

**At Home with God  
and in the World**



# At Home with God and in the World

A Philip Potter Reader

**Philip A. Potter**

Edited by Andrea Fröchtling, Michael Jagessar,  
Brian Brown, Rudolf Hinz, and Dietrich Werner



**World Council  
of Churches**  
Publications

AT HOME WITH GOD AND IN THE WORLD

A Philip Potter Reader

Philip A. Potter

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## Foreword

Almost everyone I meet who has a strong image of or a strong opinion about the World Council of Churches links this to Philip Potter. First as a youth delegate at conferences and assemblies, then as a member of staff, and later as WCC General Secretary, Philip has always brought high visibility to the Council. He was ever ready to open debates, to offer the WCC as an open space for ecumenical reflection and action and to make known his own positions.

More than that, he became an interpreter of the Christian tradition in a time when it was necessary to ask and consider new questions together, to make this tradition a common heritage of churches in all parts of the world. In his speeches and sermons, he exercised his role as a leader of the ecumenical movement, and he conveyed inspiration and insight. He interpreted the Christian faith and also strengthened the faithful through his challenging preaching and leadership.

It is appropriate and very much to be welcomed that some of his texts, particularly from his speeches and sermons, are now made available again for old friends and colleagues as well as for new readers. These texts possess the quality to renew and inspire both categories.

When I met with Philip recently, he received me warmly and welcomed me into his circle of memories, sharing the joy of the ecumenical movement with one of the younger “boys.” He has reached the milestone of ninety years, with a lower voice than before but still full of a deep sense of humor and wisdom. He remains, as ever, a credible witness to the vision of the kingdom of God with its true values of “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17b).

We give thanks to God for Philip’s witness, and for the opportunity to give this witness a new expression. May the Holy Spirit bless these words for our time.

*Olav Fykse Tveit*

*General Secretary of the World Council of Churches*



## Editors' Preface

come from the Caribbean islands, from the region where the Europeans landed after they had crossed the ocean. In 1492 they erected the cross of Christ on the first piece of land they discovered, Hispaniola (Haiti). The inhabitants of these islands had to carry the heavy burden of the cross which was laid upon them by the conquerors—and they are carrying it still today.”<sup>1</sup>

Philip Alford Potter—born on 19 August, 1921, in Roseau on Dominica—is a visionary of the ecumenical movement who took his point of departure from the interaction between biblical text and socio-political, cultural context. The loci of his theologizing are contextual, inclusive, inspired by an *oikonomia* that provides “life in all its fullness”—for all. In his various placements, ranging from being a clerk at the Law Chambers to his position as General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Potter understands his work as that of a missionary. *Missio Dei*, the *oikonomia* of God, and the subsequent sociopolitical and economic consequences of ecumenical existence, are at the core of Potter’s life and work.

Philip Potter has, since his early life, been an ecumenical networker par excellence. His often cited ‘only connect’ has been a bridging exercise between the manifold members of the one *oikos* and *oikonomia* of God, across human-made frontiers and limitations.

*At Home with God and in the World* follows Potter’s first collection of writings and speeches, *Life in All Its Fullness* (1981),<sup>2</sup> in which Potter covers a broad range of ecumenical topics and challenges, ranging from soteriology and the understanding of

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1. Quoted from an unpublished travel report to the Caribbean Islands in Walter Müller-Römheld, *Philip Potter*, (Stuttgart: Evangelischer Missionsverlag, 1972), 9.

2. Philip A. Potter, *Life in All Its Fullness* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981).

peace and justice issues, to concerns of covenanting, of growing in faith as a Christian community, and to questions of an ecumenical life-style. *Life in All Its Fullness* has covered essential ecumenical ground and has been the basis for much of the ecumenical envisioning and envisaging done thereafter.

After his retirement as General Secretary of the WCC in 1984, and for the decades to follow, Potter has remained an ecumenical visionary, concerned theologian, sharer of the Bible, shaker and mover, and a caller for getting involved in the just and inclusive *oikoumene*. He has remained a prolific speaker and writer, covering further ground when it comes to issues of dialogue, to prophetic responses to neoliberal economic globalization, and to processes of marginalization that tear the *oikonomia* of God apart.

In 2009, a group of friends met together with Philip Potter and his wife, Bärbel Wartenberg-Potter, in their home in Lübeck, Germany. The main interest of that group was to make his writings and contributions available to a broader audience. Archival work started by Katharina Fenner finally resulted in a German publication entitled "*Damit du das Leben wählst*": *Texte und Reden eines Gestalters der ökumenischen Vision*,<sup>3</sup> launched for his ninetieth birthday in August 2011.

The German publication and *At Home with God and in the World* are not identical. Though the major part of these two publications is identical, other parts speak more to their German- or English-speaking contexts. Thus, for example, an added emphasis of the English publication is Potter's reflection on the universal dialogue of cultures. Like the German edition, the English publication aims at making available those contributions by Potter that are either post-1981, unpublished, or difficult to access. Furthermore, both compilations aim at providing Potter's ecumenical landmark speeches throughout the decades, starting from Amsterdam in 1948.

Except for minor editorial changes and, in a couple of instances, a shortening of the contributions to ensure the inclusion of a larger number of writings and speeches, Potter's texts have been published unaltered. The current pursuit of inclusive language, particularly in regard to gender references, did not prevail when most of these texts were written. A brief introduction by the editorial team, set in italics, introduces the background of a speech or an article, and a chapter introduction offers a brief overview of the topics covered. Potter's style of speaking and writing is an engaging, challenging, and theologically reflective one. In his contributions Potter interacts with a variety of other authors, theologians and documents. Parts of this interaction have been referenced by Potter, other parts have not. This edition has not altered that style, that is, no additional footnoting or referencing has been done.

3. Philip A. Potter, "*Damit du das Leben wählst*": *Texte und Reden eines Gestalters der ökumenischen Vision*, ed. Andrea Fröchtling, Rudolf Hinz, Paul Löffler, Bärbel Wartenberg-Potter, and Joachim Wietzke (Göttingen: Ruprecht, 2011).

As compiling a book is not the sole effort of a single person, we would like to gratefully acknowledge the input and dedication of all who supported the publication process:

First and foremost, we would like to thank Philip Potter and Bärbel Wartenberg-Potter for their warm hospitality and for the treasures they made available, be it in archival records or in snippets of shared memories. It was Potter's retirement project to write about the twentieth century as the ecumenical century, a project that, for a variety of reasons, he could not complete. We recall the many times in which he reminded us of his project, and we are convinced that by publishing "*Damit du das Leben wählst*" and *At Home with God and in the World*, decisive thoughts and moments of ecumenical history can become part of a living ecumenical memory, encouraging and challenging our notions of *oikonomia* and ecumenicity.

Potter once called himself "a Geneva-guy and a guy of this world at large." We are very grateful that the World Council of Churches has facilitated and accompanied the editorial process of the English edition. Our special thanks go to Michael West as head of the Publication Department of the WCC, who has seen to the final copyediting, indexing, and layout.

Mareike Meier, Sven Lesemann, and Felix Halbensleben have digitalized most of the texts in this volume. Barbara Robra has dedicated time and skills to the compilation of a video on Potter's life, many colleagues at the WCC, such as Peter Williams, have facilitated access to photos, archival material, and already existing bibliographies,<sup>4</sup> and Hans Lessing provided technical support at a crucial time.

Our final thanks go to those ecumenical bodies, churches, agencies, and church-related organizations in Germany that made funds available for the German edition and consented also to the use of parts of the overall funding for the production of the video and the English edition (see full list of partners on 297).

*Brian Brown*

*Andrea Fröchtling*

*Rudolf Hinz*

*Michael Jagessar*

*Dietrich Werner*

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4. See, for example, Michael Jagessar, *Full Life for All: The Work and Theology of Philip A. Potter* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1997).



# Introduction

— Michael Jagessar —

“Ah, Gregorias, you are genius, yes!  
Yes, God and me, we understand each other.”  
He hoists his youngest seascape like a child  
kisses, cradles it, opens the windows . . .  
“Listen! Vasco de Gama kneels to the New World.”

—Derek Walcott, “Homage to Gregorias”

*Collected Poems 1948–1984*

## The Caribbean Imagination

On previous occasions when I have had to write anything on Philip Potter, I always turn to Caribbean verses/poetry to help find words to capture this great teacher, dependable friend, prophetic voice, dynamic leader, visionary ecumenist, biblical scholar, passionate theologian, pastor at heart, walking encyclopaedia, Caribbean wordsmith, and a person full of humility. These are not mere descriptive words for me: it is how I have come to know, experience, study and write about Philip Potter.

I recall at the defence of my dissertation (Utrecht University, Netherlands) being questioned by a well known professor of systematic theology how is it possible for me to make so many claims about Potter (missionary, biblical ecumenical, Caribbean theologian, and so on). I responded that one minor word and insignificant dot in a sea with its colorful and complex stories made that possible—the Caribbean. For me, that still stands. Potter is shaped by “a history sunk under the sea, or scattered as potash in the canefields, or gone to bush.”<sup>1</sup> I discovered that to read and understand Potter, one needs to understand two important things about the Caribbean:

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1. Michelle Cliff, “Journey into Speech,” in *The Graywolf Annual Five: Multicultural Literacy*, ed. Rick Simonson and Scott Walker (Saint Paul: Graywolf, 1988), 59.

The sea or what Edward ‘Kamau’ Braithwaite writes of as *tidalectics* (not dialectics) “as a way of interpreting our life and history as sea change, the ebb and flow of sea movement: and with the suggestion of surf comes the contrapuntal sound of waves on the shore.”<sup>2</sup>

The other is the Caribbean patron saint that lives in each Caribbean soul—Anancy. In retrospect, I wished I had used more of the optic of anancy-ism to read Potter’s contribution to theological/ecumenical discourse. For as these essays in this volume will show, his work is loaded with significance, way ahead of its time!

To introduce this volume, I explore briefly how Philip Potter, a Caribbean person, navigated his way on the “world scene,” specifically in the ecumenical movement and while noting some continuing implications. Potter is an important church leader and ecumenical theologian of the twentieth century. He stands out as a significant catalyst in contemporary theological thinking, especially within the ecumenical movement. His contributions influenced the changing direction of mission, of ecumenical thinking, and of theology and doing theology in the latter part of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup>

It is, however, necessary to note a couple of significant points. Firstly, as already pointed out, Potter is from the Caribbean. He is quintessentially a Caribbean thinker, who comes from a region shaped by the “archtectonic forces of conquest, colonization, slavery, sugar monoculture, colonialism, and racial and ethnic admixture.”<sup>4</sup> The region was “the testing ground of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalist racism.”<sup>5</sup> The stories of the Caribbean islands are essentially stories of the constant struggle for survival, cultural diversity/synthesis, subversion, nationalism, and black consciousness.<sup>6</sup> All these factors are significant in understanding Potter’s leadership of the WCC as they have shaped his thinking and the ways in which he negotiated working in a predominantly euro/western context.

Secondly, Potter has spent most of his working life outside of the Caribbean. It is reasonable to consider him as a missionary in Europe.<sup>7</sup> He served as the *first* Black Student Christian Movement (SCM) Overseas Secretary for Britain and Ireland (1948–1950), Executive Secretary of the Youth Department of the WCC (1954–1960), Field Secretary of the Methodist Missionary Society for West Africa and the Caribbean (1961–1966), and Director of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (1967–1972). The significance of this observation is twofold. In the first instance, while there was the

2. Mary E. Morgan, “Highway to Vision: The Sea Our Nexus,” in *World Literature Today* 8, no. 4 (1994): 664.

3. Michael Jagessar, *Full Life for All: The Work and Theology of Philip A. Potter* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1997), 15.

4. Gordon K. Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought* (Kingston: Heinemann, 1983), 3.

5. Philip Potter, *Life in All Its Fullness* (Geneva: WCC, 1983), 141.

6. Dennis Benn, *The Growth and Development of Political Ideas in the Caribbean, 1774-1983* (Jamaica: ISER, 1987).

7. *Full Life for All*, 72.

recognition of the need to include people from the “mission field,” Potter served in these key positions primarily because of his abilities, charisma, and qualifications.<sup>8</sup> As Pauline Webb noted, Potter was elected as the General Secretary of the WCC (1973) not because he was from the “third world” but because of his experience and qualifications for the job.<sup>9</sup> This was also the view of the late Willem Visser’t Hooft, who noted that Potter, who is from the so-called third world, “knows the other worlds intimately.”<sup>10</sup>

Further, it is reasonable to consider Potter as part of the Caribbean/Black Diaspora that lives and works in Europe. His work and theological articulation has been done in the context of “homelessness” and “displacement.” In a real sense, wherever Potter lived (and is living) has been “elsewhere.” The hybrid nature of Potter’s life (including his ethnic and hybrid makeup) has affected all aspects of his life. Indeed, one can suggest that Potter led the WCC and wrote from the affective experience of social marginality and from the perspective of the edge offering alternative ways of seeing and thinking to that of the dominant view(s).<sup>11</sup> In Potter one finds a member of the Caribbean/Black Diaspora with the ability to slip into different contexts embodying a considerable amount of inside knowledge without being an insider. Hence, my bold claim that Potter should be considered a “calypso” theologian.<sup>12</sup>

## Sir, I Only Came with the Other Gentlemen!

In his acceptance speech as General Secretary of the WCC, Potter told the story of the Caribbean person who arrived in heaven when various gifts were shared. While all the others in the group knew what they wanted, asked for it and got it, the Caribbean upon his turn merely gave a “huge grin” and replied, “Sir, I only came with the other gentlemen!” This comment was neither a self-deprecation of Potter’s person nor the undervaluing of his gifts.<sup>13</sup> This was characteristically a Caribbean way of “poking fun” at oneself when the joke was in fact on those who were laughing. It was a taste of genuine Caribbean “Anancy-ism” at its best, that is, Caribbean *subversion*. Anancy-ism is a signpost to surviving oppression. It is a pattern of behavior that involves the ability to find the loophole in every situation so that the apparently disempowered individual manages to come out on top, in spite of the oppression. This is what Potter calls the

8. Cyril Davey, *Changing Places: Methodist Mission Then and Now* (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1988), 20.

9. *Full Life for All*, 80.

10. William Gentz, *The World of Philip Potter* (New York: Friendship, 1974), 83.

11. See Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

12. *Full Life for All*, 302.

13. Pauline Webb, ed., *Faith and Faithfulness: Essays on Contemporary Ecumenical Themes* (Geneva: WCC, 1984), viii.

“in-spite of faith.”<sup>14</sup> It is also a philosophy of resistance and “talking-back” or a *subversion* of the dominant version or dominant voices.

Potter may have had in mind his critics and those from the “white” world of ecumenism who had reservations about his leadership of the WCC. I think, however, that this was an indication of how Potter intended to navigate his way through the dominant “western” ethos and ecumenical culture with all the usual baggage (subtle or overt) of superiority. His “calypso” style leadership and thinking would refuse to fit into any pre-conceived molds. The fact that he mostly wore a “shirt-Jac” (some refer to it as “Bush-Jacket”) further underscored Potter’s intention of non-conformity—a typical Caribbean way of subverting. As a *catalyst*, a *postcolonial voice*, and a *frontier theologian* he not only gave signals but offered challenges and opened perspectives on: the inseparable relationship between faith and *praxis*; Jesus’ offer of full life for the whole *oikoumene*; a sustaining spirituality; the necessity of a dialogue between cultures in the mutual sharing of riches; the centrality of the Word of God for doing theology; the development of the concept of *koinonia* and the church as the house of living stones; and social justice issues (economics, ecology, racism, sexism, and so on).

In his acceptance speech as General Secretary, Potter goes on to perceive his role as that of a “servant,” identifying the need to make the ecumenical community ‘alive and real’ and enabling each culture, nation, and church in its context to be itself, “not just the sum of parts but an organic relationship of interaction.”<sup>15</sup> The imagery of “servant” was another hint at “Anancy-ism” with all its signifying possibilities. While theologically/biblically one understands what he was saying, Potter’s slave heritage must not be sidelined. The imagery of servant/slave (*doulos*) and Paul’s words about Christ becoming a slave is not a theological dictum for a Caribbean person! Further, in the western context where the dominant version is characterized by power and the “love of power,” the call to a “servanting” life-style is truly *subversion*. It is through the “power of love” that Potter intended to negotiate his way—a way of living also espoused by the Christians in the west but too often not practiced.

## Beyond the Boundary—Cricket as Metaphor

Potter suggests that the game of cricket has had a significant impact on his leadership of the World Council of Churches and the way he, as a Black Caribbean, was able to work and reflect theologically in Europe.<sup>16</sup> Implied here is more than the ideal of working as a team, enabling, and the insignificance of the end result. Cricket is at the nexus of colonial rule and the constructed precarious Caribbean/Black identity.<sup>17</sup>

14. *Life in All Its Fullness*, 141.

15. Philip Potter, “Dear Friends,” *Ec R* 24, no. 4 (October 1972): 472.

16. *Full Life for All*, 90.

17. See C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London: Hutchinson, 1963).

C. L. R James, a significant influence on Potter,<sup>18</sup> suggests that cricket's political resonance extends beyond the "boundary" of the cricket pitch and interrogates the tenuous walls that separate culture from politics, race from class, high culture from low culture. The opposition of batsman and bowler serves as a metonym for the broader antagonism between not only colonizer and colonized, but between leader and led, between nation and individual, and between class and race factions. As James writes: "The British tradition soaked deep into me that when you entered the sporting arena you left behind you the sordid compromises of everyday existence. *Yet for us to do that we would have had to divest ourselves of our skins.* . . . The cricket field was a stage on which selected individuals played representative roles charged with social significance."<sup>19</sup>

It is my view that Potter, who was nurtured in the British tradition, could not (and rightly so) "divest himself of his skin" and played a representative role interrogating the barriers placed by the euro/western world. Like many who emerged from a colonial milieu, he reflected a contradictory consciousness—torn between the metropole and the Caribbean. Because of his ethnicity, his history and where he came from, he had no option but to "take-on" the dominant western culture and traditions. He intuitively grasped from his Caribbean heritage the incapacity of accompanying the "master-race" narcissism to encompass the many sidedness of humanity. His critics, mostly from the dominant world did not (or did not want to) understand this. Potter's leadership of the WCC confronted the tangible barriers that prevented people from being fully human. He was criticized for his obsession with third-world problems and with issues like racism, liberation struggles (Southern Africa), development, human rights, and poverty/debt. Critics were concerned about his unbalanced emphasis on activism and social justice issues, the danger of his ideological/theological bias, and his weak emphasis on the unity of the church—especially with regard to the older "historic" churches.<sup>20</sup> In retrospect, the developments in South Africa (among others) stand out as positive signs of Potter's insistence on the Programme to Combat Racism. With the present focus on globalization, poverty, world debt, ecological issues, and the total mess of our present economic life, Potter has demonstrated remarkable forward thinking. Today it is amusing and sad to read the largely western white male critique of Potter in the light of dying and empty churches in Europe and the growing "black" and "ethnic" Christian communities in their midst and the continuing inability of many western congregations to be welcoming communities.

Why could his critics not see the "writing on the wall" and constructively engage with the issues? Was the problem merely a matter of ideological/theological differences or the "evangelical camp" versus the "liberal camp"? Or was it because who Potter

18. *Full Life for All*, 130.

19. *Beyond a Boundary*, 72.

20. For more on the critics and the criticisms, see *Full Life for All*, 89–94.

was and what he represented as a theologian from the majority world? While Potter was a respected leader, a very able theologian, and had many friends and supporters from across a wide cross-section of the ecclesial families and geographical locations, he often felt that the criticisms were unfair and specifically directed to him because of his color/ethnicity.<sup>21</sup> In a dominant “white/male/abled-bodied” environment, it is extremely difficult for minorities, from a context of oppression (colonialism, racism, sexism, classism, ableism, slavery, neocolonialism) not to feel despised because of marginal identity and to display overt sensitivity to criticisms or to be suspicious of the dominant status quo. This becomes even more difficult in the context of subliminal and institutional racism, among the many forms of marginalization. Moreover, the insensitivity, arrogance, and unconscious (or conscious) feeling of superiority of colleagues from such dominant groups merely serve to exacerbate the situation. This would have certainly contributed to Potter’s “defensive attitude,” hindered or stultified an honest and meaningful dialogue with these theologians/church leaders, and may have given the impression that he had a “chip on the shoulder.”<sup>22</sup>

In discussing the various forms of marginalization today, the threat of such polarization is still real. The difficulty of realizing a meaningful dialogue can also be attributed to the inability and unwillingness of dominant groups to *theologically* come to terms with their past vis-à-vis prejudices, racism, slavery, and their role in the impoverishment of Africa and the Caribbean. Too few efforts have been made by British and European theologians to deal *theologically* with their colonial past in order to break the cycle of their continuing superiority and domination. This becomes even more urgent given that Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean are in Rotterdam, Berlin, Stuttgart, Paris, London, and Birmingham. Potter’s challenge was an attempt to move the discussion beyond a “colonial” fixation and the monolithic molds of oppressor/oppressed, hence his plea for and commitment to the search for authentic community and the “dialogue of cultures” as the “only hope for humankind to attain fullness of life in all its shared diversity in the Christ who contains and holds all things together.”<sup>23</sup> This is a tough and costly call. Potter, who has had to wrestle his own inner and outer struggles as a victim of racism and the consequences he displayed, knows this. As he told a gathering of decent English folks: “I know in my inner being how hard it is to overcome the past and present, and the separation which this has caused between me and you, all the more hard because most of you in this country are so insensitive and complacent about it all. . . . I know, too, how all this is woven into my own inability to forgive myself for the contempt I have for white people and the resulting contempt I feel for myself.”<sup>24</sup>

21. M. M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey* (Trivandrum: Ecumenical, 1990), 410.

22. *Full Life for All*, 297.

23. *Life in All Its Fullness*, ix.

24. Philip Potter, *The Alex Wood Memorial Lecture* (Surrey: Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1974), 18.

While Potter is known to get passionate and angry when the issue of oppressive practices is being discussed, he seeks justice and reconciliation and not revenge. His genuine passion for seeking ways to give expression to full life for *all* is motivated by the power of love in Christ.

## That Look in the Eyes—Love with Seeing Eyes

In one of his early sermons (1968), Potter cited a conversation that Laurens van der Post had with the last Governor of Indonesia. Van der Post records that the Governor was complaining bitterly that after three hundred years, in which the Dutch had done so much for the Indonesians, they were being thrown out. In answer to his persistent why, van der Post replied: “It was the look in your eyes.” The look had all the marks of self-sufficiency, self-regard, arrogance and superiority. The Governor did not have “love or trust with seeing eyes.”<sup>25</sup>

In his ecumenical pilgrimage Potter encountered many who had “love with seeing eyes.” Many of these friends and colleagues have influenced his own life and thinking as he also influenced theirs. On the other hand, he has had to wrestle with the arrogance of those Christians with a mindset of superiority. Potter was able to counter this by his genuine commitment in seeking ways to manifest the fullness of life in Christ. Even his sharpest critics and people who did not know him personally, but only see and hear him for the first time, see in Potter a man driven by the “power of love.” Pauline Webb, who credits Potter for her own ecumenical conversion and theological formation, shared an interesting anecdote with me (August 27, 1990). At the Executive Committee Meeting of the WCC in 1979 (Oklahoma, USA), she was invited to the home of a conservative evangelical family who did not know much about the ecumenical movement. At that very time there was a program (*60 Minutes*) on TV in which Morley Safer interviewed Potter. Both the WCC and Potter were being criticized over the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) with regard to the controversial support given to “liberation” movements in Southern Africa. After the program, Webb was struck by the comment of the family: “We do not know much about the WCC and the program under scrutiny, but we can recognize when something is said in Christian love and the second speaker (Potter) spoke in that manner.”

Motivated by the power of love in Christ, Potter who had harsh things to say to the Western Christians and to his own people from the “third world,” was able to counter arrogance with humility and integrity. These were two important characteristics of his spirituality. The witness of Potter in the ecumenical movement is grounded on the belief that the labor of love begins with trusting that love that is at the heart of our

25. Philip Potter, “Work Out Your Own Salvation,” Sermon preached at the Assembly of the United Board of World Ministries of the United Church of Christ, Greensboro, North Carolina, Sunday November 10, 1968 (General Secretary Files, WCC Archives, Geneva), 12.

encounter with the “other.” To counter cultural arrogance and the feeling of superiority, Potter reminds us that we must rediscover this belief *and* live it out!

## A Liturgy of Abundance

One of the significant biblical texts for Potter has been that related to Jesus’ offer of abundant life for all (“I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly” (John 10:10b). What Potter embodied through his work and lifestyle was practical ways to make abundance and generosity real in his own life and to challenge the world church to practice a lifestyle premised on generosity rather than on scarcity. For Potter, the logic is what he experienced and learned from his mother and the people of Haiti: If scarcity is what motivates us, then we will only continue to create and maintain all sorts of barriers against the free movement and exchange between peoples and cultures, and of the resources of the earth that should be for the good of all. Self-preservation and selfishness take over our lives. If, on the other hand, it is the abundance and generosity of God that propels us, then warmth and open hospitality will be what shapes our life together, thus breaking the cycle of oppressive practices. Potter’s effectiveness as an ecumenical leader and theologian lies in such a generous spirituality that is grounded in the Bible and Caribbean biblical realism. This served as an indispensable source for his spiritual orientation in wrestling with arrogance of dominant groups/cultures, racism and his own anger, in his ability to encourage, in breaking through an impasse, and in criticizing and being criticized. No wonder his life motto remains: “We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty” (Luke 17:10b). Moreover, I can imagine the insight of poet Laureate Derek Walcott, quoted at the beginning of this introductory essay, rolling off the lips of Philip Potter accompanied with that mischievous smile of his: “Yes, God and me, we understand each other.”

# Biography

— Paul Löffler —

## **“Sir, I Only Came with the Other Gentlemen!”**

This was a sentence with double meaning that Philip Potter used at the beginning of his primary speech to the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Utrecht. In August 1972 the highest committee of the WCC had, with an overwhelming majority, just elected him as its third General Secretary at a very important point in its development. And as the chairman, M. M. Thomas from the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar in India asked the English Methodist Pauline Webb to inform Potter, who was waiting outside, of the result, his two predecessors, the Dutch Reformed Visser't Hooft and the Presbyterian American Blake prepared to accompany him into the hall. Visually, this was also a historic moment for the ecumenical movement. The consequences will be reported on later. But what was it that made this new man from the Caribbean island of Dominica so suitable that the representatives of World Christianity gathered there were convinced that he was the right person at the right time?

The double meaning in his reference to the two other gentlemen who had just taken him between them—the press photo of the triumvirate circulated around the world on the following day—lay in the fact that Potter had from the beginning belonged to the ecumenical movement shaped in continuity by his predecessors. He was one of those few people who had been formed by this ecumenical movement and to a certain extent brought by it to this point in his biography. Then fifty-one years old, he had followed a classic path of ecumenical learning and living; his mother, a committed Methodist who brought him up on her own, made him to feel at home in this tradition from childhood through to youth. Baptized into the Protestant church he received together with his father's name, Potter, the Christian name of the Catholic Bishop Philip von Roseau. Although his father practically disappeared from his life due to long-term academic

work in Canada, the influence of his strict Catholic family was retained through his grandfather, who regularly took him to the Catholic cathedral. During his theological studies in Jamaica, Potter was a member of the Student Christian Movement (SCM) and worked for the British branch of the movement during and after his studies for his Masters at the University of London. From 1954 to 1960 he was in charge of the Youth Desk of the WCC. From 1960 to 1968 the Christian World Student Federation elected him as their president. In his contribution, "From Missions to Mission," he mentions the whole gallery of his teachers from Oldham through Kraemer to Cone, who were almost all part of the Student Christian Movement. When he was seventy years old he researched and wrote up the history of the World Student Federation from 1895 onward. Original contributions from youth and student times are documented in this book, as is his speech at Utrecht. How does his personal background outlined here help us to appreciate them better?

From the beginning Potter stood up and spoke out as a protagonist rooted in a powerful movement of young people throughout the world who increasingly made him their spokesperson. At the World Youth Conference in Oslo, directly after the end of the Second World War, he was one of the keynote speakers. A year later at the inaugural meeting of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948, he was called as Speaker for the Youth. In the middle of the previous century, this movement had already begun to ignore denominational differences and to reach out to one another across national and cultural borders. Through its close links to the work of world mission it had been globally oriented from the beginning, and after the Second World War it developed into an entirely ecumenical network encompassing the world. Potter was able to travel and visit parts of it from its early beginnings. In a BBC broadcast in 1962, he reported on his current experiences in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, in Brazil, and in India.

He reported on crisis areas in the various societies where young people had taken the initiative and put their faith into action. These movements reflect the power of lay people in the church who are close to social reality and combine international acts of solidarity with their prayers for one another around the world. In Bad Segeberg, Germany, in 2002, when looking back on these days, Potter confessed that it was this movement that taught him the close relationship between biblical interpretation and newspaper analysis: "Without the Bible the newspaper is not very meaningful. And without the newspaper the Bible is not relevant." And from the beginning it was a movement of both men and women together. "I believe it left its mark on all of us."

Visser't Hooft's characterization of this movement as "the nursery and proving ground for the ecumenical movement," applies in a special way to the ecumenical development of Potter. Politically it is noteworthy that the movement concerned itself with

the problem of racism at a very early stage; particularly racism within the Christian Mission as exemplified in the ground-breaking analysis of racism by the ecumenical lay pioneer J. H. Oldham (*Christianity and the Race Problem* [SCM, London, 1924]). This fitted very well into Potter's own personal experience. He grew up in the native quarter of Roseau as a black person among black people. His tall figure identified him at first sight as a descendant of slaves from West Africa, displaced with all the consequences of dispossession, discrimination, and contempt from the ruling white masters. In the same way and especially later in view of his professional success, he experienced the more refined forms of racial prejudice, which he admitted he found almost more repulsive: patronizing forbearance, paternalistic tutoring, and wounding arrogance. Thus the fight against racism became a constant task throughout his life. In the WCC under his direct predecessor, Eugene Carson Blake, the fight had taken the form of the "Programme to Combat Racism (PCR)." From 1967 onward, as Associate General Secretary and Director of the Department for World Mission, Potter contributed to the development of this program as the most prominent part of the work of the WCC in those years. He supported inviting Martin Luther King as a prominent guest speaker at the WCC General Assembly in Uppsala in 1968, but King was assassinated before the General Assembly took place. Potter had much in common with him as a person, with his pacifist nonviolent strategies and with their theological justification. As General Secretary he not only convincingly continued the work of the PCR but developed it much further with various campaigns and forms of action.

### **The Election in Utrecht: A Breakthrough!**

For a long time, even after the Second World War, the ecumenical movement was still prevalently determined by the North Atlantic states in spite of its global framework and context. Even at the beginning of the 1960s, we said jokingly that the WCC was characterized by Anglo-Saxon Presbyterian standing orders, Dutch pedantry, and German theologizing. The large majority of the delegates at the General Assemblies, in 1948 in Amsterdam, and in 1954 in Evanston, also came from the Western world. Correspondingly, the first two General Secretaries came from Western Europe and North America. It was not until the General Assembly in New Delhi in 1961 that the representatives of the Two-thirds World, at that time still known as the Third World, began to be better represented in the work. At the World Conference on the subject of "Church and Society" in 1966 in Geneva, and the WCC General Assembly in 1968 in Uppsala, the majority ratio had visibly changed. The election of Potter as General Secretary of the WCC at the meeting of the Central Committee in 1972 in Utrecht put the seal on the breakthrough. A man from the Third World, a black man, had visibly

taken the wheel for the world to see. That was more consistent than the United Nations, unthinkable in Rome, and almost forty years before such change took place in the President's office in Washington.

The breakthrough also took the form of a new intensity in ecumenical thinking and working. This included: practicing ecumenical sharing, intensifying the exchange between the member churches so that they accounted to each other for their actions, going beyond individual programs to carry out joint campaigns, giving expression to an ecumenism that comes with a cost, acting in line with theological thinking (“doing theology”), and fulfilling the prophetic task of speaking out in today's world in the light of the Gospel. Correspondingly, the PCR gave new impetus to boycott goods from South Africa and to campaign against banks that invested in the Apartheid state. A circular letter sent to the member churches after the Central Committee meeting of the WCC in 1979 in Kingston, Jamaica, ten years after the start of the PCR, directed their attention to racism in the context of their own churches and societies as the challenge for the 1980s. In Germany this resulted in a “Programme to combat racism in the Federal Republic of Germany.”

### **Potter's Background and Experience—Formative Influences**

Potter began his Utrecht speech with the story of how the gifts were distributed at creation, which stems from his inexhaustible treasure-trove of Caribbean wisdom, as do many easily remembered sayings and apt expressions which he often made use of, and which have accompanied many of us throughout our lives. The necessity for a holistic understanding of mission, for example, he explained with the saying: “When you get a thorn in your foot you have to bend your whole body to remove it.” His home island, Dominica, one of the Lesser Antilles, was a special case of Caribbean history and cultural development, if only because of the still-surviving indigenous people, the Caribs, high up in the mountains. Inaccessible mountain massifs apparently prevented Columbus from conquering the island. He merely gave it its name, in reference to the fact that he sailed past this island on a Sunday. It was not until 1750 that it was first occupied by the French and later by the British. This history led the inhabitants to acquire self-confidence and the art of surviving, together with a strong sense of belonging together. This is still expressed today in their enigmatic humor and the “Calypso Way,” as Potter calls their way of life. It helped those who had learnt it to assert themselves and master their own lives in spite of many unfavorable circumstances. But above all, they lived in a society that practiced solidarity and still does today.

In the same way they had also learnt to maintain internal solidarity against external interests, which also applied to religious and denominational differences. Looking back, Potter always claimed: “Six days in the week we did everything together. Only

on Sundays were we separated.” But even on Sundays it was more like friendly competition than divisive opposition. For example, the Methodist congregation that Potter belonged to tried to drown out the Catholic singing in the neighboring cathedral by singing their own hymns even louder. Potter’s personal experience of overcoming denominational boundaries had to do with the name of the Catholic Bishop, Philip, which was given to him, and to his regularly sitting in the front row of the Catholic cathedral together with his grandparents on their frequent Sunday visits there. The unity that he experienced here would influence his vision for the unity of the church in the whole ecumenical world: diversity and different traditions are an important part of this and can stand side by side as an expression of the richness that has come into being through the history of the church. After his election as General Secretary of the WCC in Utrecht, he spoke of the deepening sense of community, absorbing the existing differences and cultural diversity into itself. In the report of the General Secretary to the General Assembly in 1975 in Nairobi, he insisted upon moving toward “a New Covenant between the member churches at all levels of their church life and the WCC at all levels of its activities.” And following on from his Methodist tradition, where the understanding of the Covenant in the Bible is still very much alive, he clarified that it meant more than a partnership of convenience, for God himself remains the founder of the Covenant. It was a case of a new understanding, even a new theological quality, of “being church” in the ecumenical community.

In 1981 in Vancouver, at the next General Assembly of the WCC, in his report as General Secretary, he used the picture of the “House of Living Stones” that continued to shape the ecumenical vision in the years that followed. For him an essential part of this was the components of various cultures linked together in contextual interpretation of the Gospel together making up the great diversity in the ecumenical house. “I regard this as congenial,” he said, “I who come from the special world of the Caribbean, where all major cultures of the world have not only coexisted over the last 500 years but have also interacted.” The universal dialogue of cultures that he demanded had already begun for him in the truly multicultural society of the Caribbean. This is made clear in what he said in his speech in honor of the Indian ecumenical scholar, Russell Chandran, about the real aim of the universal dialogue of cultures: “The ecumenical movement that should be, will exist when the world becomes an *oikos* in which all will be open for each other and will share a common life in the entirety of their interwoven diversity.” This means that continuing dialogue will become the essence of an ecumenical community in which cultural differences are fundamental and not divisive.

Although his grandfather was modestly well off with his lemon plantation outside the town, the household of Violet Peters and her son Philip would have been considered

rather poor. On top of her small wage as a secretary, she was compelled to cook for others in order to earn extra money. On the whole the black population of the island, to which they belonged, lived at a lower economic level of the colonial society. The world economic crisis of 1929/30 also hit the Caribbean hard, and there was a traceable impoverishment as a result of the Second World War. Potter experienced poverty as a lay preacher on Nevis, and lived amidst poverty himself as a pastor of the poor from 1950 to 1954 in Haiti. Looking back on this time at a seminar on “Service among the poor,” held at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, he declared: “What I am now going to say is based on my experience with the poorest of the poor in all of the Americas. . . . [On] Haiti, where I worked in the poor villages—90% could neither read nor write and so on and so on. . . . I was with them every day and since then they are always with me.” Looking back later he added: “It was in Haiti where my faith was tested the hardest, but also enriched in a wonderful way. It was also there, that I got to know the power of the biblical stories to speak to the people in their real situations and to empower them.”

From this time onward his orientation was determined by the service of the churches empowering and liberating the poor. The World Mission Conference in 1980, in Melbourne, took this as its subject and Potter identified himself in the same way with the “Option for the Poor” of the Latin American liberation theology as articulated by his valued colleague on the WCC staff, Julio de Santa Ana. Also to be seen in this context is the biblical-theological concern with “Justice,” which runs through his life as a recurrent theme: even to the Bible study he held on his eightieth birthday in the Loccum Academy, Germany: Justice—no philosophical principle, rather a life in relationships, in which people share with each other.

## Potter’s Personal Life

On a visit to West Africa as the person responsible for the Mission work of his Methodist Church in London, Potter was welcomed there with the honorable name “Son comes home.” His hosts had recognized, quite correctly, that it was unmistakably his African roots that give him strength and throughout his life have given him a black consciousness. This also includes his way of doing theology. However, he differentiates himself from the so-called contextual theologies, such as the African or Latin American with their own specific regional context, in that he retains for himself the global perspective that he has inherited from European theological history. With this perspective, he clearly remains a critical discussion partner for Third World theologians. He always reflected globally—as did his ecumenical mentor Visser’t Hooft—saying: “The world is my parish.” This however also required a direct application of the biblical texts to a distinct social, economic or human situation. Just as the biblical texts grew

out of a concrete historical situation, they must also relate directly to our present-day challenges. Through him this form of Bible study became a source of inspiration for the ecumenical movement, for example in his vision of "A House of Living Stones" in 1983 in Vancouver.

His descent from black slaves however is paired in his case with his descent from aristocratic circles. His grandmother Emilia, on his father's side, was a nobleman's daughter with a family tree that goes back to the Normans. In the twelfth century her ancestors had supported the English King Henry II at the conquest of Ireland and were rewarded for this with the Irish County of Kilkenny and raised to the nobility. It is typical that Potter only concerned himself with this part of his family history long after the end of his working life. On a visit to his ancestor's Ormond Castle, this connection was made real by a gravestone with the name Emilia, confirming it to be a common name in the family. From being nine years old, the advice that his grandmother Emilia gave to him on her deathbed accompanied him: "Always remain a gentleman, Philip!" It follows that his easy manner, when dealing at eye level with the powerful of this world, can be seen in connection with this inheritance; visible for example at his meetings with the three Popes, Paul VI, John Paul I and II, and with the Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin, whom he invited to "Call me brother!" Even Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands valued him as a trusted advisor. In this context his activities after his law studies as assistant to the Crown Lawyer for Dominica should also be mentioned, and his solid literary and philosophical British education.

The fact that he belonged to the Methodist world community, in which each independent church was in partnership and fellowship with the others, gave him a different kind of naturalness. For within this church, commitment to World Mission was a matter of course. While missiologists in Europe critically concerned themselves with the enmeshment of missionary activities with European colonial rule, a black person whose ancestors had themselves been objects of this Mission could work in great freedom, and as a result of positive experiences in a worldwide international church community deal constructively with the mission of the church. According to his tradition, it was part of the nature of the church. However, in his article "From Missions to Mission," he underlines the fact that, "Christian World Mission is Christ's Mission not our own." As the Secretary for West Africa and the Caribbean in the Methodist central offices in London, Potter said the following to missionaries preparing to be sent out: "It must be absolutely clear to you that service overseas does not depend on the fact that we have anything to offer!" In 1972, at the end of his time of responsibility for the mission work of the WCC, he summed it up by saying that our task is still to discover anew the mission of the church: "The most urgent task remains to recreate the credibility of

Christian mission by being a living church for others,” thus spoken in a speech to the Roman Bishops’ Synod on the subject of World Evangelism in 1974.

His personal credibility derives from the fact that he is a joyous Christian who practices his piety in daily life. But this kind of piety would not be comprehensible were it not for the breeding ground of black Methodism in which it grew. Specifically in the Caribbean, Methodist traditions of Anglo-Saxon origin had become fused with black spirituality. This then led to a fusion of Wesleyan and Catholic liturgical traditions that were still alive in the Caribbean. They were founded on the very personal experience of the closeness to God that affected the daily lives of the slaves, how they read their Bible, their language, and their songs. Their Negro Spirituals are a powerful expression of what has enriched the whole ecumenical world. Whoever was there will never forget how Potter moved the gathered masses of people at the *Kirchentag* in Germany, when he sang the Caribbean version of the Lord’s Prayer, which has in the meantime been taken into our official hymn book.

It was the same for him at home, where one could often meet Potter with his first wife, Doreen, sitting at the grand piano and singing. Doreen came from a Methodist manse in Jamaica and was a passionate musician and composer of songs. Fittingly, *Cantate Domino!* is written on her gravestone in Geneva. But it was also decisive that spirituality remained indivisibly linked to diaconal service. Methodists speak of scriptural holiness.

This holistic approach enabled Potter to talk about salvation and healing, and life in a healing community as the source of health—as he did in his report to the Central Committee in 1981 in Dresden on the occasion of the presentation of a study programme of the WCC Health Commission.

Black society in the Caribbean, as in other places, has been formed in a special way by strong women who hold the threads of living together firmly in their hands. His mother was one of these women, who ensured the daily life of the small family, without a husband, with determination, and single-mindedly held her own against prejudice and reservations in the neighborhood and church congregation. It will have been her example that taught Potter his deep respect toward women and what women can move in church and society. Later his experience of partnership between women and men in the Christian Student Movement strengthened this experience. His Bible studies for example were influenced decisively by Suzanne de Dietrich from Alsace. The equality between men and women also played an important role in his work in Geneva. During this time women increasingly gained in influence. The ecumenical ten-year program, “The Community of Women and Men in the Church,” would never have come about without him. Women bear witness to this.

The Programme was decided at the General Assembly in 1975 in Nairobi. Potter's ground-breaking efforts for this program are reflected in the speech he gave in 1974 at the Berlin Women's Conference, as the only man—apart from a word of greeting by Bishop Scharf. This "Women's Decade" eased the way for women in the member churches of the WCC—at least the Protestant ones—to come into high offices of church leadership. As in Germany, when in 1992 Maria Jepsen became the first woman Lutheran Bishop in Hamburg, and later Bärbel Wartenberg-Potter, who has been married to Philip Potter for more than 25 years, became Bishop of Lübeck and Holstein.

## The Larger Framework

The dynamic new beginning for the ecumenical movement after the Second World War was inspired at that time in history by a great longing for peace. It was a question of finding a new peace order after the incomparably bloodiest war in the history of humankind and in face of humanity's new capacity to destroy itself with nuclear weapons. The ecumenical movement was able to contribute far-reaching messages, such as the one at the WCC's inauguration Assembly in 1948 in Amsterdam: "War is contrary to the will of God." Prominent members of the ecumenical community were also among those who worked on the General Charter of Human Rights that was passed in the same year. The closeness of the WCC to the United Nations, which was just coming into being, remained over the years. The WCC especially got involved in the struggle for disarmament. In this situation the practicing pacifist Potter was a good representative. His statement on the church position about the reduction of weapon arsenals, held before the Special Assembly of the UN in 1978 in New York, was a highlight of his time as General Secretary. The WCC Assembly in 1983 in Vancouver stood uncompromisingly against the use, production, and storing of atomic weapons, inspired by his leadership as General Secretary. Bringing about peace remained his theme and his contribution, as evidenced in his speech on the occasion of his receiving the Niwano Peace Prize in 1986 in Tokyo. It is moving that a Japanese Buddhist initiative honored him for his commitment to peace. It is at the same time an expression that the interreligious efforts of the WCC, which he supported, had been taken note of in the world of the religions.

But already in 1948 there was a shadow of a new division in the world. It hung over the Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948, and would soon lead to the permanent condition of the Cold War. The fronts of this war ran right through the middle of the member churches of the WCC, which were divided into almost equal parts between the West and the East, especially after the complete entry of the family of the Russian Orthodox

churches in 1961. In this way the East-West confrontation influenced the ecumenical agenda in many ways between 1948 and 1990 and demanded mediation activities between the two blocs. Potter regularly found himself between the fronts and became the victim of public slander campaigns that stamped him as a friend of the communists. There is little of this visible in the texts of this volume, due among other things to the confidential nature of his personal mediation attempts that were not published as a rule. However, as General Secretary of the WCC, Potter was untriflingly on the move for this cause, in order to try to build bridges between Bucharest or Moscow with London or New York. Philip Potter flew thousands of miles in the service of peace and reconciliation! It is good to take this opportunity to remind ourselves how many of the contributions and speeches in this book were literally written on the move, in either a transit lounge or a hotel room.

Bridge building of a quite different kind was necessary and made possible by the ecumenical new beginning in Rome. While in 1948 the Pope forbade any Catholic to attend the inauguration Assembly of the WCC, ten years later Pope John XXIII decidedly changed course when he called for an ecumenical Reform Council. At the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965 the WCC member churches were not only able to take part with prominent personalities as ecumenical observers, but were also able to influence to an astounding degree the wording of statements and decisions taken that concerned both the member churches of the WCC and the Catholic Church. Between Rome and Geneva a comprehensive dialogue developed in which Potter was actively involved as the Director of the Department for World Mission in Geneva from 1967, especially concerning the implementation of the decisions of the Council. First of all it was a question of reorganizing the field of Mission activities which were traditionally very important for the Roman World Church. Was it possible to find a common biblical and theological orientation for this? Potter had put together fundamental ideas on this subject for the Ecumenical Community in Geneva and had presented them to the WCC Central Committee in 1967 in Heraklion. In 1974, when world evangelism became the subject of the Roman Bishops' Synod, Pope Paul VI invited Potter to come and give the keynote address on this subject. The deliberations of this synod then flowed into the Papal encyclical on "Evangelisation in the World of Today" in 1975.

A further important new area of cooperation between Geneva and Rome came about in the area of church world responsibility. Besides a joint working group and the participation of the Vatican in the WCC commission for "Faith and Church Constitution," in 1968 the Committee for Society, Development, and Peace (SODEPAX) was founded jointly by the Holy See and the WCC. With headquarters in Geneva and its own staff, SODEPAX organized conferences and deliberations until 1980 that set new

standards (in Beirut, Montreal and Montreux), influenced the rapidly growing fields of the church development services, and also the church statements on social issues and questions of society.

Potter took an active part in many SODEPAX conferences and pointed the way forward with many of his programmatic statements. In the same way it was he who suggested comprehensive global institutions and programs to the Geneva ecumenical community or pushed them through: The Ecumenical Development Commission with the Ecumenical Development Cooperative Society (EDCS, founded in 1975) or the Christian Health Commission are instances of this. It was characteristic for these, as already seen in the PCR or the Urban and Industrial Mission, that the WCC went beyond studies and coordination and took the initiative itself.

There is no question that this rapid extension of the ecumenical movement went together with the rapid development of a global world society as we know it today: "Third World centers" became overnight "One World centers." The debate on the role of transnational companies increasingly dominated ecumenical social ethics. This was followed by the electronic revolution which, as far as communication was concerned, created conditions so far unknown in the world. The ecumenical movement was itself not only part of this but also an active protagonist in pushing the process further. For them the question was not whether they wished for globalization but rather which form of globalization was desirable. At a fundamental level the theological context between the moving toward unity among the churches, and their relationship to the One World to which we all belong came closer together. In the 1970s when the North-South conflicts were central, Potter took it upon himself to stress the role of the "third world" for the ecumenical movement –quite obvious for example in his speech on the occasion of his receiving an honorary doctorate in 1974 in Hamburg. It was his particular contribution to emphasise the tensions that arose from the facts: on the one hand to be an advocate for the One Christianity in the One Humanity, and at the same time to make the Christians and the Churches more sensitive to the great diversity of cultures in which Christianity exists, and to further intercultural dialogue. To work on how the Gospel could be embedded in each culture became one of his aims, as also the strengthening of interreligious dialogue. In this sense he also deepened the understanding of Christians seeking for unity, as a search for a larger and deeper unity in, with and among our diversity and our differences, our various ways of life, our ways of witnessing and decision-making processes.

As the development toward a common world society had so far been dominated by economic interest and speculative financial crises, the economic questions became more and more important on the agenda of the Ecumenical Community.

The connection between ecumenism and economy had already intrigued Potter at a very early stage. Then in the 80s and 90s the subject became increasingly explosive and brought his commitment to justice to a new climax. He sought for biblical criteria that could make Economy possible under just conditions. He questioned the international system from a biblical point of view and warned against speculative Casino-Capitalism. There are examples of his prophetic witness documented in the collection of texts that have been put together in this volume. For the General Assembly in Harare he finally worked on a memorandum with the characteristic title: "Resist global powers!" In it he wrote: "the most serious aspect of globalization today is the absence of political and social correctives. To a large extent the national political institutions have lost control over global financial and economic processes. . . . Which leads to economic and social marginalization and the exclusion (from the life of society) of the majority of the people in many countries." As an alternative guideline he quoted from the statement of the Catholics Bishop's Conference in 1986 in the USA: "Every economic decision and institution must be judged in the light of whether it protects the dignity of each human person or whether it undermines it. All human beings have a right to share in the economic life of a society."

At the General Assembly of the WCC in 1998 in Harare, Potter gave a speech, together with the then President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, that was received with standing ovations. At the last General Assembly, in 2005 in Porto Alegre, he was the only person who could stand up when the question was raised as to who had taken part in all nine ecumenical assemblies since Amsterdam in 1948. His biography, and also the selection of contributions in this volume, span a unique period of six decades of decisive ecumenical history, connected in the same way to the dramatic history of the times: "the twentieth century as an ecumenical century," as Potter likes to formulate it.

Over all these years he has taken part in a Methodist Covenant Service at the beginning of each year, most recently in a small group in his Lübeck home. In this celebration of new commitment, the congregation confesses: "Christ has many services to be done; some are easy, others are difficult; some bring honor, others bring reproach." And the congregation promises, "Let me be exalted for you or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty; I willingly offer all I have and am to serve you, as and when you choose."

The spirit and the vision of this New Covenant that he has made every year have accompanied him throughout his life and have also accompanied his work for the whole of the ecumenical movement.