

Philip Potter

Dear Bärbel, dear friends,

Philip was a man of the Bible and he reminded his colleagues often of some of the key words to be found there. One of those was “righteousness”, which means to be straight, firm, steel-like. To be just is to be right, acting according to one’s inner being, he said. “Security”, he said, is above all about being able to trust one another: security is about mutual trust. (may be our politicians should be reminded of this). And “justice” refers to fruitful soil and the right use of creation. God’s gift of justice is also our work, he said, because we are made in his image. And so racial justice, solidarity with the poor, human rights and the focus on a truly new community of women and men, are what the ecumenical movement is about. I believe Philip’s most significant contribution has been that he made clear that we are not only called to work for the unity of the churches but that we are called to work for the unity of the whole of humankind. *These two go together.* Today, that call is valid more than ever!

I felt continuously inspired by Philip. With him we, his colleagues, tried to relate the agenda of the churches to the agenda of the world. We had to invent and tread new ground. And we knew it was a risky undertaking. We tried to work for what later became Philip’s call (at

the 1983 Vancouver assembly) to become “truly a house of living stones, built on the rock of faith...”

I remember the many times I went to see Philip in his office of general secretary when I was in difficulties about developments in the Programme to Combat Racism because some member churches refused to understand the issues and to move with us in an effort to expose the underlying causes of racism and injustice. I needed his help. He would listen to me patiently and tell me wisely to take myself a little less seriously!

His style was that of real collegiality: humbly to struggle together to discover the answers to our problems. His authority stemmed from his collegiality. Never did I sense a *diktat* or pressure from above. Philip helped me to understand what living faith or rather living out one's faith is about.

Today we can seriously ask ourselves what would have happened to the Programme to Combat Racism if Philip Potter had not become General Secretary during those extraordinary years.

I pay tribute to him as my mentor, and also as my pastor and elder brother.

Baldwin Sjollema

Geneva, 18 May 2015.