

Ein besonderer Höhepunkt der Synode war gleich zu Beginn der Besuch von Dr. Potter, Generalsekretär des Ökumenischen Rates, der am ersten Arbeitstag spontan die Gelegenheit zu einer längeren Aussprache wahrnahm. Seine Erwartungen von dem brüderischen Beitrag im ökumenischen Gespräch sollten nicht vergessen werden und seien darum hier mit den biblischen Besinnungen abgedruckt.

*Dietrich Meyer*

ADDRESS BY DR. PHILIP POTTER, on August 31, 1981, in Herrnhut

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ. I would like once again to say what a privilege it is for me to be amongst you at this Unity Synod and to share with you some thoughts about our life together in the ecumenical movement and particularly in the World Council of Churches. The question that I put to myself is: What is the role of the *Unitas Fratrum*, the Moravians, in the ecumenical movement and in the WCC today and tomorrow?

Yesterday, in my greetings, I related the Moravian past to the present ecumenical movement. Afterwards I was asked many questions by people in interviews. One of them was: How can a small church like the Moravian Church play any significant role in the ecumenical movement? Well, my answer is, the Moravian Church was always a small church. But in the 18th century it played a role way, way beyond. But the World today is a very, very different place. It is not as vast and far away as in the 18th century. Communications are easier, people can get to the furthest corner of the globe almost in a day or in a day and a half; disease is not as rampant as before, people do not die so easily and all that. But our world has become a great deal more complex with many more conflicts right on our doorsteps and people are a good deal more insistent on their own identities. So we have to remember that fact; but we have to remember too, that the nature and needs of human beings remain the same. Now, how do we meet the new situation therefore as our forefathers did in their situation, that is the question.

Then I was asked another question and that had to do with the pietistic tradition of the Moravians - their tendency to stillness. And the question is: How can Moravians play a role in a body like the WCC, with its very active program and its tendency to be involved in the struggles for justice and peace in the world? Now, here if you will excuse me, I would like to say a little word about the word "piety" or as in German "Pietismus". That word comes from a French word "piété" and the French word comes from an old Latin word "pietas", which somewhere in the early middle-ages became the two French words "pieté" and "pitié", from which we get in English "piety" and "pity". And "piety" became associated with one side of the meaning of "pietas". "Pietas" meant utter loyalty, which expressed itself in the love of those, to whom one was loyal. But what happened was,

that by splitting that word into two, "pieté" became utter loyalty and "pitié" became doing good things to other people and without those two being united. And that has been one of the problems in our Christian world, where piety has been divided from "pity" and both have suffered. Now, the Moravian tradition - and by the way the word "pietas" in Latin corresponds very well to the Hebr. chësek, which has been translated as "mercy", Barmherzigkeit, but which really should be translated as "loyal", "steadfast love", you see, that utter loyalty, which expresses itself in love for others. The Moravians never lost that "keeping-of-the-two-together-in-piety". It was in its loyalty, which expressed itself often in stillness, that stillness meant that patient endurance and unflinching hope without which you cannot go on caring for others. Now, this enables us to go on doing what one has to do - in truth and love and leaving the outcome to God. My own conviction is, that we desperately need this quality today. The real question is, how is this piety to be expressed in the realities of our world today.

Yet another question which was posed to me yesterday was this: How can a simple naive group like the Moravians play a role in a body such as the WCC with so many self-conscious, sophisticated churches and Christians? Reference was made to the life and work of Zinzendorf. It was almost too good to be true. Well, there is a naivety, which comes from a deep faith. It is, what I should call a creative naivety.

A world such as ours, which is so devoted to security and hanging on to things at all cost cannot easily appreciate this pilgrim people who have crossed the seas to the end of the earth and who are quite indifferent to what they might have and what they might keep. Actually you know the ecumenical ship that we have, this ship with the bare mast, which is a cross on rough seas, is an excellent symbol of what Moravians have been. And the ecumenical movement needs such a spirit of creative naivety. But now, what are the relations of the Moravians with the WCC, what are the working relations that we can have. Well, there are certain facts:

The Moravian Churches, not all only several of them, have been member churches of the WCC for a long time. There has been involvement in various activities in the WCC in many countries. There has been participation in our Assemblies and in the Central Committee. Dr. Groenfeldt is a honoured member of our Committee. But I have the impression, that there is not sufficient direct involvement. So I want to take up again the four points about the life and work of the WCC, which in fact correspond with the historical witness of Moravians. And I do so in terms of the historic vocation of the Moravians.

First of all, Unity: It is not enough to speak and sing and pray of the unity of heart and mind. This unity must be seen, to be in process of being realized in the power of the Holy spirit. Therefore there should be active involvement with other churches in each place. That is to say, in the Councils of the churches but particularly in the things that we can do together in faithfulness to the Gospel. And that ought to be a main concern, it seems to me, of this Synod and indeed of every synod of every church. How can we, coming out of a particular tradition with all that has been given to us, act as a member of the total body of Christ in each place in our world today.

If you take this small thing - "Losungen" - it is not only the daily texts, however precious these are for the nourishment of our spirit, but it is also to the reading and the studying of the Bible together, again in each place, to discover what God is calling us to do at any

particular time. I was long taught in the student movement, that we have to learn to have the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. The Bible enables us to make sense, to see some meaning in the newspaper, which otherwise leads us to a sense of despair. And to read the Bible without the newspaper we lose the sense of its relevance to today's world. And one of the important tasks is, how to recover the relationships between the word of God and the words of human beings, between what God is revealing in Christ and what is happening in our world, so that we can understand and also can act in faith. And this we need to do together. Or if we speak of our singing, which is a wonderful tradition, it is not only singing the old hymns, which arose out of particular situations, but learning the new songs of people in all the different situations and encouraging them. If we speak of Unity in faith - the unity in faith is expressed not only in old creeds, which after all came into being because of particular challenges, but we must learn, how to confess our faith in a relevant way to the people of today. I have with me here a pamphlet "Two Words upon the Confession of the Common Faith." And this pamphlet has been produced by Orthodox, Roman-Catholics and Protestants and with the blessing of the Vatican as well as the WCC in what we have together since 16 years a joint working group and which is an attempt by all of us to find the way of confessing our common faith today in terms of the challenges of today. Now, this cannot be done by ourselves. It can only be done together as we face the world in which we live. Then Christians have for several years now been struggling with three concerns which have divided us: Baptism, the Eucharist-Lord's Supper and the Ministry. In the next year we shall have ready some convergent statements on these three concerns to be shared with the member churches. We have already indeed been sharing these questions with the member churches and I hope as you deliberate on the question of baptism you also will be willing to listen to what is being said and learnt in all the churches together, because that is basic to our unity in faith.

Secondly then: Mission and Evangelism. Again the Moravians led the modern missionary movement, but the context in which we live is a very different one today. You are meeting in a country, which professes Marxism, Leninism and Atheism. And the Moravian Church like other churches finds itself in such a situation and its witness and mission have to be in that context. Many of you live in countries of a western secular capitalism and there, with the whole accent on things and having more, the Gospel has to be proclaimed in a different way. Moreover, wherever we live, we are in a world where science and technology dominate; and science and technology have a dynamic of their own. They keep us very glued to things, to creation, to reality and how these can be used and often, more than often, they are abused. And how do we proclaim and witness to our faith in that kind of situation. We are also living in a world, where other faiths become more and more aggressive: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, perhaps less so, even Judaism in Israel is becoming much more self-conscious and conservative in its approach and so we have to see how we Christians in this situation in full interpretation but also in full respect for other people can witness to our faith. Again we are in a world where people are becoming very self-conscious about their cultural roots. And a faith which denies their culture is something about which they are very suspicious. Of course faith has to challenge, but faith, which removes

people's culture and replaces it by imported culture is not a faith that has roots. So, people are conscious of that fact. Again there is the awakening of the poor and the oppressed, who form more than two-thirds of our world today. And when we speak about good news to the poor, that is not just a spiritual word; it is how in a World, which God has made and God has enabled to have so much, so many are deprived even of their right to be human beings in their own land. And so is the context in which we live. We live in a World of physical hunger in the midst of plenty. We also live in a World where there is plenty, but there is spiritual hunger. The text then of the Gospel must be proclaimed in word, in deed, in the context. And that is, what we are seeking to share together in the WCC; the text and the context have to be related. Many of our activities are in that direction - whether it is in urban- and rural mission - or the sharing of experiences in evangelism or working at structures of relationships which respect the full integrity of each church in each place. And here again I have with me a document, which was produced just a few months ago by Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants, on common witness, giving a whole series of examples how Christians together in the kind of World we are living in are seeking a common witness in the world. And I can only hope, that the Moravian Churches can more and more participate with others in a common witness with their extraordinary tradition of being a pilgrim church not burdened with the heavy baggage of traditions, of structures, of institutions and so on.

Thirdly on the issue of Education and Renewal, the question here is, how do we equip the whole people of God for mission and service in today's world? We in the WCC are involved in many areas of work in this field, e.g. in the Year of Child we brought together a great deal about children and the education of children and the rights of children as expressing in their simplicity their own understanding of faith and life. Also we are involved in education, especially church related schools and what is the role of church related schools in today's world, because in so many countries church-related schools which began as a service have become a privileged place for the education of the "elite", rather than for helping the whole people to be themselves and to make their own contribution. We are involved in popular education. Some people call that literacy, but it is an education related to the actual situation of the people, awakening their consciousness, helping them to be persons seeking their own self-reliance. We are also involved in Christian education, helping people to relate the Gospel to the whole of life, putting the emphasis on the quality of life, rather than the quantity of things, on being rather than on having. We are of course heavily involved in theological education, especially in ministerial education, that is, education in order to be at the service of the people and not as an academic exercise. And here again the Moravians were pioneers in the 18th century. That is why for example our Commission on Program on Theological Education met here in October last year in a consultation on theological education in Europe; and many of you here know the ways, in which our program of theological education has been supporting the colleges and the various experiments, that had been made in your countries. We also tried to coordinate the work of the training centres, evangelical academies, institutes for the study of religions and society, enabling the leaders of those groups to meet and share together. These various

centres in different parts of the world are excellent means by which Christians can meet others in facing the issues of the life today. We are also involved in family education. In the changed world in which we live we are very concerned about the role of woman in church and society and we are working for the community of women and men in church and society. We have a large program of Youth and their growing in faith and their witnessing to their faith. And we have a program on Renewal in Congregational life (how to relate worship and service in the world and doing so as congregations in each place).

Finally the emphasis on service, seeing service as expression of our unity, of mission in our renewal in education - and there we think of the church as a servant church. We heard in the Gospel reading this morning, that the disciples had to be taught the lesson, that they were not to stand over against the people, but they were to be in the midst as the servants of their Lord who emptied himself and became the servant. Now, this has been the historic contribution of the Moravians wherever they have been. But service today must be related to justice and peace as the prophets did. They would be servants of the Lord and as the servants of the Lord they proclaimed what God's covenant will was for his people and for all peoples. And God's covenant will was, that righteousness should reign on the earth and righteousness meant that right way of living before God and Living with each other without which the image of God is broken and distorted. And that peace is that wholeness of life, which we share in communion. That is what service is about. So we are concerned not only about feeding the hungry but getting at the causes of hunger and dealing with those causes, not only giving strength and consolation to those who suffer from racist domination or oppression of any kind but to be beside them in their struggle for liberation. Not only dealing with disease, but creating conditions for a more healthy community and environment, not only praying for peace and caring for victims of war, but working at the causes of conflict in a war and working actively for peace. These are several of the challenges before us today and we have to see our old tradition in terms of these new challenges. But of course no one of us can ever do these things alone today. We never could. We tried to. But today God's inescapable challenge to us is, that we must plan our work and carry out our task in the company of all God's people. That is what the WCC insisted to remind you and to facilitate your doing so. And I hope that you in your deliberations these days, will always remember that and plan accordingly. Thank you.