

19 P. Schmidt-Leukel, 41. A similar critical view is expressed by K. P. Jörns, with the distinction between invisible religions, i.e. the universal history of the perception of God, and the visible ones as religious institutions of emerging religions. Jörns, 70 and 154.

20 K. P. Jörns, 46.

21 Religious plurality and Christian self-image. This gives a type of interim result from an ongoing ecumenical discussion process and thus is not an official document of the WCC; instead, discussion topics and comments from the churches are solicited. The document can be found at <http://www.oikoumene.org/>.

22 Ibid, p.8.

23 Refer also to *Over een andere boeg*, op. cit., p.24, where a biblical miniature on the concept of hospitality is given. The concept here becomes a central one for missionary presence.

24 Ibid, p.12.

25 T. Sundermeier uses the Greek term of “Hodogese” from the story of Phillip in Acts 8 to represent a different type of understanding for which the eunuch bids: not explanation (exegesis) but rather accompaniment on the path. Perhaps it is in the appreciation of other religions while on a path of common commitment in the face of worldwide threats it becomes possible to appreciate the stranger.

26 Refer to H.C. Hahn/H. Reichel: *Zinzendorf and the Herrnhut Brethren*, Hamburg, 1977, p.412.

27 Specifically because “secular” society is not completely atheistic and because Christians in today’s churches no longer conform without question there are fluent transitions which must be “kept open through communication”. “This however requires the departure from the unrealistic idea that one can live in a communicative yet closed system.” (K. P. Jörns, op. cit., p.79).

28 K. P. Jörns loc. cit., p.71

Nicaragua—A Community of Faith

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At the end of January 2007, 307 delegates met in Bilwi (Puerto Cabezas) for the Synod of the Iglesia Morava en Nicaragua; it was the fourteenth since becoming an independent province. The official announcement of the conference contained the following words: “The Moravian Church of Nicaragua is a community of faith in Jesus Christ—consisting of various peoples and cultures, Protestant, by

nature oriented to the Gospel, and ecumenically disposed. It promotes and participates in the complete evangelism of Nicaragua and thereby in union with the rest of the Moravian Church declares to the world the Good News of the kingdom of God on which are grounded love for one another, equality of the sexes, and the rights of all people as well as its dedication to social and economic development, medical care, education, and the protection of the environment.”

This anniversary, the 550th of the Moravian Church, did not appear to play a direct role for the Synod, but the message is a program and a clear sign of our membership in the worldwide church and reflection on its roots. The Iglesia Morava en Nicaragua does not look back on 275 years but only on 158 years of mission work. In 1849 the first German missionaries from Jamaica arrived at Bluefields, and this event was duly celebrated 150 years later (in March 1999). I was able to represent the worldwide Unity at those celebrations. A particularly moving experience during that time was the sunrise procession to the small God's Acre of the German missionaries which took place just as on Easter morning and the liturgical service of thanksgiving which was held at the graves whose markers had all been provided with a fresh coat of white paint.

"A Miskitu is a Moravian" is a longtime saying which denotes that the Moravian Church in eastern Nicaragua has become a church of the people similar to the situation in the Moravian Church in Surinam and some areas of the southern highlands in Tanzania. The saying naturally only pertains to a segment; at this Synod activities were conducted in four different languages—Miskito, Mayangna (formerly called Sumu), Spanish, and English, the latter for the admittedly decreasing number of Creoles.

The multi-ethnic diversity of the province which was mentioned in the text cited at the outset points to one of the challenges for the Iglesia Morava: the numerically dominant Miskitos must afford the other groups and

their work an appropriate role in the province. The Mayangnas in particular have clearly gained ground in this respect over the past 20 years, not without external support. This is evidenced by the Herrnhut mission support for the publication of a hymnal in the Mayngan language. In the church leadership not just the five geographic but also the various ethnic groups must be represented; thus this board's 5-member representation always creates nearly impossible problems for the Synod. The Iglesia Morava is intent however, as noted above, to be a multi-ethnic church and with the election of Cora Antonio as chairperson of the Board—the first woman in this position—has also come closer to the goal of equality between the sexes. Ordained women, by the way, have been working in the Iglesia Morava for about the past 15 years.

The Nicaraguan province experienced a revival near the end of the 19th century which grounded the entire church and strengthened it in its service. Today worship attendance, especially in Bilwi, is of amazing size; communion services are so well attended that even in the large, barely 20-year old, city church two services must be held. On the other hand the divisions created by the charismatic movement in the neighboring province of Honduras have reached the Nicaraguan province as well leading to the formation of new congregations. The influence of the charismatics is, however, noticeably less here than in Honduras. That is another reason why it is important that the Iglesia Morava remembers its membership in the worldwide Unity as was clearly expressed in the words of the announcement of the Synod.

Other challenges stem primarily from the economic situation of our country. Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in Latin America, and the east coast, home to the Iglesia Morava, is the least developed part of this Central American country. Infrastructure is meager across much of the country; as a result Bilwi is still not accessible year-round by road from the capital, Managua. Many congregations in the Iglesia Morava have neither electricity nor telephone service. This is why the United States—Miami is only a mere 2½-hour flight from Managua—has an almost irresistible attraction to many Nicaraguans. Currently hundreds of thousands of them live in the USA, among them many Moravians including former members of the church administration and bishops, who are missed by the country and the church. There have been regular economic setbacks as a result of hurricanes in the past twenty years, and these have particularly devastated the Moravian Church. In 1988 Hurricane Joan almost completely destroyed Bluefields including the since rebuilt Home Church of the Iglesia Morava.

The deep wounds that were inflicted especially on the citizens of the east coast by civil war in the 80s have not yet healed. The notable medical work of the Moravian Church, exemplary for the entire country, almost came to a complete halt as a result of the destruction

of the hospital in Bilwaskarma. After the Bible School there, the local theological training post of the Iglesia Morava, also became a victim of these battles, after a long interruption, was able to resume its work in Bilwi. Correspondence education has played a large role in training and continuing education; by these means several hundred elders and other lay members have been prepared for church service in the outlying congregations. Therefore the announced charge of the Moravian Church, to which it renewed itself at Synod, will be fulfilled.

550 years of the Unity, a long history of mission; there are some aspects of it which the members of the Iglesia Morava are not (any longer) aware of, and the result is that connections to the worldwide Unity are primarily with the two provinces and mission boards in the USA. But the message of the Synod shows that the church is prepared to allow its rich heritage from the Unity to henceforth become vital.

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