the eight provinces of Tanzania, in four theological colleges in Tanzania, as well as in the following African countries: Malawi, Zambia, DR-Congo, Eastern Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, and Kenya. In addition, the final stages have been reached in the translation of this book into the Czech language, and, within the next week or so, 500 copies will be printed and distributed throughout the Czech Republic's Moravian Province.

I ask that you blend this same-sex marriage controversy with the recent issuance of the "American Moravian Church Catechism, wherein it is stated that the Bible is not essential. Here again, Tanzanians disagree: A Tanzanian member of the clergy recently communicated this mathematical certainty to me: "No Bible means no Christianity." As an analogy, although it may not be the best, it is an analogy nonetheless: try saying to the United States Supreme Court that our Constitution is not essential to American governance.

This new American Moravian Catechism does not disappoint the PEC-supported liberalistic, permissive advocates of extreme change in church theology with its ludicrous and new-found insistence that if the Bible can be burned and one remains a Christian, then it (the Bible) is no longer essential in the Moravian Church. Yet, at the same time, these ecclesiastical change-agents inform us that the Bible is also "not non-essential.

Well then, if the Bible is not “essential” and is simultaneously not a “non-essential,” just where does one find the Bible on this “wild blue yonder Biblical hierarchy?” No one seems to know.

The new catechism also contains a statement that the new Biblical language for marriage is “two people,” not a man and a woman. The problem for the PEC is that this new “genderless” marriage identity conflicts with the Moravian Book of Worship. I expect that the next target for these righteous church leaders will be to rewrite the Moravian Book of Worship, especially pages 175-176, that specifically pertain to traditional Moravian marriages.

Perhaps the rightful resting place for this new American Moravian Catechism is the city dump.

My fellow Moravians: “America is at war with Christianity.”

From the highest mountain peaks on our west coast, to the sandy ocean beaches on our east coast; from Canada in the north to Mexico in the south, a new mantra, a new standard, has overtaken the American Moravian Church:

If it’s a Biblical change, promote it;  
If it’s a permissiveness in morality, adopt it;  
and, if it’s a “feel good attitude” in sexuality, do it!

It is imperative that a “willing and active coalition” of Southern Province Moravians (clergy and laity) unite in a “21<sup>st</sup> Century Crusade” to annihilate and exterminate this growing and dangerous ecclesial cancer that is destroying the American Moravian Church with a “Confession of Ideas” based on reason. We need to replace that dangerous path with “Moravian Originalism” that emphasizes a “Profession of Faith” based on the “Word of God.” It is in the imparting of a cause for the launching of a “Crusade” that we must remind ourselves of the purpose for such an effort. Napoleon Bonaparte’s maxim provides such a rationale: “It is the cause, not the death, that makes the martyr .”

We American Moravians must take the initiative in challenging our church leaders and their allied clergy and lay followers. To our friendly, but quiet Moravian clergy and “pew dwelling” laity, who agree with our goals and aspirations but are hesitant and reluctant to stand up and speak out, I would like to remind you of a word of caution from a notable Christian: “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter. In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends. There comes a time when silence is a betrayal.”

We are facing a firmly entrenched ecclesiastical bureaucracy with an abundant resource advantage, having

complete and total control over all Church functions, legislation, and decision-making. Such extensive power and authority can easily invoke fear on any opposition. Fear of the unknown always places an added burden on anyone facing adversity. Yet, in opposing those who control our Church, we Moravians must have not only the tenacity to challenge, but the wisdom to do it with courage, conviction, and purpose. The words of the 20<sup>th</sup> century English Christian writer, C. S. Lewis, seem most appropriate: “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they become ineffective in this.” An American academician, Thomas Sowell, pretty much endorses C. S. Lewis’ views: “It is hard to imagine a more stupid or more dangerous way of making decisions than by putting those decisions in the hands of people who pay no price for being wrong.” Even George Bernard Shaw had this to add: “Take care to get what you like as you will be forced to like what you get.”

We are in the midst of a serious battle that will determine the future of the American Moravian Church and Christianity in America.

With spiritual guidance from the Holy Spirit, we must, with all our energy and strength, challenge this new ideology and “garbage theology” that has overtaken our Church.

The American Moravian Church has been hijacked by a band of thieves. We must stand up, speak out, and resist further destruction of our Church. This academic-inspired, PEC endorsed “cancel culture” must be aggressively opposed and, with God’s help, we shall restore our Moravian Originalism.

A great way to start is by your attendance today. John Dyer’s keynote address is very powerful and everyone needs to hear it. Please listen carefully. It is an important message.

May God bless each of you. May God bless America. And may God bless our beloved American and worldwide Moravian Church.

(Remarks delivered by Jules Modlinski at Concerned Moravians Meeting, Bethabara Moravian Church, June 26, 2021)