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Moravian Bishopric Office: Historical Developments and Its Pitfalls in the Tanzanian Context

The Moravian Church in Tanzania has been operating on the historical heritage of the Worldwide Moravian views in as far as the office of the bishop is concerned. The office of the Bishop is separated from the executing duties and thus based only on spiritual matters, where the Bishop is described by COUF as a spiritual and pastoral role rather than an administrative one. Bishops are regarded as “pastors of pastors”, responsible for ordination, intercession, and maintaining the unity and continuity of the church’s ministry, but without Episcopalian authority like bishops in some other denominations. While there is smooth running of the Bishopric office and the Provincial Executive Committee in many other provinces of the Unitas Fratrum, the scenario in Tanzania and its offshoots (DRC, Zambia, Burundi and Malawi) presents pitfalls. There is a paradox of understanding and practice between the Bishopric office and that of the Executive Committee, leading to, in most cases, overt or covert conflicts. This paper looks at the historicity of the Bishopric office developments in the Moravian Church from antiquity to the present, weighs the existing situation today from Biblical insights, and finally draws the views into the Tanzanian context. To a great extent, the paradox existing in these two offices, bishopric and Executive Committee, has contributed very much to the stagnation of church growth economically and socially. Therefore, the paper proposes ways of solving the long-existing pitfalls for a better way of church governance in the Moravian Church Worldwide. Discussions in this paper are mostly based on the paper which was written by the Teofilo Kisanji University (TEKU) staff upon the request of the Moravian in Tanzania (MCT) in trying to solve the riddle between the two pillars (Executive Committee and Bishop’s Office) in 2007 and later from an extensive research done during my doctoral studies between 2008 and 2012 and also from the ever-increasing echoes for clear demarcation alignments of these two offices coming from ordinary church members in the Tanzanian Moravian Church. It is my hope that through this paper, modifications will be made in the church’s running pertaining to the executive committee and Bishopric office without offsetting the historical foundations.

Key words:

Unitas Fratrum ~ Moravian Church ~ Bishopric Office ~ Executive Committee ~ Tanzania