

## Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling

is published by the

Society for Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling  
(Gesellschaft für Interkulturelle Seelsorge und Beratung e.V.)

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No. 2

**Traditions:  
Shadows of the Past –  
Sources of the Future**

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Düsseldorf 1997

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a German version of this issue is published under the title:

*Traditionen: Schatten der Vergangenheit – Quellen der Zukunft*  
(Interkulturelle Seelsorge und Beratung Nr. 2)

ISSN: 1431- 8954

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Julian Müller

## *Intercultural Exchange*

### *A Discovery of Being Different*

#### *Personal experience as a South African*

The earliest story of my life that I can remember is a birthday story. It must have been either my third or fourth birthday, I am not sure. On that birthday I received as birthday present from my parents a box with a few toy cars in it. I remember that I was overjoyed and that my first intention was to show this wonderful present to my best friend. We lived on a farm and my best and only playmate at the time was Daniel, a black boy, a little older than me. He and his parents lived on the farm and they were our servants.

So, I ran outside to show my present to Daniel. I remember that he was sitting on a little bench in a room in the backyard. Proudly I showed him the cars. He looked and admired, and then after a while, chose the two most beautiful ones and gently pushed them on their wheels, underneath his bench, backwards. With this act, he said to me without words: "I'll take these, thank you!"

The rest I do not really remember. There must have been a commotion, but I got my cars back. Perhaps my parents intervened. The fact is that I got the cars back.

This is a personal little story from my childhood and I would like to use it as a basis of reflection on the South African society.

1. The story of South Africa is one of involvement and even enmeshment of black and white people. Like the little boy who ran to share his birthday joy with his best friend, most people in South Africa would be able to tell stories of how they shared moments of joy and sorrow with someone of another race.

Black and white South Africa don't exist as two completely separated and isolated worlds. Although the apartheid policy was a form of social engineering which forced people apart in different neighbourhoods,

different schools, different churches, etc., it couldn't stop people's involvement with each other. Economical realities forced people towards each other, at least in the work situation. And today South Africa is very rapidly changing towards a totally integrated society - a process which started gradually long before the laws of segregation were repealed.

2. A second point of reflection on my childhood story: As in Daniel and my relationship, most South Africans grew up with definitive and even rigid role distinctions and expectations. Although Daniel was my friend, he knew and I knew that he was the servant and I was the boss. And because of historical reasons all the bosses are white and all servants are black in the South African community. Therefore we grew up with the stereotype that a person's colour equals his/her value and status in society. When people are framed into these roles because of stereotypes which developed in our minds from childhood, one cannot easily get rid of such presuppositions. I must admit that within the South African context, it is up to this day not easy for me not to put myself in the boss-role when communicating with a black person. I think that I and many other South Africans try hard, but find it still an effort, a struggle to become free from the roles inflicted on us through our upbringing.

3. These are structures of society with a long history. The roles into which Daniel and myself fitted so easily from childhood, were the inheritance of generations before us and the way in which they structured society. The way in which the South African society developed was not the result of a criminal government which one day sat down and made a list of vicious laws. It developed through centuries and what the Nationalist government wrote in the law books from 1948, was only the legalising of social practice through many years. The development of this legalisation process represents indeed the deepest point of inhuman and unchristian discriminatory

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practices. But the fact is that it is deeply rooted in the history of our community.

4. This story represents most probably also a difference between the African and Western experience of personal property. According to the western capitalistic mind, personal belongings and property are individualistically earned. The African, on the other hand, has primarily a communalistic mind. The riches which were developed on African soil by western industries and capital, are seen as the corporate riches of all the people. Prosperity and poverty must be shared by all. That is why issues such as the private ownership of land and the rights of inhabitant workers on farms are the most difficult ones to handle in the negotiation processes.

It is against this background of personal bias, a history of social injustices, and conflicting cultural expectations in the South African context, that I would like to try and contribute to the development of theory which can be of value in our praxis of intercultural interaction, especially in the field of pastoral family therapy.

### **Approaches to culture in the social sciences and in family therapy**

In recent literature, a number of different possible approaches to intercultural therapy were described:

#### **· The essentialist view**

According to this view (Krause 1995:364) cultural differences are considered to be much like other differences, i.e. differences based on gender and age. Culture is seen as an overwhelming influence which determines the individual's behaviour and thought. According to this view, the individual does not really operate as an agent constructing and making choices about his/her own life.

The essentialist definition of culture would have us think about culture as one great organism in which all parts are connected to all other parts. You have to take either the whole lot or none of it, for only in this way could culture have the iron hold on individuals required to form and mould their bodies and their minds. If, however, we combine a generative notion of culture with an interactive one then it becomes possible not only to consider some cultural differences more important than others but also to talk about them cross-culturally (Krause 1995:365-6).

#### **· The universalistic view**

The universalist approach (Falicov 1995:373) takes the position that persons and families of different cultures are more alike than different. This school of thought argues that there are basic similarities which are to be found in all cultures, for instance the concept that all children need love and discipline and that parenting always involves a combination of nurturing and control.

The problem with this view is that the perception of what is considered to be normative, may be local knowledge or beliefs based on a certain cultural experience. It also follows that adherents of this position have little use for training in cultural differences.

#### **· The particularistic view**

This position is the opposite of the universalistic one (Falicov 1995:374). According to this approach persons and families of different cultures are more different than alike and no generalisations are possible. The uniqueness of each family is stressed and often idiosyncrasies of a certain family are referred to as 'a culture unto itself'. As was said by Falicov (1995:374): "In the particularist position, then, the word *culture* is tied to the internal beliefs of each particular family rather than to the connection between the family and the broader sociocultural context."

As is the case with the universalist view, this approach also doesn't regard cultural training as very important, because the family's interior, which is always unique, is held solely responsible for all of the family's distress.

In discussing this view, Inga-Britt Krause (1995:364) calls it: culture as an idiom of differences. The popular use of the word 'culture' shows a preoccupation with diversity, choice and identity. "Culture becomes an idiom for the expression of all kinds of individual differences and appears to encompass everything." (Krause 1995:364)

#### **· The ethnic-focused approach**

According to this position families differ, but the diversity is primarily due to the factor of ethnicity (Falicov 1995:374). The focus here is on thought patterns, behaviours, feelings, customs, and rituals that stem from belonging to a particular cultural group. This school of thought would see culture as a symbolic expression, and "a symbol is some form of fixed sensory sign to which meanings has been arbitrarily attached. Persons within a cultural tradition share common understandings. Those outside this symbol system take

great risks in inferring the meanings of symbols from the outside of their own system" (Augsburger 1986:61).

In this position there is a real danger in oversystematising and stereotyping the notion of shared meanings. It might be assumed that ethno-groupings are more homogeneous and stable than they actually are. We are actually talking here of an epistemological error: "...clients are seen as their culture, not as themselves" Bateson (1979:30) warns also that "The map is not the territory, and the name is not the thing named."

Ethnic values and identity are influenced by various factors. There are variables within the group (education, social class, religion, etc.) and then there are the phenomena of cultural evolution and the effect of influences stimulated by contact with the dominant culture. Perhaps the most important limitation is the assumption that the observer, the person who describes the other culture, can be objective and has no effect on the conclusions being made about the group observed.

### **The narrative approach to intercultural pastoral therapy**

Over and against these four approaches, I want to propose the narrative model of intercultural understanding and communication.

The narrative approach implies that the therapist places him or herself in a not-knowing position. And that position calls for "...a kind of conversational questioning that leaves room for the client's story as told by the client in the client's own words, unchallenged by preconceived therapeutic knowing" (Boyd 1995:220). "The process of therapy is not to reveal the truth or to impose a reality, but to explore through conversation, through languaging, realities that are compatible with a particular client's unique tendency to attribute meaning and explanation in his or her own life" (Goolishian and Anderson 1987:536).

In spite of the well intended and well phrased theories introduced by Augsburger (1986) in his good book, concepts like *interpathy* and *transspecion*<sup>1</sup> are too much coloured by a knowing position and do not reveal the same epistemological position to be found in the not-knowing position of the narrative approach. The idea that a therapist is capable of moving over to persons of the other culture in a process of transspecion, is already arrogant and knowing. It reveals something of an asymmetrical communication, of a messianic role in stead of a partnership role. It consists of a movement initiated

form here to there, while the narrative approach wants to experience the sensation of being drawn into the other's world, of being drawn over the threshold of a cultural difference.

The narrative approach to therapy is clearly and in detail described by authors like Anderson and Goolishian (1988) and Michael White (1995). Anderson and Goolishian (according to Boyd 1995:221) describe the therapeutic conversation as "...a slowly evolving and detailed, concrete, individual life story stimulated by the therapist's position of not-knowing and the therapist's curiosity to learn." Seen from this point of view, intercultural therapy seems no longer a complex and rather impossible task, as long as the therapist is honestly willing to learn from the person from the other culture. "The kenotic pattern of Philippians 2:25ff describes the Christ-conversation and makes clear that our position must be one of service rather than domination or social control. A stance of agape-listening places the pastoral conversation in the realm of mutual co-authoring of a new story for the one in need of healing by valuing the unique reality of the other while continually striving for a stance of openness and humility" (Boyd 1995:221).

The "tools" which fit this approach to therapy are: responsive-active listening; a not-knowing position; conversational questions. The aim, as in all therapy, is change, but change within this perspective can be defined as "...the evolution of new meaning, new narrative identity, and new self-agency." (Boyd 1995:220). The narrative approach has a capacity to "re-relate" events in the context of new meaning. We can refer to this kind of therapy as "being in language".<sup>2</sup>

When working in this school of thought, it becomes increasingly difficult to view culture on the basis of the previously mentioned approaches. Culture must be seen as a much more immediate and ongoing process and not as something static which is handed down unaltered from generation to generation. The broad definition which Falicov (1995:375) gives, is perhaps one which fits into this paradigm: "...those sets of shared world views, meanings and adaptive behaviours derived from simultaneous membership and participation in a multiplicity of contexts, such as rural, urban or suburban setting; language, age, gender, cohort, family configuration, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, socioeconomic status, employment, education, occupation, sexual orientation, political

ideology; migration and stage of acculturation."

When the combinations of 'simultaneous memberships' and 'participation in multiple contexts' are seriously taken into account, the groups that emerge are much more 'fluid, unpredictable and shifting, than the groups defined by using an ethnic-focused approach' (Falicov 1995:376). It thus becomes much more difficult to make generalisations about culture groups and much more necessary to take on a not-knowing position.

In discussing the phenomena of cultures, cultural similarities and differences, Falicov (1995:376) refers to two important concepts:

*Cultural Borderlands*, a concept which refers to the overlapping zones of difference and similarity within and between cultures. This gives rise to internal inconsistencies and conflicts. On the other hand, it is the borderlands that offer possibilities of connectedness. Falicov (1995:376) refers to the poet, Gloria Anzaldua who describes the 'new mestiza' (a woman of mixed Indian and Spanish ancestry born in die USA): She 'copes by developing a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality.'

*Ecological Niche* refers to the combination of multiple contexts and partial cultural locations. We can think of a family narrative which encompasses multiple contexts rather than a single label (Mormon, African, Afrikaner, Boer). The philosophy here is to emphasise large categories - a philosophy that supports inclusiveness and a diversified unity.

With these concepts in mind, I again want to strongly argue the not-knowing position of the narrative approach as the only acceptable approach in an intercultural therapeutic situation. I agree with the approach and words of Dyche and Zayas (1995:389): "We argue that one should begin cross-cultural therapy with minimal assumptions, and that one way to learn about a culture is from the client. This argument seeks to balance the cognitive model of preparation with a process-oriented approach by exploring two therapist attitudes: cultural naiveté and respectful curiosity."

The ideal is for therapists to be participant-observers. Rather than working with historically constructed descriptions only, the therapist should learn from a present and

current cultural community (Falicov 1995:385). As is shown by Goolishian and Anderson (1992:27), all human systems are linguistic systems and are best being described from inside by those participating in it, than by so called objective observers.

### ***Narrative pastoral counselling: a social constructionist approach***

Narrative therapy can be described as the rewriting of history and auto-biography (Boyd 1996:215). And this rewriting takes place through the mutual conversational co-creation of new stories. This is a view of pastoral counselling which takes seriously our "radical embeddedness in history and language." "Such a view takes for granted the creative and creating power of language. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the God who is active in history is also active in language. Consider the powerful *dhabar* of the Old Testament creation narratives and the *logos* of John's gospel and the early Church Fathers" (Boyd 1996:215).

To focus on conversation in this way directs our attention away from the inner dynamics of the individual psyche or events in the external world (Boyd 1995:216). Instead, we are more free to be attentive to *words in their speaking*, words we create and by which we are created.

With reference to an article by Gergen (1985), Boyd (1996:218) summarises the social construction orientation as follows:

- a) what we take to be experience of the world does not in itself dictate the terms by which the world is understood,
- b) the terms in which the world is understood are social artifacts, produced of historically situated interchanges among people,
- c) the degree to which a given form of understanding prevails or is sustained across time is not fundamentally dependent on the empirical validity of the perspective in question, but on the vicissitudes of social processes (e.g., communication, negotiation, conflict, rhetoric), and
- d) forms of negotiated understanding are of critical significance in social life, as they are integrally connected with many other activities in which people engage.

To take a narrative approach is to look for a "negotiated understanding". When a new negotiated understanding is reached, a new narrative has been constructed. By taking this approach, culture is no longer seen as a determining factor, but as an interesting "borderland" from where new "ecological niches" can be developed.

Then human beings become inventors of and inventions of culture. The prerequisite is of course that we take on the risks of the borderlands and give ourselves for intercultural interaction. As Augsburg (1986:25-26) puts it: "This change comes from encounter, contact, and interaction, not from programmatic education or social engineering. It occurs on the boundary, not in the cultural enclave. ... The capacity not only to 'believe' the second culture but to come to understand it both cognitively ('thinking with') and affectively ('feeling with') is necessary before one enters cross-cultural counselling."

The way we interpret our world, the rights and wrongs of our life, the good and bad, are all products of our social (and therefore cultural) embeddedness. "There is no recounting of the history of a country ... apart from a narrative loaded with interpretations of interpretations which are by-products of human relationships." (Boyd 1995:218).

### The South African context

Although things have changed much for the better during the past few years, the poem by a black South African, Oswald Mtshali, still describes the situation in our country:

#### WALLS

*Man is  
a great wall builder  
The Berlin Wall  
The Wailing Wall of Jerusalem  
But the wall  
most impregnable  
Has a moat  
flowing with fright  
around his heart*

*A wall without windows  
for the spirit to breeze through*

*A wall  
without a door  
for love to walk in.*

Oswald Mtshali, Soweto poet

These walls of fear are part and parcel of the South African scene and history. The following story shows how in an ironic, but tragic way, it shapes our lives (Malan 1990:226): "This is a parable of fear obscuring fear that occurred a long time ago, in a small town called Bulwer, in 1906 - the year of the Bambatha rebellion, the last Zulu uprising. Bulwer lay close to Zulu

territory, and white farmers in the district feared the local Zulus might join Bambatha's rebel army and butcher their masters in bed. So the whites called a meeting and formulated a plan of action: if the Zulus rose, all whites would rush to Bulwer and barricade themselves inside the stone courthouse.

A few days later, someone cried wolf, and the whites panicked. They loaded their guns and children onto wagons and abandoned their farms, leaving meals on the tables and leaving cows un milked in the barns. They barricaded themselves inside the courthouse, loaded their guns, posted lookouts, and sat back to await the barbarians. By and by, they saw dust in the distance. Peering out through chinks in the barricade, the whites beheld a vision from their worst nightmares - a horde of Zulus approaching on foot. The crowd halted a few hundred yards away. A deputation detached itself and approached the courthouse. The Zulus knocked on the door. The wary whites opened a window, expecting to hear an ultimatum. Instead, the black men said "Why have you forsaken us? We see there is a terrible danger coming, because our masters have fled into this fort, and we are frightened, for we don't know what it is. So we came to ask if we could also come inside, to be under the protection of our masters' guns."

Stories like this one which tell of misunderstandings and fear between cultural groups in Africa are actually very common. Language and other cultural differences are part of our community. To communicate across these borders is not always easy, but it remains fascinating. For those among us who are willing to listen and willing to be drawn into the stories of others, new worlds of understanding emerge almost daily. The difficulties sometimes bring us to the verge of despair, but with a narrative, not-knowing attitude we can make growing progress in the "borderlands" and develop new "ecological niches" where being different can be experienced as the most fulfilling part of existence. This is the joy of becoming part of someone else's story - like it is to know the joy of fish in the story of the old Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu (as quoted by Rosenbaum and Dyckman 1995:41):

*Chuang Tzu and Hui Tzu  
were crossing Hao river  
By the dam.  
Chuang said:  
"See how free  
The fishes leap and dart:  
That is their happiness."*

*Hui replied:  
"Since you are not a fish  
How do you know  
What makes fishes happy?"  
Chuang said:  
"Since you are not I  
How can you possibly know  
That I do not know  
What makes fishes happy?"  
Hui argued:  
"If I, not being you,  
Cannot know what you know  
It follows that you  
Not being a fish  
Cannot know what they know."  
Chuang said:  
"Wait a minute!  
Let us get back  
To the original question.  
What you asked me was  
'How do you know  
What makes fishes happy?'  
From the terms of your question  
You evidently know I know  
What makes fishes happy.  
"I know the joy of fishes  
In the river  
Through my own joy, as I go walking  
Along the same river."*

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Transpection is an effort to put oneself into the head (not shoes) of another person... Transpection differs from analytical 'understanding.' Transpection differs also from 'empathy.' Empathy is a projection of feelings between two persons with one epistemology. Transpection is a trans-epistemological process which tries to *experience* a foreign belief, a foreign assumption, a foreign perspective, feelings in a foreign context, and consequences of feelings in a foreign context, as if these have become one's own." (Maruyama et al., cited by Augsburg 1986:30)

<sup>2</sup> Anderson and Goolishian (1988: 378) use concepts like "language", "in language", and "languaging" to refer to the process of the social creation of the intersubjective realities that we temporally share with each other.

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## ***Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling***

### ***Reflections on the Background of the Intercultural Seminars in 1995 and 1996***

Looking back on her experience in the realm of international conferences on pastoral care, Liesel-Lotte Püschel who has done a lot by way of interconnecting various international pastoral care movements writes the following: "...when members from different systems try in earnest to reach mutual understanding it is inevitable that they hurt each other's feelings...; and naturally clashes between very close systems hurt the most". One feels so because it is from closer systems where one would expect it the least and because the sudden experience of non-understanding and of being like strangers is most painful and irritating and particularly disconcerting. According to Herkenrath-Püschel "...such offences are almost typical of intercultural dialogue and occur when the concerned suddenly become aware of a deep rift between their cultures".<sup>1</sup>

The above words could be taken as a commentary on the meanwhile ten 'International Seminars on Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling' the last of which was held in Ustron/Poland. The above-mentioned experience seems to have been made many times and in different ways over and over again. And it was exactly this experience of feeling hurt and not understood which led us to explore deeper the cultural dimension of pastoral care and counselling and which - at least in relation to the pastoral care movement in Germany - awakened our interest in the issue of 'intercultural pastoral care' as such.<sup>2</sup> This is not at all surprising. As a matter of fact, culture normally envelops us like the air we breathe but take no notice of until something disturbing happens - shortness of fresh air or sudden changes. We become aware of the existence of air for instance if there is a draft, so it causes a twinge -

and the same can be said of our culture. It is also very interesting that - at least with us - the question of culture did not emerge at first from dealing with multicultural settings in practice, but rather from "within": from experiences of being different within our (supposedly) own and secure environment, among ourselves as women and men working in pastoral care and counselling, among ourselves who believe to have so much in common, even as far as having equal standards of training. I think this is a very important point. It makes me realise that that which is strange and of different culture need not necessarily be exotic, it may wait for me just across my own garden fence. Even in the closest area of my own tradition I have to be prepared for the different and for culturally based alienness - for difficulties in understanding and acts of offence which do not result from malevolence or an unwillingness to understand each other, but are rooted in the variations of cultural colouring which distinguish me from my neighbour.

As for the specific elements which the intercultural aspect adds to our practical work - once we have become aware of it - the first realisation simply is that once again things have become a little more complicated than expected. With encounters in the field of intercultural pastoral care still more aspects and factors have to be taken into consideration and paid attention to as having an effect on the encounter. It is no longer enough to concentrate on the encounter on a personal level, in fact, the social, political, and even spiritual backgrounds of the people gain importance;<sup>3</sup> group processes become increasingly more complex - and in the end, there will be even more things of which I must admit that I did not understand these. So I simply carry on alongside the things I understood as well as those I did not, and try to deal with both in the

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most sensible manner (both as a human being and as someone engaged in pastoral care).

Again, let us listen to Liesel-Lotte Herkenrath-Püschel: "Only if we acknowledge the limitations of understanding between members of different cultures can we succeed to some extent. This also means to refrain from over-expectations on both sides ...".<sup>4</sup>

### **Possible forms of encountering the alien**

In the last decades, the context in which pastoral care and counselling occur in Western Europe has changed considerably. Cultural diversity has become a visible aspect of our everyday life, manifest in the changed streetscape of our towns and cities. How do I meet people from different environments, different cultures, in a world that has turned multicultural? Which is the attitude to be adopted towards them?

There are many destructive forms of dealing with people. If we leave those aside and concentrate on a more positive approach, we will discover a multiplicity of other possibilities. Below, I would like to try and outline a few possible attitudes - 'ideal type' ones and not by any means exhaustive:

#### **A supposed world citizen**

I can choose to meet the alien with a universalistic attitude, the attitude of a world citizen. In that case I accept the differences as a given fact, as something that might make an encounter more difficult at first, but - in principle - could be overcome by increased background knowledge, through studies and more contacts. This is partly what I have experienced myself: Things which felt alien to me first grew more familiar once I got to know these better. However, if the fact that something is 'alien' is basically something temporal, something that has to be overcome - then this approach results in the end in a negation of the alien within the alien. Viewed from a higher plane, there is no such thing as 'being alien' at all; and if something feels alien to me, this only gives proof of my own limited horizon. I think that the conception of pastoral care within the church is still predominantly based on this universalistic ideal. Our demand reads: Closeness and understanding are always possible, in principle, and therefore have to be striven for. However, reality often draws

a different picture. Even some optimistic models of a multicultural society are based on this conception: To overcome 'being alien' is only a question of learning. And often this learning programme is coupled with considerable moral pretensions.

#### **The alien as a foil to set off myself**

Negating the alien: this can happen in a much more subtle way. Many of the fashionable things which come under the name 'postmodern' even seem to search for what is alien or different, demonstrate and emphasise it. But this is done in such a way as to "alienate" the alien elements from their contexts. To me this seems like turning the whole world into a collage or a museum in which I can experience myself. The alien detached from its hereditary context becomes a projection area for myself, the alien is made into something exotic which stimulates me but has stopped to stir me. The corresponding pastoral-care model would be an attitude of arbitrariness which prefers to let all forms of verbal expression, all forms of religion or culture exist amicably side by side.

A variation of this can be found in the role the culturally alien played in the art of painting in the first decades of this century. Among expressionists for instance, African sculptures were *en vogue* for quite some time. Even Picasso collected such items. Gauguin went to live on Tahiti - but not with an idea to share the existence of the people there! The alien was experienced as a counter-image and was interesting because it reflected experiences of alienation, differences and rifts in one's own society.<sup>5</sup> This, I feel, is along the lines of pastoral-care models or therapy approaches which reduce the issue of 'feeling alien' to the problem of the 'alien within myself'. The alien which irritates me is thus reduced to an expression of the unconscious, the suppressed parts of myself. Such models of interpretation are well known from analytically-oriented psychological definitions. I should think that these explanations offer many valuable insights, but they do not suffice as a sole pattern of interpretation.

#### **Hermeneutics of the alien**

It may sound old-fashioned: But I feel that the classical approach of hermeneutics is more helpful here than all the above models. The point is to try to

"understand" the alien without eliminating its being alien or different. The point is not to give in to generalisation too quickly, but to perceive my vis-à-vis in her/his singularity and within their particular context - while at the same time hoping (and to a certain extent expecting) that understanding is possible even across borders.

I am in no way concerned with the high standards of hermeneutic virtuosi who claimed that by proceeding methodically they could understand an author better than he or she could themselves. What I have in mind is to remind us that our occidental hermeneutics originates from the exegesis of the Holy Bible and therefore, at least in its origins, is committed to certain theological fundamentals. Exegesis must be seen as an attempt to understand a vis-à-vis which I know I will never have understood fully, which will always remain one step ahead since it confronts me with words of divine revelation unfathomable to me. As a matter of fact, hermeneutics, viewed from the point of exegesis, does not start from the assumption that 'only like knows like', as Aristotle and the classical philosophers have put it. On the contrary, confronted with a biblical text I always discover things unsuspected, new things which are nevertheless important for myself and for my conception of myself as well as for my life. Significantly enough, the founding father of the pastoral care movement, A. Boisen, developed the theory of encounter in pastoral care along the lines of an exegesis: he describes the vis-à-vis as "a living human document" which deserves to be read applying the same methods as when reading the Holy Bible. This means: Boisen must have been consciously aware of this tension existent also in pastoral care work: A successful encounter holds something divinatory, can be characterised as a kind of revelation to me - and it may happen without ever totally removing any last trace of feeling alien towards my vis-à-vis. This illustrates how my own conception of a God-human relationship determines the options I have in my relationships to other people.

What matters to me in these reflections is the following: An encounter must include both, becoming closer as well as reserving the alien. And another point: Successful understanding sets off a process and changes occur, in fact on both sides. The issue is to get involved



in an encounter as a never-ending process.

**In concrete terms:  
Problematic areas in intercultural  
pastoral care and counselling**

Is there anything like a basic "inter-cultural" attitude in pastoral care? David Augsburger whose book *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures* (1986) is still a standard work with regard to our topic distinguishes between three different positive attitudes in an encounter:<sup>6</sup>

· "Sympathy" as a spontaneous and in most cases unreflected way of feeling with the vis-à-vis, which means that I simply project my own feelings upon the other person or recognise these in her or him.

· "Empathy" (in the way this term is known from client-centred therapy and from pastoral care training): Feeling with the other person as a conscious and affective attitude towards my vis-à-vis, an emphatic understanding, as "active imagination" of her or his emotions - making a distinction between my own emotions and those of the other person.

· Thirdly: "Interpathy" which D. Augsburger understands as a form of conscious empathy, too, but making an effort to let oneself in for the emotions, standards of values and mentality of the other person all of which are different from mine so that my own beliefs will somehow be temporarily ignored and shoved to the background. What we talk about here is something more than empathy; for if I acknowledge the existence of different values and standards, the question arises anew of what is normal, what is the aberration? What is healthy, what is sick?

Some issues which came up during the last Intercultural Seminars may point to what is at stake here, and may show how great the differences possibly are:<sup>7</sup>

**The question of our world view**

Which is the world view, the cosmology I assume? Not reflecting on it philosophically or theologically, but in my everyday talking and doing? At the seminar two years ago, Robert Solomon from Singapore illustrated the great importance attached to a peculiar area of experience in his country, placed somewhere between the given and the transcendent: An "in-between sphere" which on the one hand is fully present in the everyday doing and on the other

hand is not subjected to the law of nature; an area having religious aspects and at the same time being independent of concrete images of God and a particular religion and which is therefore experienced as real by many Buddhists, Muslims and Christians alike. In this sphere, spirits for instance play a big role. According to him, it is from this area where most of the questions that come up in pastoral care originate from - and those involved in pastoral care should take this seriously if they did not want to miss the people concerned. I have also come across such questions working as a pastor in pastoral care - may be this "in-between sphere" plays a much bigger role with us than we generally assume.

Looking at the question of cosmology (of a world view), we must also take into consideration that there are cultures and religions which are not theistic, i. e. do not have a personal God. This is particularly true of Buddhism. Studies about dying processes in Japan show that mourning phases are experienced there, too, similar to those described by Kübler-Ross. But the phase of "bargaining" as part of the dying process seems not to occur there.<sup>8</sup> If no personal vis-à-vis exists, no God or any kind of personal fateful power, who is there to bargain with? This difference is all the more interesting in so far as we often find that (in the West) even such people who view themselves as irreligious, as agnostics, start to "quarrel with their fate" once they are confronted with severe strokes of fate - as if there did exist some sort of a vis-à-vis, however vague it might be. Obviously these are cultural characteristics which lie much deeper than any conscious profession of religion!

**The concept of person**

A different cosmology also means: a different concept of person. In certain respects, the relationship between the individual and society is of a totally different nature in other cultures. At our last seminar, Nalini Arles from India explained how difficult it was to transfer fundamental conceptions of client-centred therapy to her country. Therapeutic goals such as "strengthening of the ego" or "development of the Self" will catch only in a very limited way; the only "Self" existent in the cultural tradition of India is "jiva", the individual soul, which incidentally happens to be regarded as something temporary,

something which needs to be overcome in order to reach identification with the "atman" or world soul. Of course, cosmological axioms will not be found in a philosophically perfected form with most people there either; and still they have a very subtle bearing on the thinking and feeling of the people.

**The individual and society**

On the societal level, a difference is made between "individual-centred" and "community-centred" societies. Most of the non-Western societies are much less individual-oriented than ours. Guidance by traditions, the individual embedded in the extended family, all these play a much bigger role - with the result that the pastoral care worker or counsellor must take on a different role, too. Our Indian colleague told us that while it is common practice in the psychological therapy setting in the West to limit the establishment of a relationship to the counselling set-up, this pattern will hardly work in India. When she builds up a relationship in pastoral care, for instance to a student (she works at a Christian college), it will naturally be expected of her to accompany and encourage the student during exam times, to attend family events etc. It would be regarded as a breach of confidence if she did not do so; she would create the impression that her "acceptance" of her vis-à-vis was not really worth that much. As counsellor she is also given the role of a personal mentor - and she is expected to fill this role even to the extent of placing her client in a job. This certainly is a very holistic model of pastoral care as compared to the professionally set-up therapy (in the West). On the other hand, it is much less emancipative as regards the individual. However, the textbook model of a client-centred counsellor who develops action models together with the client and in doing so remains deliberately non-directive, leaving the part of decision-taking totally to the client - this is a model hardly conceivable in an Indian context; there, a counsellor, as the mentor, also gives advice, even to the extent of direct instructions.

In this context, many questions arise with regard to the goal which is to be achieved by pastoral care or therapy. For instance: Given a certain conflict situation, is it my aim to strengthen the individual in her/his independence as against their community (family) - or do I try to help her/him adapt themselves?

If inclusion within a group - and acceptance via the role the group assigns to an individual - plays such a dominant part, this will also bring up methodical questions. While we prefer to use role-play, even bibliodrama, in order to help the individual experience various possibilities of action, understand and live through them, this method might not have a liberating effect on people who are anyway strongly governed by the expectations towards them from their society, and might rather have a restricting effect on them.<sup>9</sup>

### **The issue of religion**

"Interpathy" as a means of letting myself in for the standards and world view of a different culture - this will inevitably take me to the area of religiousness. Issues like cosmology or the concept of person, all these have a religious aspect, too. Drawing a clear line between culture and religion as we often do is quite impossible with regard to Asia or Africa. Even with us, there is a closer connection between the two than we like to admit. I first realised this when colleagues from Eastern Europe happened to ask me at some of our seminars: In your work, how does your faith, your religion come to the fore? - In part, I felt this was a justified question to ask. On the other hand: In the environment in which we work as pastors (or as counsellors in church institutions) we can afford to leave questions of faith unmentioned; this is to say that in our work we quietly feed on the set-up of the ambient church life and of the Christian faith. It is self-evident that a pastor belongs to the Church, this needs no particular mentioning. God's name may remain unmentioned, because in a certain way God is implicit in our thinking. However, the situation is quite different in many other countries.

When I meet somebody from a different culture, of a different faith - how about my own faith? How far am I prepared or able to let myself in for the other person's faith if I try to let myself in for her/his culture? I think each of us will have to find their own distinct and theologically founded positions. In intercultural pastoral care, in fact, the interreligious issue always arises; and interreligious dialogue - not on an abstract academic level, but embedded in the facts of everyday life - certainly is at the core of intercultural pastoral care. There are still many unsettled points with all of us in this field.

When founding our "Society for Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling", there was a strong controversy about a certain formulation in our statutes. How important is the fact that we are rooted in a Christian tradition if we want to encourage intercultural pastoral care and counselling? Obviously, we want cooperation with people coming from other religious traditions. But how important is the fact that the majority of us administer pastoral care as Christians and that this is where our motivation comes from? If we show our own identity, this may cause friction - but it can also produce more clarity.

Two years ago, a Buddhist monk came to our seminar as a speaker. It was extremely interesting to listen to his discourse on his pastoral care work in Thailand. One evening, he offered to hold a meditation, just to give a first impression. Of course, we Western Europeans took part - where else could we learn about something like that in a more authentic way? However, the reaction of some of our Asian and African colleagues I happened to talk to was quite different. They were aware of the fact that Buddhist meditation was not just another cultural phenomenon, but quite a determined form of religious practice - a kind of religious practice which was not theirs (and as a matter of fact neither mine). Certainly, I do not wish to put up dividing lines, but I think each of us will have to find their own position here, a position which is clear and responsible in its theological consequences. For naive openness would mean that I do not take the other person seriously in just her/his separate religiousness.

### **The issue of politics**

In the same way as intercultural encounters touch on the issue of religion they also lead to the issue of politics. This became quite obvious in many workshops in Ustron. As some of the contributions from there are part of this documentation it must be enough to just mention this here. Let me only say the following: When, as it happens, traditional social structures collapse in Papua New-Guinea eventually resulting in the destruction of families as a consequence of accelerated modernisation, then there emerges a task for pastoral care which cannot be tackled on an individual level but only on a political one. And what is more, this is not a question of government politics in

Papua New-Guinea only, but rather of developments in world economy. The political dimension of pastoral care - what do we make of it?

### **Some strategies to reduce complexity**

Realising that in intercultural pastoral care so many factors come into play and everything is so much more complex, the question arises: Are encounters and understanding at all possible? It is simply impossible to have in mind all the various aspects however relevant they may be. Fortunately, experience tells us that this is not necessary. Deep encounters across cultural barriers are possible (and have been so during our seminars). Building up a contact to another human being can succeed - and, thank God, has been doing so again and again, even though one might not have fully understood all the aspects of the other person's culture.

### **Cross-cultural fundamental experiences**

In my everyday practice I am forced to somehow diminish intercultural complexity. Most of the time this will happen unconsciously, which is good. However, some methodical proposals can be made. Quite obviously, one can draw on fundamental human experience which is cross-cultural. I take John Foskett's considerations on "the unknown in intercultural communication", mainly his recourse to our individual birth experiences, as an important suggestion in this context.<sup>10</sup> Experiences of one's own birth, of joy or death are essentially human in such an elementary way that it will certainly be impossible to ever "pin them down" to one single culture. Taking in a glimpse of the horrors of Oswiecim/Auschwitz was such an elementary experience which had its own effects, however complex they were. It united - and divided.

In a well-known German-language journal of the pastoral care movement, Albrecht Grözinger recently suggested to draw on human "fundamental symbols" and basic "gestures".<sup>11</sup> Among others he mentions the symbol of water to which is attributed a sense of being threatening as well as healing in many religions and cultures - even in modern literature. Can we use such fundamental symbols in a cross-cultural context?

I think we had better not be over-enthusiastic in this regard. I would like to recall the unexpected effect the uniting symbol of "soil from the Holy Land" had on one of the participants during the closing service at a former seminar. A woman, wife of a pastor, whose ancestors came from the Caribbean left the service crying. Later she explained: "In the Caribbean, if we get involved with soil, we get involved with the evil - if someone puts soil into our hand, the evil is present".<sup>12</sup>

With regard to basic gestures - as for instance the gesture of blessing - the situation may not be any different. How much physical closeness or distance does the other person need or can she/he take without feeling embarrassed? That is very different from one culture to the next. Our body language, mostly uncontrolled by ourselves, is strongly influenced by our culture. Does it make any difference which of my two hands I use to welcome an African? Yes, it does - there have been interesting encounters at seminars also in this respect!

### Tolerance

We have to admit that it is impossible to fully avoid offence to occur in intercultural encounters. To see this matter-of-factly can also be a relief. We need to practise enduring such acts of offence, which means: practise tolerance ("tolerare" in Latin means to stand or endure something). Hence, two things are needed to make intercultural encounter a success: On the one hand, to practise tolerance with regard to others and to ourselves; and on the other of course, to find ways to keep these offences small.

With regard to the latter, I have learned to appreciate anew the importance of social manners through our intercultural seminars. Among those engaged in pastoral care, frankness and directness during arguments as well as a preparedness to quarrel are considered high objectives in dealing with one another. The way Germans or Britons for instance tended to act out their individual tensions or frustrations during intercultural seminars was very impressive. It used to leave Asians, Africans, and even Eastern Europeans perplexed: "Is this the way you treat each other?" they asked.

In Chinese culture, in all my dealings with other people, I must be very careful not to let the other person lose face.

Save my face, allow the other person to save face - in dealing with one another this is very important. In Ustron, a colleague from Ghana said: In a conflict situation, we would always put the interest of the group above our personal interest. None of the two are ideals I should like to follow. But what I found worth thinking about was the sensitivity of my colleague from Ghana when he commented on social manners in his tradition, as for instance the different meanings given to one's right or left hand, respect of old age and similar things (matters which, as far as I could see, were immediately understood and acknowledged by the people present from Asia) - and above all the complexity of his sensitivity in these issues. And I realised: Social manners are not always mere symbols of social repression. They are also a high cultural good - and a great help when dealing with anything alien.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> L.-L. Herkenrath-Püschel: Kulturelle Faktoren im seelsorgerlichen Dialog, in: *Wege zum Menschen* 40 (1988) p. 50-64 (quotation p. 54).

<sup>2</sup> Vgl. H. Weiß. / K. Temme: Reviewing the journey. The 'Intercultural Seminars' 1986 to 1995, in: *Human Images and Life-Stories in a Multicultural World*, ed. by U. Atkins / K. Federschmidt, Düsseldorf 1996, p. 6-12.

<sup>3</sup> In our seminars, we tried to dispose the relevant aspects under tree headlines, which then formed a kind of 'circle' to be worked through when analysing a situation of intercultural pastoral care and counselling:

- **Interpersonal Communication:** biographical situation, biographical processes, emotional links, roles, etc.

- **Personal Context:** historic conditions, economic factors, social and political conditions, cultural values, etc.

- **Experiences of Faith:** religious symbols, religious and church traditions, life schemes and faith statements, religious and spiritual forces, etc.

<sup>4</sup> L. Herkenrath-Püschel, op. cit. p. 56.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Th. Sundermeier, *Den Fremden verstehen. Eine praktische Hermeneutik*, Göttingen 1996, p. 40-42.

<sup>6</sup> David W. Augsburger: *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures*, Philadelphia 1986. For the following cf. p. 27-32.

<sup>7</sup> For some of the following examples cf. *Human Images and Life-Stories in a Multicultural World* (op. cit.), there especially: R. Solomon: Pastoral counselling in Asian contexts (p.22-25) and N. Arles: Counselling in the Indian context (p.26-28).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. D. Augsburger (op. cit.), p. 66.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. L. Herkenrath-Püschel (op. cit.), p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. his article in this publication.

<sup>11</sup> A. Grözinger, Seelsorge im multikulturellen Krankenhaus, in: *Wege zum Menschen* 47 (1995), p. 389-400.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted from: H. Weiß/K. Temme (op. cit.), p. 10. ■

John Foskett

## ***The ' Unknown' in Intercultural Communication***

Since 1977 in Eisenach<sup>1</sup> I have been coming to intercultural and interfaith meetings about pastoral care and counselling. My family and colleagues would testify to the extra-ordinary impact these have had upon me. I have come to expect that I will be surprised again by what I learn about myself and others as a result of these gatherings. Although this is true of my life in general, intercultural meetings generate an *extra-ordinary* quality to this knowledge. They reveal some of the unknown that is not yet thought let alone voiced or conceptualised. I think there are a many reasons for this. We are detached from our cultural and racial roots. We are in someone else's world and bumping up against differences we do not understand. These expose us like new born creatures<sup>2</sup> and we can not ignore what we feel and think even from ourselves. Likewise there is an end to this detachment when we return to the familiar places from which we have come and where our livelihoods if not our lives depend upon us fitting our culture more or less. In intercultural meetings we are bound not to fit and in our not fitting to uncover heaven knows what about ourselves and each other. Those whose homeland we visit have a special problem with our coming amongst them. We and they do not fit but on their territory. This evokes all the uncertainties and fears associated with immigration and assimilation. In Ustron it was not until the last day of the conference that anyone asked about the thoughts and feeling which lay behind the inscrutability of our hosts.

### ***Learning from experience***

These conferences remind me of learning about the dynamics of group behaviour in the 1960's. As a pastor finding myself at the mercy of the groups for

which I had responsibilities, I went on a course about the understanding of group behaviour organised by the *Tavistock Institute of Human Relations*<sup>3</sup>. We were invited to learn from our own experience of being a group member. This was a revolutionary idea to me then and shocked me in the same way I have been shocked since in intercultural gatherings. My educational culture had always been academic and I had learnt to minimise the value of my own experience. Later I was to meet this learning from experiencing culture in other forms - clinical pastoral education, therapeutic communities, liberation movements and psychotherapy. It was a revelation for me to trust my experience and the experience of others in order to learn. It was a 'new birth' to have hypotheses as embryo theories in the birth of my learning and not as credal authorities to which my experience had to be fitted. I saw the Bible and the traditions I had studied at university and seminary take on a new life. In fact to have a life, a flesh that enlivened the dead words and ideas they had been. I suppose I began to grasp that scripture and tradition were only the fruit of human experience. Food for all my senses.

### ***The good that I want, I do not do, the evil I do not want, that I do...***

Fruitful as my first learning from experience was, like birth itself there was more to it than bliss and satisfaction. All too soon experience confronted me with the reality St Paul expresses in Romans 7:18-19. 'I can will what is right, but I can not do it. The good that I want, I do not do, the evil I do not want, that I do'. That was all too true for me as a pastor and as a husband and father. What was more it was especially true of my corporate efforts with others to achieve the objects of our faith and to try and realise the coming of God's Kingdom amongst us. In my revolutionary optimism I joined a radical Christian group to make the church do, and not just will, what was right. We re-

formers found all too quickly that we were as irreformable as the church. In my despair I was introduced to psychoanalysis.

It was not a comfortable introduction, but it did offer me another perspective on learning from experience, and one that took seriously the difficulties I had encountered. The idea that I live and act unconsciously as well as consciously was another shock to my cultural assumptions, another new birth as painful as the first. If there is so much of me that is unknown and its effect upon me and others so unconscious, then there must be compelling reasons for this. In this new language of experience I was confronted with my *defences* against the unknown and unconscious. Defences upon which my very existence depended, or so I believed unconsciously. Despite all I said about wanting the good, my actions revealed a different story. It was no wonder I could not do the good I wanted as there was so much of me that unconsciously depended on something else. My behaviour demonstrated that I was and I am a house divided against itself.

### ***The group's unconscious***

As I learnt more about my own unconscious I became aware of the corporate unconscious of the groups of which I was member, my family, parish and community. Realising the power of my own unconscious I recognised the even greater power of a group's unconscious. Groups keep the unknown from being known in order to protect all of us from the many anxieties we fear will overwhelm us were they to be revealed. Groups unconsciously believe in these compelling reasons and suffer much frustration and despair as a consequence.

"An ironic feature of the congress was that the theme was about coming together, but the programme accentuated rather than dissolved the differences and made it difficult for people to come together at all. The prevailing atmosphere of the congress was one of chaos and insensitivity." This report from a delegate at the 1st World Congress for Psychotherapy in June 1996 illustrates how the profession most aware of the unconscious is nevertheless at its mercy when gathered in an intercultural forum for the first time. In order to protect itself from the corporate insensitivity and chaos at the heart of the psychotherapeutic task, the congress embodied

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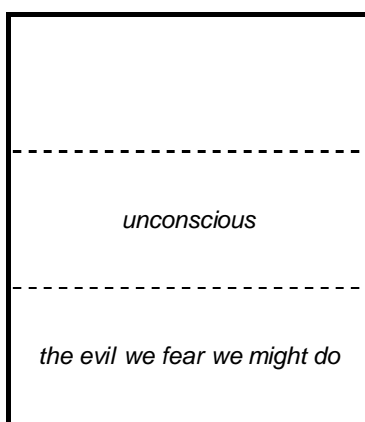
*Rev. John Foskett:  
Anglican Priest and Supervisor, former  
Hospital Chaplain, Somerset (England)*

and enacted unconsciously what it was most afraid of. Just as in individual therapy the bringing to consciousness is central to the work, so therapists and pastors want to discover how the same can be possible for societies and institutions. In individual therapy client and therapist have to learn from experience to face their insensitivity and chaos, so congresses of therapists and pastors have to learn to face the corporate manifestations of their fears. We can not face what we will not look at, but our behaviour can reveal it to us.

An important part of the work of the Tavistock Institute since the 1950's has been to try and understand what the behaviour of groups reveals about the unconscious fears that dominate them and can prevent them fulfilling their conscious aims and objectives. Staff from the Institute have worked with and studied groups and institutions in industry, politics, religion, education, health and welfare in many different cultural contexts. I tried to apply some of the results of their work to the pre-conference and the following seminar at Ustron.

**Traditions: shadows of the past – sources for the future**

The purpose of the pre-conference at Ustron was "to work on the theory of communication in an intercultural context and apply it to the work of the following seminar in reality." We discussed in pairs this objective for our pre-conference and the seminar as the good we wanted to do. Then we spoke of the evil that we feared we might do. To remind ourselves of our discussions we wrote something about the latter on the bottom third of a paper.



We put the word "unconscious" on the second third of the paper. So we related the evil we might do to whatever was unknown and unconscious amongst us.

Whatever each of us brought to this meeting and whatever was corporately evoked between us.

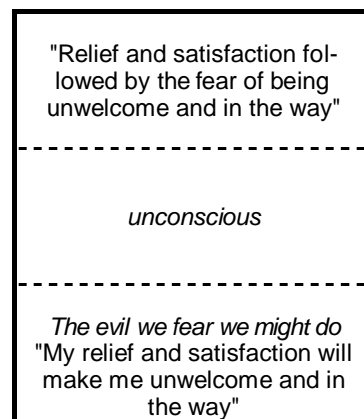
**Revealing the 'unknown' in group behaviour**

In his book *Experiences in Groups*<sup>4</sup>, Wilfred Bion explored how group behaviour reveals the unconscious anxieties which can dominate group life and undermine the task the group has to complete. As a psychoanalyst he drew upon his experience of working with soldiers who had broken down in the second world war. Their conscious task of fighting was impossible for them and their unconscious took control of their behaviour. He explored with them the nature of the trauma which had caused this to happen. He observed that entering any group exposes us all to memories of the earliest experiences of our lives - to our births - and to the first group we entered. A group which might have consisted of all or any of the following, our mothers, fathers, a midwife, a doctor, siblings and relations.

In the conference we tried to remember from the stories we had been told and with the help of our imagination who had been present at our births, and what traumas and anxieties may have accompanied our entries into our first group. We drew upon our current experiences of entering groups including this conference to identify what causes us most anxiety and uncertainty, to see if there were any connections to our initial experience in as far as we could recall it.

On the way to the conference I had stopped in Prague, where I met a colleague who invited me out for a meal with his Czech guide. As I sat opposite them I was relieved to be with someone I knew and then even more pleased to be offered my first 'feed'. But as the meal continued, I realised that they had planned to eat together to enjoy each other's company, and that I was an intruder, and unwelcome 'birth' into their lives. Although not a surprising revelation it made me aware of the feelings of relief, satisfaction and then fear, which were to dominate my unconscious during the coming conference and seminar. We wrote on the first third of our papers something to remind us of these early feelings in our lives, which coming to the conference stirred again. This provided us with an aide memoir linking our earliest anxieties through our unconscious to the evil we feared we

might do instead of the good we hoped we would do.



Bion recognised that the more stressful the task a group undertakes and the more unstable the context in which it undertakes that task, the more likely the group is to regress in order to manage the unconscious anxieties provoked by the task. This regression can be so powerful that it will completely undermine the work and the aims of the group. Although I had made no connection at the time, my personal clues to this regression were to be feelings of relief and satisfaction as a prelude to my getting in the way of the task when I had no conscious wish to do so.

Towards the end of the seminar this happened in a most dramatic way. The day before we had visited Auschwitz and we returned heavy with our emotional reactions to what we had seen and heard. During the tour the German and English speaking parties were separated, but at one point we met each other again and I recall the sense of relief and satisfaction I felt to see our colleagues and to know that they too were surviving this trauma. In an emotional service that evening we were able to express some of these feelings, albeit with more sentiment than serious thought. On the following morning the lecturer explained how the Jews had kept alive the memory of the Holocaust in their diaries and writings and in the retelling of the stories.<sup>5</sup> As I listened it occurred to me that they did this in order to stay in touch with their unconscious, and with the buried fears which would still affect their lives. They were facing the reality that being born into the human race is as dangerous and evil as the Holocaust reveals it to be. If ever the memory was lost, once again humanity would be at the mercy of the most destructive forces within our unconscious. Someone asked the lecturer

what help this knowledge was to us. He replied that it was no help. We human beings are poor pupils and we learn very little from history as current ethnic cleansings bare witness. We can not learn to be better from the tragedies of our past, but we can take the memories of those tragedies with us as symbols for today and tomorrow. The more we forget and the more we bury in our unconscious, the more evil we stock pile to destroy the good we want to do and to feed the evil we will do.

It seemed to me that we needed all the time left to us in the conference to gather our memories of these events in order not to forget them. Soon we would be in other familiar places without each other's help and support to keep alive the memories of Ustron. However, our need to forget and to bury proved stronger. As a group we avoided assembling for our last plenary together for as long as we could. Then we sat patiently as our leaders discussed how we might apply our faith to our experience of the seminar. To help us they offered to give examples from their work. The first example was of a crisis service for the suicidal. I think this subject, introduced in a thoughtful and unemotional way, ignited my sense of crisis within the group itself. At the end of the morning one person described what then happened as the group being on the verge of suicide. Whatever our unconscious needs were, I could stand it no longer, and so I intervened before the second example could be given. I said we had the most vivid and fearful examples amongst us and needed all the time left to share them with one another. However in doing this I had stopped an Indian woman colleague from giving her example. All hell broke loose as first she agreed with me, and then was admonished for not taking her turn. Disagreements about how to proceed multiplied and the group was paralysed in conflict. Realising how my anxiety had fuelled this battle and defeated my object in intervening, I was urged to do something to put it right. As I stood up to try I saw how hopeless the task was. So I remained standing feeling very awkward, ashamed and in the way. Afterwards it occurred to me that I was like the 'poor pupil' sent to stand in the corner of the class. I wonder now if that was the way we as a group embodied and remembered the reality of our humanity, which we had confronted in Ustron. We are all poor pupils and we will defeat ourselves if ever we forget that truth in our pursuit of wisdom and

expertise. The lecture had been my most satisfying 'meal' of the seminar, and the following plenary exposed me to my dread of being the wrong person in the wrong place and doing the wrong thing. I wonder now if all of us learnt a little more about being the wrong people, in the wrong place and doing the wrong things. After all, that was the tragedy for the Jews, the gypsies, and the homosexuals in Europe in the 1930's and 40's, and is still the tragedy for many people somewhere in the world today. We must keep that knowledge alive in us whenever our fear makes us want to burn and bury the evidence and whenever the ashes start slipping through our fingers.

### References

<sup>1</sup> The first European Conference in Pastoral Care and Counselling was held in Eisenach in then East Germany in 1977. Since then a European Conference has been held every four years organised by the European Committee for PCC. International Congresses have been organised by the International Council for PCC every four years since the first Congress in Edinburgh in 1979.

<sup>2</sup> St. John 3:1-8. The conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus reminds me of the 'new births' I have experienced at intercultural events.

<sup>3</sup> The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations is the leading centre for the study and practice of Kleinian and Object Relations psychoanalysis in the United Kingdom.

<sup>4</sup> Bion, W. (1961) *Experiences in Groups*, London: Tavistock Publications. Bion describes regression in groups by the term *Basic Assumption* group activity. He saw how groups began to behave in ways that assumed a very different objective than the one they publicly proclaimed. This unstated objective appeared to him to be more fundamental (and so basic) than the task itself. The examples of what Bion meant by basic assumption activity are the behaviour of the delegates at the 1st World Congress on Psychotherapy, and our behaviour in the final plenary at Ustron (cf. the end of this article). What was more remarkable to Bion was the unconsciousness of groups to this change in their behaviour. He noted three different forms of basic assumption activity, and identified the social institutions which manage these assumptions on behalf of society as a whole and in order that society can get

on with its tasks unencumbered by the anxieties which basic assumption activity embodies. These are:

*Fight and Flight*: The group engages in battles within or external to itself, and/or it runs away from conflict. The *military* provide the institutional embodiment of this basic assumption.

*Dependency*: The group is unrealistically dependent upon an individual or idea which can not possibly sustain the trust being placed in it. The *churches* and the *health services* embody this basic assumption.

*Pairing*: The group allows a pair of people to take control of the group and everyone else waits expectantly for them to bring something important to birth to save or fulfil the groups expectations. The *monarchy* embodies this basic assumption.

As in individual therapy Bion would not challenge the defences of the group as revealed in the basic assumption activity, but from his knowledge of the group's task and context, he would try to help the group identify the anxiety which was responsible for the basic assumption activity. He would explore his own feelings and behaviour as evidence for the group's anxieties and as an encouragement to others to do the same. He found that the recognition of the unconscious anxiety by even one member was sufficient to begin the redirection of the group towards its task and the harnessing the power of the basic assumption activity for rather than against the task.

<sup>5</sup> The lecture was given by Jacek Leociak, see in this publication p. xxx

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*The following are excerpts from oral contributions during the last, rather tension filled "intercultural forum", to which John Foskett refers in his text.*

*Each contribution shows an individual way of interpreting the events; thus, along with the interpretation given by John Foskett, they bear witness to the complexity and to the manifold aspects of intercultural interaction.*

**I. S.-J. (Hungary):**

...This is a dynamic group process. If the leaders offer something, and all agree to do it, and then the process is being stopped, it boils from within.

**G.J. (Germany):**

It is my impression that we are now dealing with how we treated one another. That was the source of interference. You (*speaker is referring to the female facilitators of the plenary session*) proposed to enter a dialogue, i.e. to present two models from two different cultures. That was a proposal made by women. And you, as a man, went in (*unrest in the plenary*) - please, let me finish - (*more unrest*). For me as a woman it was quite easy to understand how a woman from the Indian culture would immediately put her interests last, when she heard that this might be disturbing for others.

**S.P. (Iceland):**

Perhaps I now understand a little bit better why one cannot really help people who are suffering. I felt offended when N. was not able to contribute her story. When she finally had the opportunity to speak, she did not want to anymore. And since then we have been talking for twenty minutes. Her story would have been much shorter. But we are dealing with another story here as well: J. asked whether we could begin with the plenary session fif-

teen minutes earlier. And now I think, that maybe the first story we heard was a bit too long, and maybe this offended J.

But if we only talk about what is happening here, then we can never help those who feel offended.

*After a lengthy discussion the plenary finally divided itself into groups, and then met for a conclusive plenary, talking about the insights gained in the small groups:*

**P. H. (England):**

We ended up with a very useful discussion about the place of magic in Indonesia. I think it is useful because I think it deals with the intercultural problems when you try to understand what is going on. In the discussion it became apparent that magic is part of traditional culture in Indonesia. But one church says: Magic is of Satan. The difficulty is that that tells you nothing, it simply is labelling. And in fact, in my view, what is going on (also here in our group) is a series of levels of language. And the problem of understanding *that* is, that you have to know what the assumptions are and where the person is coming from. And that is one of the problems we face in this group. Every now and again I do not understand. The trouble is: I understand the language, but - I'm damned if I understand what we're on about! Isn't it, that my cultural assumptions, when I am

here, are usually English. And every now and again I realise: those are not the cultural assumptions of the Germans. But what I do is: I go and slap Klaus. And I say to him: Klaus, what on earth does all this mean? Some people here cannot, for their own cultural reasons - and linguistic reasons - do that. And this is my analysis what happened at the very beginning of this intercultural session: If you break rules of a group, and you do not know - it is very difficult to recover the situation. It will happen - and we need to think about what we do when it does happen.

**Ch. K. (Ghana):**

In our discussion group, we started examining what happened when N. was called again to speak - and she refused. I was saying that culturally I would have done the same thing. And I was trying to explain that, if there is any action or behaviour which would cause division and confusion between people, then our endeavour is to withdraw and not contribute to it. But one European friend in our group did say: No, in his case, he would fight for his rights.

So this was all cultural, and we need to understand one another. And I feel that John was a person who was offended by our not coming (*to the plenary-session in time*). But I am thinking that he, too, was acting culturally.

Ilka Federschmidt

## **The 10<sup>th</sup> Seminar on Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling -**

***Impulses and Questions from the "Two-Thirds-World"***

The tenth 'International Seminar on Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling' met from 13 - 19 October 1996 at Ustron / Poland. This year's topic of "Traditions as Shadows of the Past and Sources of the Future" pointed even more than the themes of former seminars to the various cultural and life-contexts of the participants of the seminar. Tradition / traditions with their burdens and with their potentials were highlighted as a matrix of pastoral care and counselling. In an indirect way the different traditions of pastoral care became also apparent. This happened especially through the contributions of participants from those cultures which are foreign to us.

Speakers from Ghana and Rwanda, from Indonesia, India, Papua New Guinea, and the Fiji Islands contributed to the seminar in the daily study-groups and workshops. Remarkably, their contributions focused on the problem of *the loss and the destruction of indigenous traditions*, induced by the 'modern' influences of Western industrial countries. A second focus was *the role which traditional rites, ceremonies and social orders played* in their own work of pastoral care and counselling.

The following will highlight some thoughts and observations about these contributions - and about their importance for us.

### ***Experiences with the loss and the destruction of indigenous traditions***

#### ***· An example from Papua New Guinea***

George Euling is a Baptist pastor from Papua New Guinea. He explained in his workshop how the traditional unity and the holding together of families in the tribal villages are rapidly deteriorating in the wake of introducing modern industrial and economical structures. Husbands and their families leave the protected social surrounding to try their luck in the industrial areas and in the cities. In the new setting with its unfamiliar structures, and with money in their pockets, many become addicted to gambling and alcohol. Their wives lose the social functions for which they had traditionally been responsible. These used to be - apart from the house - the work in the fields. As a result, degradation, abasement, and the abuse of wives by drunken husbands is common, leading to a rift within the families and sometimes to deadly violence.

George Euling claimed that he as a pastoral counsellor often stands helplessly when confronted with such 'cases'. The deterioration of traditions which formerly bound people together can hardly be compensated. Due to the speed of these social changes, adequate institutions and structures of pastoral care and counselling are not yet available.

In a short film about such a family-tragedy, which was presented in the workshop, there were some striking parallels to what we experience in terms of family crises in our own country: Alcohol, debts, violence. But the difference was very clear, too: In Papua New Guinea, the social changes break like a cataract into the traditional communities of many people. We had to realise

**2**  
**reports**  
**from**  
**the seminar**

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again that it is our own country which belongs to those countries that are 'exporting' the industrial and economic structures which affect human relationships within Papua New Guinea in such a destructive way.

Not only in this respect the presentations of pastor Euling were a kind of mirror for us. We had to ask ourselves, how we relate to the effects of economic and social structures in our own country. Of course, we are familiar with these structures, since we were brought up within them. And we have a number of institutionalised forms of pastoral care and counselling, ready to intervene when people and families find themselves in a state of crisis. But it is from such institutions that we now receive alarming reports: The counselling institutions for people with debts can hardly handle the ever growing number of applicants who need help. The situation is no better for those who work in counselling practices, family therapy institutions and parishes. They are confronted with the fatal mixture of social descend, alcohol, debts and violence. To helplessly face such problems is a feeling we are increasingly experiencing in our country, as well.

What about our own traditions of social belonging? Are they still alive? Do we have to develop new ones or can we recover some of those who are long since forgotten? What does it mean that financial support for adequate pastoral care and counselling is being cut back and ranks second to other, "more important" matters. What about the limitations, which our own structures want to place upon us? And finally: What kind of tradition do we succumb to if we 'just go on'?

#### · **An example from India**

During a discussion on 'tradition and language' Nalini Arles from Bangalore / India reported an experience which seemed strikingly similar to what we know from our situation. She spoke about changes in the language and the behaviour of Indian children and your adults, and what she had to say could have been the words of German parents: In her country, young people are using 'fashion words' which stem from a realm of language traditionally considered as inpolite or indecent. Words from the world of technics, computers and business are becoming more and more fashionable. The brand of clothing and

shoe wear becomes a most important sign. Movie stars from the West and their alleged way of life are the new standards. The inherited traditions fade away. Although there are many similarities to the developments in our own countries, again a clear difference to the specific context could be recognised: Dr. Arles felt the incision into her own Indian tradition as being very frightening, because she saw the interests and the influence of Western companies as the moving forces behind it all. She feared this to be a poignant and manipulative intrusion into traditions which are necessary for a wholesome community life. This fear is rooted in what she experiences as the influence and the power Western companies have in her country. Dr. Arles told, e.g., the story of a fishing company which had pushed the Indian fishermen out of a certain coastal region, depriving them from their livelihood. She thinks that such destructive economic influences are not purely home-made but are kind of 'imported' from abroad - amongst other countries from Germany. Of course, she insists that a great amount of responsibility falls on the side of her own country, too. But the point is: The changes in lingual and social traditions she experiences as part of a clear hierarchy of powers, and most people in her country belong to the weak side, whereas as German citizens we find ourselves more on top. Perhaps, in our friendly meetings and our working together, this difference is sometimes all too often forgotten.

The question of who gains a profit from disrupting valuable lingual and social traditions and cultures may be a reminder for us: Are we - standing on the upper side of the power hierarchy - alert enough to notice the idols whom we follow and who want to govern us? Again we have to ask ourselves: In what kind of tradition do we place ourselves - or do we not want to be placed at all? Jacek Leociak, a Polish journalist who lectured in our seminar on "Tradition from Jewish Perspective", pointed out that the decalogue (the ten commandments) start with remembering: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Tradition in this sense is the passing on of a liberating experience - by remembering it. This passing on of a lively experience makes it possible for an old text to speak and work anew in a new context. The observations and fears of participants from countries of the

'two-thirds-world' challenge us: What do we pass on in this sense, even in our pastoral care and counselling work? Is it the lively experience of a God who liberates and can liberate from false bondages, so that nobody is being distracted by e.g. a 'special kind of brand'?

#### **Do we have a loss of 'faith tradition' ?**

Furthermore, J. Leociak pointed out that passing on of the biblical experience of God by way of remembering, and the dialogue with the biblical texts is "endangered". The many informal talks with participants from Asia, Africa or Indonesia made us think, whether we are presently on the verge of experiencing another loss of precious tradition in our own countries - the tradition of faith. The social and political activities of some of these participants is indeed rooted in a deep personal faith and a lively spirituality. From their own Christian and church-context they have to challenge a type of faith which reduces itself to the individual 'inner realm'. This discussion reminds us of similar discussions we had in our own countries years ago: Fighting for an understanding of faith which no longer neglects the social and political dimension of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. But today, for us this is no longer a point to be debated. Christians in our country do not suffer any more because the importance of their social involvement is being challenged on the spot: They may only suffer, because such an involvement seems half-hearted and lacking the necessary courage. Again, the discussion with the participants from the 'two-thirds-world' makes us think: Their involvement for justice draws its strength from a personal and communal faith and from manifold forms of a deep spirituality. Do we underestimate the impact of loosing this in our social and pastoral work? To use the words of Leociak: If the dialogue with the biblical tradition and with the biblical encounter of God is endangered, isn't then the basis of our social and political involvement endangered, as well?

#### **The importance of traditional rites, ceremonies and social patterns for counselling and pastoral care**

In one of the study-groups Father John Snehadass, an Indian and Roman-Catholic priest who works in the Fijis, presented a very interesting case. He described a couple whom he counselled for some time. The husband was a native Fiji, the wife's family belonged to the group of Indian immigrants. For the solution of their problem a ritual of reconciliation played an important role - a ritual that is often used in the Fiji tradition and is very powerful: The people involved drink a special drink from a special bowl in a ritually prescribed way with gestures of respect and honour. Father John exercised this rite with the group and welcomed us into the old culture and the reconciliation work of people. This left a deep impression on the group. Of course, the question was raised whether we in Europe and in Germany do have similar traditional forms of ritual or conduct which could be used for helping people in conflict - not only by words but also by gestures and symbols.

A quite different case was presented by Nalini Arles from India in her study-group. From her own counselling work she explained how in the context of the Indian social tradition, counselling can never be done in a purely 'professional' manner, but supposes a personal relationship which extends the setting of counselling. Of course, there is a real danger of the client being once again dependant and unfree, i.e. a disciple/master relationship might develop. On the other hand, our western models of 'professional' counselling can also be questioned: Don't they underestimate the social connection or adjust to it all too quickly (e.g. in our parishes)? Do they thereby squander the chances of creating new social connections?

In any case, these reports - as well as others - advise us to search more seriously for helpful social patterns, for signs, ceremonies and rituals, and to use their potential for pastoral care and for counselling. The idea emerged to examine all such aspects much more closely in the coming seminars. Surely, the patterns of pastoral care and counselling which we are familiar with, cannot claim universal relevance but are restricted to a certain setting within the Western culture.

Still, one cannot deny that it is by no means easier for the colleagues from Asia and Africa to liberate themselves from such patterns of pastoral care and counselling. Many of them were edu-

cated in the West and are fascinated by the grand possibilities that humanities and psychotherapeutic methods have to offer. It is sometimes not easy for them to stand by the roots of their own culture and tradition. Once again - as in many other realms of life - the indigenous and the imported traditions clash.

### ***A double "border-experience"***

An exciting experience at the beginning and at the end of the seminar was the crossing of the German-Polish border. When entering Poland, the visa regulations and formulas were a stumbling stone that was relatively easily to overcome. However, quite a different stumbling stone was experienced by the author of this report herself: The great vulnerability that can be found in the individual 'intercultural relationship'. When I tried to intervene in what seemed to me a misunderstanding of the Polish immigration officer and a participant from Rwanda (who was riding in my car), she was embarrassed and insisted on being able to speak for herself. Being quite experienced in crossing national borders, she wanted to be taken seriously. For me, this was a lesson in being sensitive and alert for each other's needs.

On the way back, the pastor from Papua New Guinea ran into problems with his visa: His re-entry from Poland to Germany was endangered, and we experienced an unwelcome stop for some hours. The officer of the German border control was friendly and did his best to help. Still questions remain: What kind of signal do we send with our sophisticated immigration- and visa-regulations and with the complicated administrative procedures, which become so complicated especially when people from a "third-world-country" are to enter our country? What does it mean that the hurdles for participating in such intercultural seminars are getting higher and higher? In what kind of tradition do we place ourselves?

The 10<sup>th</sup> Intercultural seminar on pastoral care and counselling has raised many questions about the intercultural encounter and about ourselves, many of which remained unanswered. However, they will accompany us when evaluating this seminar and when proceeding on to the next. ■

Adrian Korczago

## ***The Lutheran Congregation at Ustroń***

Soon after Martin Luther's appearance, thoughts and ideas of the reformation emerged in the Tesh region. Since the area of "Tesh Silesia" was located on an important trade route, it played a mediating role in the exchange of reformed thinking. In Tesh Silesia the prevailing of the reformation was peaceful. At the

Memorial place on Mount Równika

(water - colour painting by B. Heczko)

time when Waclaw III. Adam became the Duke of the duchy of Tesh, the majority of the clergy preached in the reformed spirit. Under his government Protestant services were held in over fifty churches, and in the year 1568 a Protestant church order was established. However, his son, Adam Waclaw converted to Catholicism, and the counter reformation began. The Churches were taken away from the Protestants and it was forbidden to read writings of the reformation. Nevertheless, the Protestants secretly gathered for their worship services in the surrounding woods. Mount Równika at Ustroń is one of these secret places. Here they performed baptisms, weddings and worship services. The gathering place is marked with a big stone, reminding us to this day. The pastors wore an "alba" over their black cassock (a white gown which is part of the Catholic priestly dressing) so that the Austrian soldiers would not recognize them immediately. To this day the white alba is worn in this area for every worship service - except during lent and advent.

The duration of the counter reformation lasted for about 200 years. On October 13th, 1781 an edict of tolerance granted limited freedom of faith to the Protestants. Since that time they are allowed to use houses of worship - without bell towers - whose main entrances should not face the streets. St. Jacobs in Ustroń is built in such a fashion. Its opening ceremony was in 1828 - the tower was added later.

Today the parish consists of roughly 4.500 members, and it is the second largest Protestant congregation of all of Poland. Several years ago it was even bigger, and thus, was split in two independent parishes: Cisownica and Brenna Górki. Our parish today contains three districts (Centre, Dobka-Polana and Bladnice) and it employs four pastors. More than a 1.000 children attend religious instruction in the schools, and each district has its own children's worship service. We have three adult choirs and two children choirs. At the moment we are in the process of building our own church for the district of Bladnice. Each district engages in active youth work. There are Bible study groups and prayer groups. Every Sunday around 1.000 Christians attend the worship services.

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Lutheran Church "St. Jacobs" in Ustroń.

(water-colour painting by B.Heczko)

Klaus Temme

## **The visit to Auschwitz**

### **The goal of a long personal journey**

#### **The 'outward' journey**

For me the journey to Auschwitz had been going on for a long time, perhaps for twenty five of my fifty three years of age. I had been to Theresienstadt, Czechoslovakia, in 1969, and I was very anxious to see Auschwitz too. However, despite several opportunities, I delayed my visit and without the invitation of our Polish colleagues to come to Ustron and so to see Auschwitz, I probably would never have gone on my own volition!

Due to my participation in the planning group which met twice in Kaiserswerth, the visit to Auschwitz became more likely, as we worked on the details of the invitation to Poland. At first we were fearful to go to this dark place where lay the terrible shadows of the German past of our childhood. We had discussions as to the purpose; the necessity or otherwise; and the manner in which the visit to Auschwitz might be fitted within the framework of the seminar. There was some hesitation as to whether we would be able to communicate to participants of the seminar from other continents at least a bit of our feelings as Germans, and also the importance of this place to the peoples who had suffered at Auschwitz. There also were doubts about our capacity to manage our own feelings. We had to consider if some ritual arrangements might help in explaining or easing the situation. There seemed to be no easy answers. The final decision became clear to us Germans in the planning group that we could engage with and trust the participants in the seminar, as many were personal friends of ours.

There was a price yet to pay for this decision in that Wies Blomjous from the Netherlands, for reasons of her and her families' experience of Nazi Occupation in the War could not support, and she

decided that this time she wouldn't attend the seminar. By this action she remained in my thoughts during the seminar.

Finally the journey started. From Kaiserswerth in the Rheinland we went by car to Ustron in Poland. In my car there were Peter Hawkins from England, George Euling from Papua New Guinea, and John Snehadass from Fiji. On the second day we reached those areas, which are situated at the eastern end of the former 'Upper-Silesia', and which were one of the areas from where were launched those German attacks which began the Second World War. The Autobahn there is paved with large plates of concrete. The hard edges of the plates 'rattled' underneath us in a rhythm almost beyond endurance. Peter and I described to George and John the meaning of these autobahns as strategic supply routes.

I had very mixed feelings as we explained to our colleagues that the areas we were crossing had once been a part of Germany, but now because of the War, were a part of Poland.

The consequential shaping of the borders at the end of the Second World War as a result of the unprovoked aggression, which in turn resulted in the extinction of so many people of the 'conquered' nations, most notably the methodically planned destruction of the Jewish people and other groups who did not 'fit' into the ideas of Nazism-arrogance, all this belongs together, and was recalled repeatedly by the rattling concrete plate edges that shook the car and us as we travelled east.

There were also very mixed feelings for me to cross a landscape, whose moulding reminded me very much of the country-side were I am from. I was also mindful that my family had the good fortune to live in the west of the former Germany, and did not live here in one of areas ceded to neighbouring states in reparation for the damage they had suffered. We lived in a part of Germany

that was liberated by American and British troops, neither of whose countries suffered invasion by the Nazis, and had then become the "British-occupied-zone-Rhineland".

Two days before the visit to Auschwitz we went to see the city of Kraków, the seat of old Polish King and the renowned city of a long and old tradition of Jewish culture and Jewish ghettos. In the evening, when we were in the centre of the old Ghetto, at places which had served the horrible purpose of deportation in the holocaust, Julian Müller who had come from South Africa as a speaker of the pre-conference and was with the seminar for the first time, came up and asked me very friendly and cautiously, whether, when in Auschwitz, we the Germans could explain to them, the 'foreigners' something of what our feelings would be like then, if this did not ask too much of us... Well, this was just the point I had been afraid of earlier and had hoped that it might be avoided somehow. Tentatively, I told Julian the story of the planning group sessions, the considerations we had made, the German worries and anxieties and about our hope that we would not have to do this kind of explaining right there and then. I also told him about the idea which came up in the planning group, that the participants would mutually give support to each other, find explanations and discover that they could trust in that mutual support. This question from Julian and the talk we had, appeared to me to be another very important point in my approaching the shadows of the past.

#### **The place I The site at 'Auschwitz Stammlager'**

The kilometres in the bus from Ustron to Os, 'wie, cim (Auschwitz) seemed endless as my inner anxiety increased! When we finally arrived at the so called Stammlager (base-camp) of Auschwitz, all the details of my fore-knowledge came to my mind. The ordinary barracks of the defeated Polish army had been changed into a Konzentrationslager (KZ), perhaps the most infamous of all. After the War this KZ was converted into a museum, the Auschwitz-museum. This 'Stammlager' was important symbolically for the Polish nation. It had become a museum containing the relics of the second camp nearby, the extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. This was a symbol of the

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#### Entrance gate to the "Stammlager Auschwitz"

cruel victimisation of the Jewish people. Seeing the place, hearing the sounds around, experiencing the atmosphere wiped this my rather thoughtful approach away!

The first thing to happen on the grounds of the camp was that for the sake of convenience our group was split into English-speaking and German-speaking parties. Both parties contained people from many different countries and mother-tongues. For a while I was tempted to join the English-speaking group because of a couple of people whom I considered to be 'pillars' for me, and also, because I thought the 'distance in language' during the guided tour might be helpful. I regretted the splitting of the group according to language! The reason for my final decision to join the German-speaking group I didn't realise until later. Only on looking back can I see that it was easier for this way.

When we left the reception building of the Auschwitz Stammlager and came into the grounds of the camp there was a sign, admonishing all to regard this place with dignity, and also that it would not be suitable for children under age 14. I was surprised to see school children in the place who must have been less than age 14. At first I was upset because I as a teacher thought, that even in Poland there might be teachers who made a trip to a nearby tourist site with their classes, to fill up a day outside school, and Auschwitz would do like any other place!

Then there was the gate : "Arbeit macht frei" ("Work makes free") as the inscription! I had seen photos again and again, movies from the old Nazi-propaganda style, full of cynicism. But now, looking at it was different, much more real: "Yes, that's what it looks like!" - dreadful to me even after so many years.

When we passed the gate there were a couple of young adults sweeping the leaves up, raking the path ways. One of my German pastor colleagues said "Hello" to one man in that group, they seemed to know each other well. Later on other colleagues explained to

me that this young adult group was a part of the German Christian volunteer organisation of 'Aktion Sühnezeichen / Friedensdienste' (Action Reconciliation / Peace Services), who were doing this as their regular Christian duty.

Meanwhile the guide of our German-speaking group had started to give his commentary. He did a clear and skilful job, adding facts and figures and details, starting from the very first days of the inauguration of these barracks as a concentration camp. After a while I was not able to stand the staccato and empathetic way in which he gave his details. From then on every moment seemed to become harder for me: I made my steps into the first barracks buildings, set out as a museum, and looked into the exhibition 'rooms'; saw the photos of those very individual people murdered here, and studied the drawings of their daily life, left by prisoners. In one of the first barracks, there was a exhibition case containing a man-size urn, adorned with bows of ribbon in the Polish national colours. Here I met the children of the Polish school classes again, who before the commemoration urn laid down little bouquets that they had brought with them, also with ribbon bows of the Polish national colours. They did this very quietly and reverently. The Polish colours being presented so clearly and so deliberately,

struck me as a German forcefully for I really hadn't expected it this way!

My inner oppression grew more and more. Now I couldn't stand the rhythm by which our group moved on and by which the guide gave his commentary. So I tried to find my own tempo in watching the things and in walking through the individual buildings. Every now and then I escaped outside to the camp street. There I realised that others had similar feelings like me. My inner oppression grew even more. I thought I had reached the most extreme point of my feelings that I could possibly bear. Yet I did not really know what they were, whether anger, infinite sadness, great shame, and a deep longing to find an excuse for it all. Looking back I doubt whether there exists an appropriate reality of feelings at all, appropriate to such a reality!

Finally and in this mood I stepped into a building in which was set out the relics of the nearby extermination camp (Vernichtungslager), Auschwitz - Birkenau. I knew about this previously. But the experience of it was much more overwhelming than I had imagined. There were rooms with huge windows, each one with exhibition cases, packed with shoes; suitcases; artificial limbs; and cut off hair or plaits. All this I knew from pictures I had seen before and from films. I knew that all the items, each one representing an individual, had been brought here to this museum from the extermination camp of Birkenau, where they had originally been found, piled up to the side of the unloading ramp at the railway sidings. But my theoretical fore knowledge was no protection against the effect those pieces of commemoration caused in me. Especially it struck me, when I tried to walk down that corridor between the huge display cases of the room which were filled with hair and plaits. It came to a point where I thought I would be very close to madness. I found myself almost murmuring to those murdered persons whose plaits these were, trying to convey my excuse to them somehow, thinking 'I feel sorry, I never wanted this to happen!' Then I definitely decided to prove to myself that I was able to walk down that corridor, it was necessary to me. After doing so, I tried to run down the staircase to leave the house. But in the entrance I happened to run into another group of young adults, which I had noticed before, because they all were dressed alike, wearing black T-shirts with Hebrew letters on them say-

ing that they were on a tour of Europe this year from Israel.

These young people were about the age of my own elder children, and among them there were a couple of girls, whose plaits looked very like the ones I just had seen. I had this choking feeling in my throat which I managed to control, but as I left the house going into the rain outside, I couldn't hold back the tears any more. All of a sudden there were words in my mind of a poem we once learned at school, when we dealt with the Holocaust, '...your golden hair, Sulamith..' - and many other memories of those periods of my life, when I first tried to come to terms with this part of our German history and the past of my family. All this was wildly mixed up, both troublesome and chaotic at the same time.

It had become very important to me to find the others again, who out there on the camp street and in the rain, also couldn't go on visiting the exhibition barracks, but were standing there with marks of tears running down their cheeks. It was extremely important to me to have them to lean on and by doing so not to lose control completely. So I could experience a solidarity in the tears, the mourning and the shame. I am especially thankful to two of the German women, who supported me a lot at this time.

In one of the Buildings the cause of my tears and emotions was the sight of the displayed Jewish prayer shawls, reminding me that in the midst of death and extinction in Auschwitz-Birkenau their wearers stayed so true to their faith. Here again it was a strange kind of mixture in my feelings, grief and infinite shame, but at the same time admiration, if such is allowed to use a word like this in regard to the surrounding reality, and also of awe in the face of these symbols of living faith unto death. Outside the rain was still falling in an almost comforting way. It was good, that I could somehow adjust myself and lean again on Inge and Ina in an association of crying.

At the same time I felt a great restlessness within me, so that I tried to keep moving by walking down the camp street to have my own space over against the others. I used the roofing eaves for protection from the rain. I searched for the old swimming-pool where the Nazi-guards used to relax or where they might have enjoyed looking at the suffering of others. It appeared to me that I wanted to overcome some of

my feelings by working them out in walking.

It became very close as we entered the barrack with the torture chambers alongside the yard used by the execution squad. The chambers are arranged so that you walk down the corridor in single file in close proximity to the returning file. It was here, that I became aware of the other participants of the seminar from the English-speaking group for the first time again.

It was good to see them, to look into their eyes, it was good to touch hands or feel how they were touching my shoulder. These brief contacts were important and full of meaning.

In front of the execution wall at the end of the yard between the barracks, I met the children of the Polish school classes again. They were setting down little candle lights in front of the wall, right next to a lot of little bouquets with other candles there already. They did so with so much concentration and seriousness and dignity, which I wouldn't have expected when I first saw them. And again I felt ashamed.

Meanwhile we had reached the end of the camp street, and my inner oppression, a great sadness, a choking in the throat, all this seemed to have come to a standstill. I even could exchange some impressions with other participants, especially with some of the colleagues from the English-speaking group.

The guided tour took a wide sweep, and then turned back using the other camp street returning towards the main entrance. At that point I encountered this special stone of commemoration, and all the intensity of my feelings of grief and shame, all my inner turmoil and my tears were present again, with the difference that now there was a Jewish youth group standing around me and watching my rather distressed state. On the commemoration stone is written "...my sorrow is continually before me. (Ps 38.18)", in various languages, and the stone is set up in the memory of a

commemoration stone, donated by the president of Israel, Chaim Herzog  
"...my sorrow is continually before me" (psalm 38.18)

visit of the president of Israel, Chaim Herzog.

Psalm 38.18 affected me very much as it was almost a 'confession of confidence'! The line of Psalm 38.18 rang again and again in my head "... my sorrow is continually before me..", diminishing all thoughts of justice, revenge and blame. I am entitled to tell my sorrow to God for this very sorrow which is continually before me as a part of my life: I grew up as a fatherless child in the war.

May I dare to think of my sorrow as a 'fatherless' child, as approaching that of Chaim Herzog and the Jewish People? Well, right there, at that moment, from point of view of my feelings, from point of view of my faith and as God sees it, I could say so and pray so with those words. In retrospect my loss pales into insignificance more and more again compared to the enormity of the losses of the Jewish People.

Next we stopped at a very central place in the camp site, where the Nazi-gangsters had built a special gallows, with a long cross-beam on top to be able to hang a number of victims at the same time. I felt anger this time, not so much shame, but anger against the members of my people whom I would have referred that they never would have been called my people. My feelings of anger were underlined with contempt.

The guided tour finally led us through a gate in the surrounding barbed-wire-fence to a specially defined area, where the 'villas' of the KZ-staff were to be seen at a little distance to the right, and

where the first Nazi-built gas chamber was to the left, placed in a bomb shelter for reasons of camouflage. In front of the entrance to this bunker there was another gallows, a 'traditional' one. After the end of World War II and the trial in a Polish court these gallows were used to execute the former KZ-commander Hoess. I was shocked by the conviction and satisfaction of my own feelings when I saw this gallows! "Yes, - this was a just end - it was the only rather appropriate sentence this court could pass in the name of the Polish people!"

I recalled my teachings on 'death-penalty' in school, when I try to put forward to my pupils: 'the death-sentence is a very archaic thing, it does not fit any more to a modern society and it's attempt to bring about justice!' But all this theory was far, far away! It appeared to me as if here in this case that there was justice in the midst of revenge!

The very last act at the end of this tour, at the end of this encountering the shadows of our German past, was to enter the darkness of the bunker, being the first gas chamber. Thank-God the darkness was dark enough. Again I was overwhelmed by all these feelings of anger, mourning, choking in the throat and utmost shame. Again, I really appreciated the darkness giving me a chance, to stand away in a corner, a chance to hang on to these feelings!

They had restored the cremation ovens, too, next-door to the gas chamber in order to give the particular atmosphere and impression of this technical testing site for mass-killing, but I couldn't stand this any more. I was relieved to be outside again. A lot of memories came to my mind, recalling the first time when I saw ovens like this at the crematorium of a special site of the KZ-Therezin in former Czechoslovakia, where they had dumped the ashes of the victims in the nearby river.

On the way to our bus I met many of the others of our seminar. It was a relief to surface again out of a world of sadness and shame. It was very comforting to get a chance to be hugged or to hug others, and to affirm to each other, that the horror of this place was not the only reality in this world and within our lives.

### ***The place II The extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau.***

Here everything was also quite different from what I had expected for the tourist busses were parked close to the memorable gate of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Again I had this moment of reflection, "Yes, this is the gate of Birkenau, that's what it looks like today! These are the railway tracks, the sidings were they unloaded the wagons.

The rain had stopped, and the overall impression was different. The inner dread which I had experienced in the streets of the Auschwitz Stammlager camp had gone, replaced by a sensation of a wide open space.

We took a look into some of the stable-pattern huts of the earliest part of Auschwitz-Birkenau-KZ. My inner tension did not appear again. There just was this deep disgust towards these particular 'members' of my own people, this anger against the persons who had worked here, planning everything, and ensuring that this execution process operated with German thoroughness. The crude inadequate arrangements showed the underlying deep disregard of human beings, whether in the toilets, the water fountains, the ambulance wards, the bunk beds, the heating furnaces, and the roofs designed originally for horses, but used for men. Everything was built to deceive, even the names! There was just one common aim behind it all, to humiliate, to disregard, and finally to extinguish the inmates! The technique, the language, the 'labels', all these were used as weapons in the fight against the enemy, weapons to serve ultimate cruelty! The visitors' centre of Auschwitz - Birkenau had been given only a short time in the timetable for the day. There was no more time, and this was a relief for we wouldn't have been able to take more or to stand more! Looking at the wide spaces of the site and the dimensions being so gigantic, one could imagine just how immense was the actual 'killing machinery' at the remote end of the site. We saw this long paved road from the unloading sidings to a dark place one could hardly see at the other end of the site This was set amongst trees screening and hiding the 'crematorium' with all its massive works. I myself wouldn't have had the strength to walk down that road at all, on that day! It almost seemed to me, as if our Polish colleagues had mercy on

us, the Germans, by sparing us the visit that part of the camp!

### ***The place III: The Auschwitz meeting-centre***

After a short bus trip we came to a centre in a religious house or convent, which had been set up by the churches for the assembly of visitors to the KZ. It was a mixture of a hotel, a monastery, and a visitors' centre. It was a place with an atmosphere of calmness and dignity to me. The unreality that this could also be a place to sit down and have lunch, the fantasy to eat anything at all, was rather strange to me. Of course, it took some time to walk from the parking lot to the house, to find a place to sit down for a while, to arrange the groups at the dining tables and finally to serve the meals. How strange it all was, but my mood changed after all the tears, the oppression in the chest, the choking in the throat. Suddenly the meal was tasting good to me, it was comforting to eat, and almost relaxing! It was an important break for me that day!

### ***Special points following the visit: The sharing group session following the visit.***

During the day we decided not to hold the sharing groups in the Auschwitz convent centre, but to take the busses back to the hotel immediately. There we held the sharing group sessions in the now familiar and comforting rooms. In this session of our group there was a cautious, restrained atmosphere at the beginning. It was clear that everyone was supporting each other in common feelings. Some of us could lower their guard only now, and let go those feelings which were suppressed by the oppression of the day. Urias described his experiences by saying that it seemed as if all the evil man can do on earth, or that man can do to man or ever has done to man, all this was and is present at the site of this KZ and this evil was speaking to us through our emotions. In the session there was a kind of 'solidarity' among us in our exposure to the realities of the sorrow, the violence and the meanness, of that awful place.

It was a relief for us as latter day Germans, not to be held responsible for these now old and terrible crimes which took place when I was but a child. However, this is not a position to be proud of nor to be relied on. I remembered that

Wies from the Netherlands did not accompany us to this seminar and in the seminar Jaap also from the Netherlands, pointed to this absence as significant. He said that he couldn't share all of his feelings at that moment, because on the one hand that he might hurt some of us Germans present without such an intention or on the other he might express his anguish of having been hurt in his early life by other Germans. He also explained that because of this he was not going to participate in the worship service that was to follow the sharing groups. Those participants in the sharing group who came from other parts of the world, showed how they also experienced deep feelings of shame during the visit to Auschwitz. These feelings of shame arose because they realised that this was a kind of evil that man in general was capable of. Towards the end of the group I found I had developed a feeling of tenacity, of defiance, of resistance, and a certain will to look for the difference between an ordinary life and a life of principle. Ordinary life simply led to death, but a life of principle would be a 'life to life'. I would look out for this difference, to get a sense for it, to practice for it, and finally to explain and show it to people, wherever I should have a chance in my life and my work to do!

### ***The common worship service at night***

Somehow I had to convince myself, to go and attend the worship service. At the end of this day it wasn't an easy thing to sit down and have communion with the others in this worship. I was loathe to sing with them or join in the same common feelings. I had the impulse to sit right next to the door so I could leave the worship service if I could not stand the situation any more. The worship was prepared in such a way that all the participants from different countries were asked to bring their own bibles and read those verses of Psalm 38 around the line which we had read on the monument stone in Auschwitz. Within the worship hall there were large tubs of water set out, and little votive candle lights to serve for a ritual of commemoration. From the beginning, the reading of the verses of the psalm in our various languages, sometimes with a short interpretation but without a common translation, created a powerful atmosphere. As the ritual progressed, some of us lit and set the

candles in the water accompanied by their own words of commemoration. At this point there were strong emotions present shown in the measured and firm tones of the voices! The personal reasons voiced for one's grieving and mourning became not just connected to the victims of the holocaust whether Jewish or gentile nations, especially those represented by the participants in the seminar who also were persecuted by the Nazis, but moved outwards, remembering the deaths and grieves in the participants' own surroundings, especially in their own families. As this happened I wanted to leave a couple of times, since all this did not fit at all into my worldview of the primacy of the commemoration of the victims of the holocaust. It seemed irreverent to me to tie this commemoration together with the incidents of one's own life, one's own, so to speak 'private' grievances!

All this aspects condensed at a certain moment when one of the participants lit a candle to commemorate his father, who was killed in Auschwitz in the summer of 1943. This released strong feelings of mourning within me, because this was the same time that I was born, when my father was reported missing in the war. But because of my deepest conviction, not to mix things up I wasn't able to go and light a candle for my father. And besides, it wouldn't do for me to walk over to this participant and tell him about my fate, and it even wouldn't do afterwards, either. After the ritual of commemoration having lasted for quite a while and having been used by the group with enormous intensity, H. Weiß tried to draw an end to this stage of the service. But things had developed a strong emotional dynamic of their own, and nobody took notice of this request, and for a long time there was no end to this part of the ritual. There was a mixture existing of density and depth, of openness, intensity and intimacy, so that many a person could get in touch again with previously delayed grief. The situation seemed to appear to them to be a chance to express this grief. Inside I moved back and forth between being aware that this grief of the participants was true and deep and that there was an obvious desire to express it on the one hand, and on the other, having 'scissors in my brain', to make my thinking fit to political correctness, and having my firm beliefs throughout the years, not to mingle matters of the holocaust and other matters from the rest of the world.

This issue became obvious to me again at another point when participants from former communist countries expressed their mourning on behalf of the victims of communism, and compared the victims of communism all over the world to the victims of the holocaust. Again I felt split, for I could hardly stand this, but I had to realise by the way in which they expressed their feelings and expressed their concern, that we had different perspectives to each other, and that it was necessary for me, to take to myself the seriousness of their concern and of their mourning. Until the end of the worship service I could not join in the singing, but when the group formed a circle at the end, I could come out of my little 'corner' and join the circle of all the seminar group for the blessing.

### ***The late finale of the day***

All the other nights before there almost had developed a custom, that many participants wanted to end the day with chatting in the hotel bar, where there were other non resident local guests, who came just for dancing. So it was on this day, too. Some of the participants were sitting in the lounge of the bar, in small group, mostly made up as to the countries where they were from, or as to their languages.

Well, then it happened that Eugenie came up to me. She was leading a workshop on the tradition of women in her country of Rwanda, to express all the misery of the civil war, of the victims, of the murder, of the sadness by the way of dancing. She encouraged me, convinced me by being very determined, that it would do me good, just to dance and so let my low spirits go! I found this to be a good counsel and so we danced for a long time - or better to say: I danced for a long time, vehement, stomping, just like that, no big reflections any more, very vivid and somehow, even a little bit hilarious, in spite of everything!

### ***The homeward journey:***

#### ***The farewell to the seminar in the hotel lobby.***

Here something occurred which I never expected. The English participant in the seminar, who's father had been killed in the summer of 1943 by the Nazis, came to me and asked about my father. Peter Hawkins and he had spoken about this earlier. This man had seen my disturbance in the Auschwitz I, and when he



had realised that I was a friend of Peter's he had asked about me. And Peter, who knows my life, had told him about this part of my loss and about my grief. The point on which I missed out during the worship service came by this to an end, a 'mediated' end and to an end which was comforting to me, since here again, there was no sense of 'accusation', but rather of solidarity.

### ***Back to everyday life***

The time and the talk on our way back to Düsseldorf from Ustron, and that first night back when Peter and George stayed in my home, were important and helpful to me in accepting the fact that other people look at Auschwitz with different eyes than I do, and to accept the seriousness of their perspective and that they have the right to their view, and that there is no final interpretation of these horrible events.

### ***And finally back to school at Bottrop***

I had made up my mind to speak about the seminar and the visit to Auschwitz. But already my first attempts to talk to my colleagues in school showed that it wasn't possible for me. In one of my classes, where we planned to talk about 'racism, Nazism and the Holocaust' I postponed this subject, because I did not feel strong enough right then, to deal with this as a subject for class discussions. Meanwhile time has passed, so that now I find that I can work and use my experience that I tried to describe in this report, in the course of my teaching!

### ***Intercultural aspects***

I find it hard to look back at my own personal experiences and emotions. The reactions of the other non-German participants of the seminar were very important to me especially, and to the other Germans generally. The non-Germans were also exposed to the same shadows of our past and yet they gave us supporting warmth, despite knowing about the reality of these shadows either from long ago or on that very day when they experienced with us part of these shadows and so became aware of the immense power of these shadows.

As the day progressed there was revulsion to the sites which formed the Stammlager - the original Auschwitz concentration camp. The barrack build-

ings had been remodelled from Polish army barracks into a museum exhibiting the torture cellars, the two sets of gallows, the gas chamber, and the crematorium ovens. This was followed by further antipathy to the wide open spaces of the extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau with its shabby stable style huts expressing in every detail a contempt for humanity. All this constantly demanded a response about one's own reaction.

We had to accept the partiality our previous knowledge and question it. We had to come to terms with the perspectives of the other participants from other countries and continents, who had the same experiences on that awful day. The interaction back and forth between them and us Germans, made us see more clearly those parts of the shadows of the past, which are still powerful us in our life and fate.

The peculiar, almost comforting, atmosphere arising from the memorial stone and its verse of the psalm, being underlined and reinforced by the worship service and the reading of the scripture in each one's mother tongues, became one of the very special experiences of the day. Indeed the day itself became a high point in the whole history of all the ten seminars we have held! This binding together within our faith, had never shown up so clearly before in the other services of worship, neither in the morning or evening prayer, nor in all the other attempts to integrate our beliefs into the work of the seminars.

In my reflections up till now I am still wondering whether the process of "exposing and supporting each other" had been enabled by the intercultural nature of the group. I think that this process was rather helped because as a group we had already developed so much trust, even intimacy, that we could experience and be sensitive to each other within the group, and had a protective boundary to the outside. On the inside of the group we could open up, almost to the point of daring to reach far out areas of our own personal and emotional foundations.

The strong emotions, that were present with so many of us, could have ruined the whole day, if the dark side had gained the upper hand. The underlying fear for me was that I might drown in emotion, switch off my intellect, and finally end up with the emotional irrationality of those very Nazi-times. My strong emotions of grief for the father I had never known, curiously like the

feelings of colleagues from the former communist lands to their time of suffering under the communists, was laid bare by the holocaust reality that could distort your political analysis of the situation in a way which I think is unacceptable. But the interaction going on between us was a means of controlling or limiting. It became quite obvious how many people in the group related their feelings to their own realities, whether historical, local, national, religious, power structures or traditions of ways of thought. This seems to be necessary, almost mandatory, in order not have emotions have the final say in regard to the unpredeceased events of the holocaust.

My reflection on intercultural encounters show it to be very important to reflect on 'real places (Editors' Note: This phrase does not become clear in the following text and needs to be explained!)' and 'personal space' on a real and a symbolic level. The effects which the 'real places' and 'personal space' had on us were various. In our inner self we needed enough 'personal space' to work through our feelings and thoughts, and only then to engage in communication about it with the others on a conscious level. This was happened during that day especially and later that evening in the sharing groups and worship service. I needed time and patience by myself before I could share with my good companions walking again through our experience! It is important to emphasise the role of the 'mediators' or 'bridge-builders', who did a marvellous job at this day, as they changed roles and/or exchanged positions, in supporting, in explaining, in enabling persons to meet and share, to communicate to others, or just even to describe the facts!

There were moments when those who had been to the theory building conference in the two days before the seminar, became aware of connecting ties to the main points of those lectures. John Foskett's subject of "Making the unknown known" was to be experienced a couple of times. The chance to get hold of formerly unconscious matters, and then to have them integrated into consciousness, was helpful both for me personally, for us as the latter day Germans, as well as for the other participants. Julian Müller's "The experience of being different" was a day to day adventure of experience! We had to work it through! At the end came acceptance perhaps not known before, that

each and everyone has the right to be different in one's own life. Additionally this day was very important to learn about and to be aware of the suffering of the Polish people, which our German people had imposed upon them! We had to learn this as we experience the rather cautious, silent, indirect way in which our Polish colleagues prepared the day. In fact many participants from other parts of the world had come to think that the first move to integrate a visit like this into the seminar had originate from the German preparation group!

My personal thanks for this day are due to many people, but especially to the colleagues in Ustron symbolically representing all the other people in Poland who prepared it! Additionally I would like to dedicate this article especially to Wies, but also to Jaap who could not come with us in body, but who were present with me in my consciousness throughout that awful day.

Düsseldorf, Germany, May 8<sup>th</sup>,  
in Germany: both the day of capitulation and day of liberation. ■

comment by the translator:

*My own thoughts on this:*

*I did not appreciate that the people of Germany had such a "specific" view of the holocaust. I expected them to feel shame, but I was surprised that they thought their shame was not shared by the rest of humanity. Germans are not a race, nor even a nationality, for such things do not exist in reality, they are simply men and women like the rest of us with a particular language and culture which are shared with appreciation by many far from their home.*

*As an Englishman of a similar age to you Klaus, I am conscious of the errors of the allies who raised barriers to the defeated German people after the First War, and so colluded with the destruction of the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Nazis. I am grateful to those since the Second War, who have ensured that Germany and France, the lowlands and even Britain, can argue and share*

*their interests in common and so bring the peoples of Europe to an ever closer Union. We in Europe are the Christian part of Asia, and it is time we behaved as such.*

*I composed the following on my first visit to Mönchengladbach (our German twin town) many years ago:*

*"When I was a child  
your people made my heart run  
and jump with fear,  
now in due time I have learnt that  
you are my brothers  
and my heart is full  
with your kindness.  
Christus Victor."*

*The Rev. Peter M. Hawkins,  
The Holy Spirit Church,  
Bretton, Peterborough, UK*

# 3

## lectures on the

## seminar's theme: tradition

Zdzislaw Mach

## ***Tradition - an Anthropological Perspective***

**I**t is a great pleasure to welcome you to this university and to share with you some thoughts about tradition. But before I speak about the general issues I would be happy to say a few words about the place where you are:

The Jagiellonian University is the oldest in Poland and one of the oldest in Europe in fact. It was founded in 1364 that is well over 600 years ago. And this building is a 19th century building and it was built when the population growth made it impossible for the old university buildings to accommodate the increasing number of students and staff. But a two or three minutes walk from here you will find the oldest building of the university called "collegium maius" which was founded in fourteen hundred. The university is a very traditional place, and I am happy to say this in a good and sociable sense of the meaning of the word tradition. In other words, it is based on the past but it also looks into the future. And here behind me there are pictures, 19th century pictures that represent the founding fathers of the university, King Kasimir the Great holding the founding charter of the university and here one of his successors, King Jagiellonius, who provided the proper endowment for the university and made it possible for the university to flourish in the fifteenth century. Over there behind you, there is a picture of Nicolaus Kopernicus looking into the sky, and he was the most famous alumnus of the university up to now. And I don't think it is likely for us to have anyone better in the future because his role in the history of sciences is difficult to match. This picture, the picture of Kopernicus was painted by a Polish painter, Jan Matejko, who is an important painter when we talk about tradition. And the old gentleman in the chair

in the painting next to the window, with the beard, is the painter himself, it's Jan Matejko. And he was one of the most influential creators of national mythology and national tradition in the nineteenth century, in the time when the Polish national culture and national identity was created. And most Poles, when they think of some events of the past or some heroes of the past, they see his images, the images, which he painted, of famous figures, the famous battles, and if you ask an average Pole, what a certain person looked like or how to image certain events, the person will certainly copy the image from one of the pictures by Jan Matejko.

In a few minutes I will tell more about that. But for now let us look at this room and its function. This is the place where some of the university events take place - such as the inauguration of the academic year or confirmation of degrees. And when events take place the director magnificus sits here, the prorectors sit there - and here by the rainbow, there is a row of chairs for the deans of the faculties. And all invited guests including members of the government and members of the churches and other invited persons sit in the first row, and all other invited guests and a few students sit behind them.

In this room we also have other events, for example important lectures or distinguished groups of visitors such as yourselves. To my right there is a picture of one of the former rectors, if you can see him from where you are, you see the regalia he is wearing, the gown, with fur and colour and a sceptre and a chain, this being an official ceremonial dress of the rector and just two weeks ago we had an inaugural procession of the academic year where the rectors and the deans and professors marched from one of the university buildings over here and they wore their academic dressings and the audience was watching and clapping and cheering.

So we are very proud of our tradition, but then let me say immediately something I will lay out later in some more theoretical terms that it is this gown, this ceremonial dress that represents a very old tradition and I am sure that most people in this town think that this is the way the professors dressed back in the 15th or 16th century. The truth is, however, that this gown was invented in the 19th century. And the circumstances were as follows: Krakow was in the 19th century part of the Hungarian-Austrian Empire and the Emperor Franz Josef was expected to visit the town and the university. The university professors were considered to be civil servants, and according to the custom they were expected to wear uniforms which resemble the military uniforms as all civil servants of the Austrian Empire wore on official occasions. The professors refused to do so thinking that it is not appropriate for them to dress as Austrian civil servants and they invented this academic gown saying it had always been like that and that this is the way they always dressed. So this tradition was in fact invented in the late 19th century. - If you then look at many other traditions in your countries or in other countries, what has been created in that fashion is called "invented tradition". I am sure this one is not a unique example. Nevertheless, as I said, this furry thing is over one hundred years old and it also became a tradition, a tradition of the university which is proud of its own events. It does not really want to yield to political pressure of any kind.

So as I said we are very proud of our tradition but also look to the future - this university is very proud of the past - it is eager to meet expectations and the requirements of the changing society. Thus we read humanities, but we also have sciences, medicine, and just last month we opened a new part, new faculty: the school of business and management; because of the demands of today's economy it is that the university has to meet these requirements. Well, so much about the university. If you have any questions about the university I would be happy to answer them later.

**B**ut now let me turn your attention from this place to the more general issues of tradition and identities.

What is tradition? The simple answer may be that it is the accumulated heri-

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tage of a culture, i.e. the symbolic culture of a group. What does this tradition imply? It first of all provides legitimacy and justification of a social order. Tradition looks into the past, looks into the historic roots of the present culture, the present social status quo. For the traditionalist, the present must be understood as continuation of the past. Therefore, innovation, radical change, revolution, is not something that a traditionalist would particularly welcome. The traditionalists look into the past, but not the past as described by a historian, not as objective description of past events. It's rather "sacred past" a mythologised past. And the formation of this accumulated heritage the symbolic culture of a group, it's various events, people or historical processes become mythologised and function as images, as symbols, as myth. Some people, conservatives, politicians or philosophers, think that tradition is a value in itself, that first of all should be cultivated, cherished, protected. But for everybody it is obvious that whether we like our past, our accumulated heritage, or not, - we are determined by it. Tradition is a concept that answers the question who we are in opposition or as different from other people or groups.

Identity is formed in a context in opposition to that of other peoples, other groups, other nations. And we all have several identities just as we all belong to several different social groups depending on different criteria. We belong to nations, we belong to churches, we belong to language groups, we belong to social classes, to relational groups etc. etc. And most of those identifications are based on certain symbols, certain traditions, certain mythologies. For instance, in contemporary Europe, we participate in a debate about certain identities, and levels on which identities should be established. For some Europeans for instance, national identities are of secondary importance. They like to refer to the traditional identification of the self of the common European heritage, saying that this is important, that we are all Europeans, that we all are, say, Christians, that we all have a Latin tradition, that we all originate from Rome and Greece, and this is much more important than divisions between one nation and another. On the other hand, many Europeans think that, of course, they are Europeans and they participate in common European heritage and common European traditions, but this tradition is much less important

than national tradition. They like to refer in their self-identification to their national past, to national culture, to their own linguistic identity, to their own literature and to the relationship, be it friendly or unfriendly, as is often the case, with other nations. In contemporary Europe, we also form supranational identities, as the Balkan countries, the Baltic Region, the Central Europe, or the Austro-Hungarian tradition, and there are regional traditions of countries that are smaller than the nations, like the Catalans in Spain or the Provence in France, the Basques or the Irish. In other words, every level of identity requires a certain symbolic frame work and a certain point of reference, and this point of reference is the past with all its tradition and its specific ideas about national characteristics. If we understand tradition as the basis of social identity, it is a symbolic construction. The past transforms into itself images and is presented in literature, the arts in various national mythologies, and in our images of the past.

As I mentioned before, Jan Matejko, the painter - he and many other intellectuals and artists at the 19th century played a leading role in the creation of this symbolic structure that now forms the Polish national identity. He, for example, painted a catalogue of pictures of Polish monarchs of the past. And of course, in some cases he knew what particular kings looked like. In many other cases he didn't know much. For instance, how the medieval monarchs looked like. Nevertheless he painted them with all the details of their appearance and equipped them with various symbolic requisites. The reason for that was not that he wanted to paint realistic portraits of these people but he wanted the Poles of the 19th century to understand and accept certain ideas connected with those people and their times. So some rulers would be armed some others would not be armed, some would have attributes of Christianity, very prominent crosses and reliquaries and other things that conveyed the message that they were primarily Christians rulers. Through such symbols and various literary symbols, books, novels, and others, images of the past were created, and what was then regarded as truth about the past was given to new generations of the people in Poland.

The question now is that if identity is based on tradition to a large extent, can it also be based on a negation of tradi-

tion, or an opposition of tradition? Because we know that some human groups define themselves primarily in opposition to others and by negating certain cultural elements. Revolutionaries, people who want radical changes, very often define themselves as people who oppose traditionalism. However, such people would look into the past for those elements of accumulated heritage which would be suitable for their ideology. So socialists would look into the past and search for traces of social revolution, uprisings, work strikes, working class movements and all that. Nationalists would see their tradition in the national identity and national culture of the national majority in the culture in a country, which is in Poland for instance the Polish Catholic majority. But we also meet people in this country who argue that Poland was traditionally a tolerant and open society. And they would construct their own identity through such traditions as the permanent presence of Protestant nobility and Protestant intellectuals of the 16th century, as well as the Jewish component of the Polish society and its heritage. And they point out that Poland was for the most of its past a multicultural and multinational society. All this in order to contradict the concept of Poland as a single cultural unit with a single tradition of a national culture and of Catholicism.

This is the debate which is currently going on about the truth of the Polish past, and various ideological, political orientations construct their traditions as the basis of their identity. Some of those traditions are well documented in history. Some others are, as I said before, invented traditions. In fact, it does not matter very much. Historical truth may be very important for historians, and, of course, it's a very strong argument in the ideological struggle between parties, when they say that your interpretation is wrong and my interpretation is valid. In fact to prove that someone distorted history and painted a picture of historical events that are not accurate is a very strong accusation. In reality, however, we all think about the past in terms of symbolic images and they are a mixture of information deriving from lessons of history at school, from various publications, from novels, from movies, from visual art.

There is in fact an interesting exercise which I highly recommend: that if you travel on a bus and have nothing to do you may try to think about your own self

identifications, the national, or occupational, or regional, or whichever and try to understand and perhaps even list those images and symbols of which you think identity is at stake. What do you think makes us what we are? What makes you a German, a Pole, an Indonesian, a Yugoslav, a Russian, a Khasak, or whatever one may be. It is very interesting, what images and concepts we are using as the basis of our self identification.

When we talk about cultural identities we often assume that there are such things as homogenous cultural units. And this would be a very simple world, although not a particularly happy world, I think, if each territorial unit would be inhabited by people who are largely identical, culturally and socially. But this is how we like to think: We go to France and talk about French culture, then go to Spain and talk about Spanish culture, and then we go to Poland and talk about Polish culture. And it requires painful analysis or traumatic events to start thinking differently. Especially the politicians like to present countries they are from as culturally homogenous, as I remember Yugoslavian politicians argue that Yugoslavia is practically a culturally homogenous type. Few people now believe that to be the case and sometimes it takes a war to make people think differently. Poland has a reputation for being a culturally homogenous society. Historically this has not been the case, as I said, because Poland was for the better part of its history a nationally and culturally pluralistic society. Still, many publicly active people, politicians, members of the Roman Catholic church, like it very much to make people believe that there is such a thing as Polish culture, which is Catholic, which is traditional, shares the same culture. And then we go to the south-east corner of Poland and we realize that in many villages and many regions more than 50% of the population is Eastern Orthodox. And then you go to places like Ustroń to realize that the dominant religion is by no means Roman Catholic.

I remember one of my students who once did a research study which proved that people in Czecho-Silesia, people in Wizla and Ustroń are not only Protestant, which everybody knows, but they define their Polish national identity through the Protestant religion and not as most other Poles through Roman Catholicism. In other parts of Poland, Protestants very often were people of

German ethnic and national identity. The peasants were Catholic, their national identity was linked with Roman Catholicism. In this part of Silesia which I referred to the situation was different. In the 16th century the majority of the population became Protestant, the land was being occupied by the Austrians, who were Catholic. So the situation the fact that they were Protestant told them that they were not less Polish but in fact more Polish than others. Those Polish Protestants in Silesia constructed their national identity through different traditions - at least with regard to religion - from those in other parts of the country.

So no country is completely homogenous because not only there are minorities even if they are small minorities - but they exist - but also because we belong to so many groups in a modern society that we all have and participate in various subcultures which make the whole picture so much more complex than it seems at first sight. And in a peaceful world we learn to be open and to be tolerant and we learn to accept cultural differences and see that different people refer to different traditions.

However, if there is a social conflict, then we have a tendency to make this picture much more polarised and much more simple. But even if people cannot make a simple choice between what they are or on which side they are, then there will always be some politicians or ideologists, who tell them what they are and who they are. And boundaries are being created which separate cultural groups, boundaries which reveal itself politically: orders, orders of customs, of ritual, of dress, of various symbolic components. People who are afraid that they lose their identity may be forced to assimilate, they sometimes create essentials, symbolic boundaries that protect them from unwanted intrusions of other cultures.

In this part of Poland the best example of such a strategy is the Chassidic Jewish community. The Chassidic people created a symbolic boundary that was almost impossible to penetrate. Unlike other Jewish people who gradually assimilated to a large extent in Germany, in England, and also in other parts of Poland, the Chassidic lived very much apart from the Polish community, and in many cities in Southern Poland, in small towns and villages, it was clear that in one territory the two completely separated communities lived side by

side. They spoke different languages, they had different food, because they would not eat food that ethnic Poles would eat, they wore different costumes, and they practised their own rituals which made them completely unlike the Polish community. And these symbolic boundaries protected them from being infiltrated by other cultures, or assimilated in the Polish population. Unfortunately however, these hard to penetrate boundaries contributed to their tragic fate during Nazi-occupation, since they could not hide from the persecution. They couldn't assimilate in the larger population because they were so different.

But if you look at the Polish past of this part of Poland, the Jewish tradition is most definitely a very distinctive tradition, a cultural basis of the community which no longer exists. And in opposition to nationalism many people, especially the more educated for instance in Krakow, now try to revive this tradition. If you have a chance, have a look this afternoon at the former Jewish district of Krakow, you will see that this part was abandoned by the Jewish community, because they were murdered. It was neglected for many years. And now more and more buildings are being renovated and more and more elements of the Jewish tradition are brought back to the living community life. So Krakow tries to incorporate the Jewish aspect into its tradition, which was not the case, for instance, when I was a boy at school. Then most people here were thinking about Krakow tradition, Krakow's past traditional core, would not remember the Jewish component. This was partly due to a nationalistic politics and the Communist education that argued that Poland is an ethnically homogenous society. The Jewish tradition of this place and of the country disappeared from textbooks, from school curricula, from the media. The young generation of people want to learn the past not as in for of the mythologised nationalistic past, but as the past of the pluralistic society. We may believe that they do it not only to understand other people like Jewish people who lived in Poland before, but the young generation wants to understand their own identity, their own tradition as a much richer, more complex, more multinational tradition. This is necessary for the young people to understand who they really are as people from Poland. And this I would say is why Jewish tradition is so popular in this country now. If you publish anything about the Jewish cul-

ture, if you have an exhibition of Jewish art, it will be extremely popular. Everybody will buy books, everybody will go to see it. And if you go to the Jewish district, the former Jewish district, you see the cafes, restaurants, frequented not by Jewish people because they are very few - they come but they don't form the majority of the community there - but by people who are in search for themselves and their Jewish origin. They go there and they go to concerts of Jewish music, they buy books, they attend all cultural events to understand their own heritage, and to have a feeling: they live in a richer, more complex, more open society. And in such a way the Jewish tradition is brought back to the town understood as a community with an infrastructure and is combined with Polish, ethnic Polish culture. Some Polish young people learn Yiddish, with no practical purposes, and some people of Jewish origin have become practising Jews contrary to what their parents were. And this is combined with the increased presence of other people, of foreign people who temporarily live in Krakow. Some two or three years ago I had the chance to participate in the first traditional Jewish wedding which took place in the fascinating synagogue at Krakow, for the first time after the end of the second world war.

So in a culturally pluralistic society, various traditions mix. And, of course, in a more open society, more peaceful society, more civil society, this mixture is more likely to be formed. But, naturally we also have a tendency in social processes which goes into a different direction. Tradition is very often regarded as in opposition to modernity. Tradition is looking into the past, and modernity is looking into the future. This is the way of thinking which was particularly popular in the late 19th century and in the beginnings of the 20th century. Modernity was understood as a process of social development based on set criteria of progress. There are standards to be met and the more backward societies should try to catch up with the more advanced societies. We now understand that the situation is much more complex than that. That social development requires tradition as a point of reference and as a basis from which we set various standards and criteria.

Nowadays the very popular concept is 'post-modernism', as you know. Basically it says that there is no such a thing

as a single standard and that we all ought to be different because every fixed criteria, every fixed standard is a domination of one over the other. The people who voted for tradition don't like it because post-modernism for them is relativistic. It believes that everything is as good as anything else, that we cannot say that certain values or certain ways of life are better than others. Thus, there exists the momentum of what we know as fundamentalism. It exists not only in Middle East but everywhere, including Europe of course. It represents a more radical type of traditionalism in that we look into the past for fixed standards which we just have to copy and to put into practice in our lives. The opposition to this would be liberalism, which allows for tolerance, for pluralism, for openness. And this debate will probably continue, because we will have fundamentalists which want the European (in this case) tradition to be taken into account in the formation of a modern society.

In this country we have a debate going on right now on the new constitution - to what extent it should be based on tradition. Liberals don't want any particular tradition to be mentioned, any particular national tradition, while conservatives, especially nationalists, and the Roman Catholic church want this constitution to reflect the tradition of the majority. The danger of such a reference to the majority is, that it may stifle these minorities who are members of the civil society but not necessarily participants of this particular tradition. This might be the situation for the Protestant minority, for instance, which I mentioned. For they do not particularly like the Polish president to wear the emblem of the Virgin Mary, because the Virgin Mary is a symbol of Catholicism rather than just Christianity and it looks as if he were the president of the Catholics only. The real skill is to construct the official symbolic structure of the civil society in such a way that it does not alienate anybody but refers to those elements in a common tradition, that everybody can accept. To look for a common tradition which is acceptable for the Roman Catholic radically thinking people as well as for Eastern Orthodox, as for the Jewish Minority, as for Protestants, as for everybody who wants to be a member of the society.

The European identity is an interesting proposition because it provides a common structure for at least most of the many different nationalities. This is why

fundamentalists and nationalists are not very happy with European integration. ■

Jozéf Tischner

## Tradition - From a Roman Catholic Perspective

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you here in Ustron. It is quite an interesting fact, that I owe my first visit to Ustron to the Protestants here.

What can I say about the topic of tradition from a Catholic perspective? Spoken from a historical viewpoint the question of tradition was one reason for the quarrel between the Catholic Church and the Protestant movement. While the Protestants stressed the "Ad fontes"-approach - referring to the Holy Scriptures - the Catholics emphasized tradition. Thus we created a clearly dialectic tradition: thesis versus antithesis. Today, however the situation is more complex, if not paradoxical.

Tree years ago the Catholic Church received a new instruction by the Biblical Commission, a papal commission which publishes instructions from time to time with regard to the question of how the Holy Scriptures should be read and interpreted. The names of three important names can be found in this instruction, being quoted as the so called masters of interpretation": Hans Georg Gadamer, the famous German philosopher; I do not think, he is Catholic, he may be Protestant, but I am not quite sure, the Frenchman Paul Ricoeur, who is not Catholic either, but stems from a Huguenot tradition, and Martin Heidegger, being all our "grandfather" of hermeneutics. Representing a French perspective, Henri de Lubac is being as well. Hi is Catholic, but we all now what kind of open perspective he held. Thus, we have here a situation in which the differences between the Catholic and the non-Catholic perspectives are virtually overcome. Rather, all the aspects which represent a common good on the scientific level are being stressed here. The whole of the instruction points into one direction: Catholic bible scholars

and theologians should utilize the latest scientific knowledge when it comes to interpreting the Holy Scriptures.

In terms of the more concrete practical experience in the parishes, I am not very well informed when it comes to other churches, but in the practice of the catholic Church the importance of life throughout the traditions in general is being emphasized. "Traditions" hereby not only referring to the "grand" church traditions, but also to the "small", regional and national traditions. In other words: unlike the theologians and the dogmaticians, the majority of the believers does not deal with the Holy Scriptures in a scientific way; rather, they are concerned with their own regional tradition. That is to say that tradition does not only exist at the level of theology, but also at the level of the concrete regional history. I think, what I would like to point out here is, that the word "tradition" has many meanings, and that in the every-day experience of the Catholic Church the importance of the "small" traditions, i.e. the tradition of certain areas and nations, is being stressed as well.

More to the point: tomorrow you will have a chance to visit Aushwitz. Since from a Catholic perspective tradition is important memory is important as well thus also the memory of Aushwitz. As I have mentioned above: tradition implies not only the tradition of dogmatics, but also the tradition of everyday life. Thereby the question of tradition also deals with events like Aushwitz. I believe that the Catholic Church is still nourishing itself from its history. We have many celebrations, i.e. memorial services, especially in Krakow. This is something special, since through these memorial services in a sense one experiences one's own history.

But here we also have some paradoxes, since if you talk about dogmas in the Catholic Church there is the tendency to refer to the dogmas as being eternal and

removed from history. Thus we are dealing with the paradox that while in daily life one is acutely aware of the history and the tradition, in terms of the theory a strong platonism is dominant. But situation is changing today. In the Polish church the changes began after the Second Vatican Council. For the Catholic Church in Germany and France, however, the change happened earlier - I remind you of Henri de Lubac and Bishop Danielou. But for the Polish church the Council was a great beginning.

Today one could say the intrinsic problems of the Catholic Church in Poland are not of a dogmatic nature. Certainly, there are always dogmatic problems, but these problems are eternal and what is eternal can and must not be solved today. Rather, these problems can wait. More pressing seems the structural transformation of our society today: the transition from a totalitarian to democratic political system, the transition from a planned economy to a market economy. While the French church learned democracy over a period of roughly a hundred years we on the other hand have to "graduate" in only fifteen years. Poland is a country in which things happen very slowly on the one hand side and very quickly on the other hand side - and even this has a tradition. However, one can note that slowly, but steadily more fundamental questions rise to the conscience of the intelligentsia of the country. Two comments may highlight this.

Firstly, Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, de Lubac - they all worked in a very different atmosphere as we do in Poland today. We today have strong, all too strong, influence of Neothomism; when we are dealing with hermeneutical questions the revival of an Aquinian theology and philosophy is not very helpful. Why? because Thomas does not have a real understanding for time. With Augustin on the other hand we find a rather vital understanding of time which was completely suppressed by the theology of Thomas in later years. But one cannot understand what tradition is, if one does not attempt to understand what time is. Thus we are dealing with a new paradox here: since the Council of Trent (1545 - 1563) tradition was being emphasized strongly in the Catholic Church, while at the same time one did not really understand what time and tradition means since this council. Rather, one emphasized that tradition is

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important while at the same time the sense for time was being lost through the influence of Aquinian theology. Secondly, Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, and earlier Schleiermacher and others have discovered that there is such a thing as sense / meaning. While in the Catholic Church philosophy of being (*des Seins und des Seienden*) dominated, hermeneutic now discovers that sense and meaning are much more relevant. In other words, the meaning of a thing is important for us. For example, if we take text, this text holds a certain meaning and through the text we experience the object. However, there are many ways of reaching the object by way of the text, but for an intellectual mind that does not have a sense for the text and its meaning tradition is also of little importance.

In Poland we face the problem that our students of theology are mainly educated in the Aquinian mentality (e.g. at the Lublin seminar). However, since many theologians have studied abroad this virtue is not undisputed any more. But in the Catholic seminar or the schools of theology there still linger many unsolved tensions - tensions between the lectures of the Holy Scriptures (Biblical Theology) and Philosophy, since the philosophy which is being taught does not contribute to the enlightenment of the studying of texts, tradition and meaning. While this represents a problem one may find some good here as well, according to the theme: the more mental turmoil, the better.

Let me speak a little bit more about tradition in general. Why for example, was Ricoeur so interested in the question of tradition? It was him, who discovered that we do not understand European mythology any more. As modern humans, we do not understand the Greek, the Babylonian, the Jewish and the Christian mythology. Ricoeur is saying that these grand (essentially religious) mythologies rely on symbolic language, but their symbols remain concealed. Thus, one has to find new ways to unravel these great symbols. For this Ricoeur developed a special hermeneutic. Ricoeur says: we since have lost our naiveté and thus are unable to read these texts like they were read in the past. We since have become so much more critical. But despite the fact, it is possible to bridge the gap. In other words, the reflection about tradition can reveal these symbols again.

In his intriguing study Ricoeur mainly deals with the symbols of good and evil, and by reading his texts we suddenly find ourselves in the midst of the studies of symbols. Furthermore, Ricoeur works almost exclusively with texts. It seems that for him there exists no independent reality; there are only words and everything that there is one has to somehow translate into words. The sun without the word and the meaning of "sun" is no sun. Taking this to such an extreme extent one may be allowed to ask Ricoeur: What to you actually mean? Bread or the meaning of bread?

I also would like to mention another aspect of hermeneutics stated by Gadamer, which I find rather important for the understanding of tradition. There were those scholars of hermeneutics who always asked: "What does the author really want to say?" I have a friend who stutters and whom I often have to ask what he really wants to say. Indeed, many scholars of hermeneutics aligned their whole work according to this aspect. But to a certain degree they extinguished tradition, since they presupposed that the number of mistakes and errors grows in relation to the distance between author and her text. Indeed, from this perspective distance poses a threat. It was mostly Gadamer who juxtaposed this with an entirely different theory. Time, he says, implies a change of the perspective. Thus, time is creative, it creates something new. Therefore today I can find more in text of Paul than Paul himself might have been aware of. It is certainly the case that women find more in a text than men. In the relationship between men and women a woman might find a variety of meanings, whereas might just say "No". Voice from audience: "That means that women are more creative".

Of course, we now face the problem whether our interpretations might be all too arbitrary. Still, Gadamer's perspective is very important, since he shows how crucial tradition is for the understanding of meanings. Each text bears certain consequences in the course of history and if we are reading these texts in light of these consequences, we thereby enhance our understanding. Let us, for example, take Jesus' saying "This is my body." Today one cannot interpret this text without considering the history which was set forth by it.

However, the next step will have to pose the question, what truth is, according to

such a hermeneutical perspective. While that is an entirely different topic, I still have my own opinion. If you ask me about the catholic standpoint, I can say the following: with regard to a dogma one may differentiate between two aspects, its meaning and its language. While the meaning remains constant and unchanged, there do exist a variety of expressions. The Tridentinum, for example, has its own expressions for its dogmas. Today, its language is hard to understand and there exists the possibility to change it, i.e. comply with modern mentality - provided one sticks to the same intention and meaning.

For example, if I celebrate mass and repeat: "That is my body," I connect myself with the intention of Jesus Christ with that which concerned him during his last supper. I want to repeat this intention. I do not connect myself with the council's fathers of the Tridentinum, but only with Jesus Christ. That for me in a nutshell represents the practical aspect of the hermeneutical concept. ■



Janusz T. Maciuszko

## **Tradition and Religion**

### **From the Perspective of a Protest Church Historian and a Religious Studies Scholar**

#### **What is tradition?**

Tradition is a cultural phenomenon, occurring at almost any time in any culture. Tradition is involved when we think about certain incidents (e.g. ceremonies and celebrations), as well as certain cultural events, like the way we establish personal contacts, or how we exchange cultural goods in and among groups. Tradition has its own, characteristic existence. While it sometimes takes centuries to establish itself, it can also emerge spontaneously - from one day to the next. It touches people's natural environment and areas that are independent and detached from nature and environment. (The tradition of personal hygiene for example developed rather differently in 14th century Europe.) Tradition also centres around the human psyche, language and imagination. All cultural taboos are being determined by tradition. Moreover, the rules of any given social order are based on tradition. And finally, the knowledge about the world order is often based on tradition as well. Hence, tradition seems to be an "omnipresent social instrument".

#### **Vehicles for tradition**

What could one describe as the vehicle for tradition? Firstly, there is the process of educating people, which - at the moment - proves to be a very important factor here in Poland. Nevertheless we face a problem, since education in and of itself represents one function of tradition. In other words: Tradition has the tendency to enforce education, and thus, a traditional way of education could reconstruct itself in all the future generations.

A second vehicle for tradition is memory. It seems that tradition had its greatest impact in the era of pre-literacy. At that time the whole of the "social memory" - and thus, also the "historic memory" - was based on tradition. In later years literary cultures developed a sense for "traditional patterns" (e.g. look at Rome during the time of the Roman Republic). But the historic memory liberated itself from tradition as soon as tradition

manifested itself in a written form. Tradition lost a lot of its power - it lost its "metaphysical flavour", as well as its power to shelter and to protect a loyal society. In other words, the belief, that tradition has enough power to protect a society, has vanished.

A third such vehicle is the law, since it defines what is right or wrong according to traditional values. All fundamental changes in the law generally weaken the tradition, or they establish new traditional values in place of the old. A fourth vehicle is represented in cultural "patterns". From a methodological viewpoint they are the most important vehicle, since tradition is a function of the duration and the long existence of cultural patterns. From the perspective of the cultural anthropologists, such patterns are being conveyed in things that are apparent and undoubted in any society. In other words, it is useless to argue about these patterns - they do not have to be attractive. It suffices that they exist. The same is true for tradition: From a historic perspective tradition is effective, simply because it exists. Thus, the existence of tradition neither depends on the willpower of the individual, nor on a capricious upward trend.

#### **What could be harmful to tradition?**

Two things: Firstly, all revolutions, even a revolution of the existing moral or educational standards could be det-

rimental to tradition. There are revolutions that implement a new tradition in place of the old one. However, that is not always the case. Some revolutions attempt to keep a balance between the new and the old (like giving the old socialist institutions a new sense and a new meaning.)

Secondly, tradition is being harmed by the mass media. The constant attempt to reduce the distance between various cultures and societies weakens the tradition of each culture and society, since it is forced to be open for new and foreign influences.

Here one can detect a fundamental difference between Europe and the Islamic countries - cause for many misunderstandings: A culture bound to tradition usually fosters clear social relations and structures, as well as a feeling for the national identity. In order to better analyse a tradition one has to try and understand it first - maybe by looking beyond its folklore and its touristic values. Moreover, before looking at other traditions, one has to try and understand one's own. Perhaps it is here that the new way of perceiving tradition is most prominent: While there once was a time when tradition was a natural entity for everyone, one has to really try and understand it, since without trying one can neither contain nor erode it. Any part of our tradition that we do not attempt to understand will soon become mere folklore to us - as is proven in the case of some festive traditions.

#### **The religious tradition**

A special characteristic of the religious tradition is the fact that it exists across the nations - despite the fact that many nations attempt to present their religion as a central part of their own tradition, even if the neighbouring nations practice the same religion. A second characteristic is the fact that the religious tradition is gradually loosing its determining role. In the archaic cultures each element of tradition had its own religious or mythological meaning. But the ancient Christian religion adopted many heathen elements and gave them a certain Christian meaning. Thus, the original tradition changed, it experienced a metamorphosis - but not a revolution. The original meaning of tradition disappeared, however, the elements it contained, remained - sometimes until this day. The cultural landscape was clear and recognisable. Today, such a metamorphosis does not happen any-

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more. The natural aspect of religious traditions is long since a phenomenon of the past - it became a part of history. Knowledge became the new norm for the people. In order to comply with something one has to rationally understand it first. The traditional function of religion has vanished, i.e. it is no longer the bearer of cultural goods. For the majority of the people, the tradition of culture has lost its religious recognition. The religious characteristics of tradition are now only partially valid within their own boundaries - i.e. within the of religion. Consequently, the religious tradition has only limited chances to have a broad effect on the whole of a culture. In today's world the religious tradition, only serves to reflect on certain meta-physical problems, and its answers are accepted only for and in this limited arena.

Religion and life are two different entities.

### ***Religion contra Science***

Christianity has by and large lost the battle between religion and science. All too often the inquisition and the dogmas were the only answer to the probing questions of the mind, that - in the beginning - did not at all reject God, but simply questioned God's doing. One may point out that modern theology and physics sometimes even co-operate, or that Luther and the modern Protestant dogmatics did not want to understand the dogmas as rigid norms, but rather as attempts to express one's faith.

All too often the churches have relied on their dogmas and on the power that resulted from them. The consequence today is that we have two different traditions instead of one tradition, or one religion, or one spirit: The tradition of the faith and the tradition of the mind. There is a chance that the two could coexist, or that they could mutually soften their extremes. This became a possibility since positivism lost its foothold in the world of science, and since the conservative church has begun to react more strongly to reality. However, it will not be possible to ever retrieve the old "losses" from the "time of the two separate powers". The fact that we have a truce today between those two traditions can perhaps be attributed to the fact that lately a new force emerged: The New Age movement. While the New Age movement does not refer to any kind of religious or scientific tradi-

tion, it attempts to establish a compromise, based on so many uncertain factors, that neither religion nor science appreciate them. Perhaps - after the New Age movement has lost its power - the old quarrel between religion and science will reappear. And then we will have to ask ourselves in what kind of state religion will be. Will it be a religion that is concerned with the emotional, the non-rational structure, be less powerful than science? Ultimately religion would then have to pay the price for the victory of positivism, as well as for its defeat.

It is largely the churches' fault that the religious tradition is on the decline, since they forced the people to choose between the dogma and science. Science was declared to be a religious heresy, a fact which made it especially attractive. Consequently this heresy emancipated itself and the separation became a reality. Today we are dealing with a separation between an "orthodoxy" that was unwilling to embrace the questions of reason, and a "heresy", unwilling to put up with the seemingly dark and reactionary bondages of tradition.

### ***Pluralism from a world-view perspective***

Even a pluralistic world-view has the tendency to weaken the religious tradition. Some people are inclined to connect various world-views during the course of their lives; others are faithful to just one. It remains a challenge for theology to not exclude those who have a different world-view. It also remains a challenge to bridge the gap between the language of the academically inclined theologians and the language and thoughts of the ordinary people. A fact that is most important if one wants to include the thoughts and ideas of those theologies that do not shy away from a cultural analysis. The discussion about the "Word of God" and "God's judgement", about "Man" and "Culture" have to be supplemented by a positive discourse about the "surrounding" culture. Otherwise theology - as well as religious tradition - remains an unknown entity for the people. Only a culturally inclined theology offers the possibility of a modern understanding of the religious tradition, and could revitalise certain key elements. If not, the religious tradition will gradually vanish in peoples' lives - until it is utilised only to lend a meaning to certain events (such as weddings, funerals).

### ***Christian tradition and the reading of the Scripture***

The Christian tradition has its roots in the Holy Scripture. We talk about the "normative aspect of the Holy Scripture", but modern people want to understand it, so that they can accept it. The process of understanding does not necessarily imply disbelief. Rather, the work of the churches should be restructure itself according to the Holy Scripture. In order to achieve this, the Scripture should be utilised in the sense and the spirit of oral tradition of the archaic cultures. Scripture should become an instrument of the religious tradition - contrary to its own instrumental form. In other words: the teaching of the Scripture should be respectful to the "story". It is precisely this mechanism that is successfully used by some sects today - they know how to get in contact with the people. Thus, a theology that is willing to open up to a less formal way of understanding the Holy Scripture, has a good chance for a successful revival of the religious tradition. On the other hand, it remains a fact that wherever a group of people practices a spontaneous and natural literary reading of the Scripture, old religious traditions are being kept alive as well. Those groups are few and the price they have to pay is to be isolated from the rest of the world. Moreover, since the modern mind wants to liberate them from their isolation, they will not grow in number. They can only become firmer in their beliefs - convinced that it is them who are chosen. In the end they remain ignorant with regard to the hermeneutical questions and exegetical critique. And they remain powerless in the face of other, modern traditions.

A similar process can be observed wherever the "cult of the visible church" dominates our perception of theology. The religious tradition then only speaks to the people who remain loyal. All others are excluded from benefiting from the relationship between theology and tradition. The church and the Scriptures have to be questioned. If academic theology and the praxis of the church do not do this, a re-evaluation of the religious tradition will not be possible in the future. Let me stress this gain: A precise understanding of tradition is the presupposition for a faithfulness towards that tradition. In other words, a tradition that is based on the Scripture has to be easy to understand.

### Further endangering factors

In the future there could emerge further factors, weakening the religious traditions as well as organized religion. Let us try to point out a few: Firstly, there exist religious and denominational controversies, that refer to the past, i.e. to the infallibility of the tradition. Here we have to deal with the difficult question, whether the various religions could distance themselves from using tradition in such a way. And we have to consider the fact that criticising religion in light of these controversies has already become a new tradition; meaning that the foundation of a positive religious tradition is being further destroyed.

The ecumenical movement may offer a chance for healing. It should never pay the price for the "tradition of controversies", but should be free from such a tradition of conflict.

Secondly, an association of national conflicts with various religious traditions will hurt the latter. I am not referring to national religions only, but also to the connection of religious and national topics that is creating certain "stereotypes". Religious and national stereotypes should not be mixed together. However, since the stereotypes will probably vanish along with tradition, one would hope that the "bad stereotypes" will also gradually disappear. Last not least one has to ask, whether the notion of reconciliation has already become a tradition of the modern churches, or whether the religious tradition is still stifled by historic quarrels and feelings of revenge.

Finally, the last point I would like to make, is that of fanaticism, which not only harms the various religious traditions, but religion in general. Ultimately one has to be careful that fanaticism does not gradually infiltrate the religious tradition. Fortunately at the moment it seems fairly difficult to establish a fundamental religious tradition on a large scale and on the mere basis of fanaticism. The problem of the relationship between the various local and national traditions, and between the national and the common traditions I will not discuss today. These are topics that stretch the limits of this lecture ■

Jacek Leociak

## Tradition as a Dialogue Between Generations -

### In the perspective of the Holocaust experience

Ladies and gentlemen, we are here today to think about tradition. Let's consider the situation: *hic et nunc* we want to look behind us, to better perceive of what is in front of us. Which means, we want to fill our present time with the past as well as with the future. Tradition means also that every dimension of time is present in our *hic et nunc*, here and now. So, what is our *here and now* like?

We are about forty kilometres from the town of Os,´wie, cim (Auschwitz). The chimneys of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp ceased to work fifty years ago. Let's take such a *hic et nunc* as the basis for our further reflections because it is the Holocaust which is the shadow of the past and is still putting a dark trail on our present time.

That is why I would like to submit the reflection upon tradition to the reflection concerning the Holocaust, the strategies aiming at accommodation and understanding of the Holocaust, and the burden of that heritage.

Associated with tradition is a continuous return to the sources, a re-reading of them from the beginning on. My reflection is a fruit of reading the Holocaust testimonies. Those preserved texts became a basic source for my reflection.

### Word-grain symbolism

Memoirs and diaries written down by Jews in the ghettos and camps were very well hidden, usually buried. Let's ponder for a while on this symbolic meaning of such a situation. A paper upon which those chronicles of destruction were written was thrown into the soil as a grain for the future harvest. The Jewish poet Abraham Suckewer interpreted

it as such in the Vilna ghetto in March 1943. His poem entitled *A wheat grain* became a commentary for the action of hiding the books and manuscripts of the Jewish Institute in Vilna and Vilna library. "*I am burying and sowing manuscripts here...*" says Suckewer, telling a story of a grain which had been hidden inside the pyramid in ancient Egypt. The grain taken from the pyramid after nine thousand years and put into soil grew and bore ears.

The poet writes:

*„Maybe also one day these words will be taken up to the light and maybe in the hour of destiny they will blossom as unexpectedly as that ancient seed which grew an ear (...)"*

Seed - which is considered a basic food in the Judaeo-Christian civilisation - is a symbol of existence. The symbolism of the word as grain incorporates the process of writing in the ancient and everlasting order of sowing and harvesting. The text becomes a life-giving food. The symbolism of word-bread which is so deeply rooted in the Bible also leads toward such understanding. You can share a word with other people as a piece of bread. There are no limits of time and place for such a sharing of words.

The poem by Suckewer speaks about the hope for surviving in the reviving rhythm of culture. The grain resists the damaging influence of time because it preserves energy in itself, thus reviving the organic world. The power of a written word is this energy in the world of culture. A text may be hidden for a long time as a grain in the ground, until the season of crop comes, i.e. when being read it is alive again and blossoms.

The parable of the grain taken from the Egyptian pyramid after thousands of years determines the horizon of hope for all those Jews, who had written their

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texts and then hid them, believing they preserved a spiritual nourishment for the future.

The poem by Suckewer shows a mechanism of tradition as a process of handing over and receiving - amongst others by word. A deposit which reveals our identity and its roots, creates community, establishes links between the past (which is inexhaustible source of the new) and the future (which reveals itself as an explanation, fulfilment and reviving of the old). That bond is created due to the memory, which unites, joins and preserves. Memory is the first commandment of tradition.

So, let's read the preserved testimonies of the Holocaust carefully. Those texts should become for us a source of knowledge about ourselves, who live *hic et nunc*.

A reflection concerning the phenomenon of preparing testimonies about Extermination reveals three dimensions of writing symbolism: 1) writing as testifying, 2) writing as prophecy, 3) writing as a liturgy of the memory. Each of these dimensions relates in its own way to the traditional action and binds it with the universal heritage of the past.

### **Writing as testifying**

Writing as an act of bringing testimony about the Extermination is deeply rooted in the Biblical and Talmudic tradition.

The Torah and the Talmud demand to testify about inequity. In the Book of Leviticus you can read, that a person sins heavily when *"he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about"* (Leviticus 5.1). In the context of this tradition a witness is not only the person who has seen what happened but also who "only" knows. The knowledge obliges. You should testify. Such a duty has both moral and religious obligation. Testifying is closely connected in the Jewish tradition with the legal process of determining all proofs to find out the truth and reach justice.

This Biblical and Talmudic tradition of testifying reveals one of the foundations upon which the authors of the Extermination period could build their decision about writing. In the light of that tradition an author of a diary or memoirs can perceive his role as a fulfilment of the duty to testify. Diaries, memoirs and

reports as well as other written records of the Holocaust reveal themselves to be a fruit of an attitude which can be drawn from the sources of Judaism. Even more, the subject of the testimony itself can also be compared to the original Biblical models. The Bible and the Rabbinical literature provide a model for this situation and a language to describe it. Traditional ways of describing misfortunes, suffering and the triumph of evil, are written down there. The text created in the face of extermination and the text which testifies to extermination has that Biblical model behind itself. The description of reality seems to repeat the original archetype: the Biblical paradigm of common banishment, destruction, national defeat and individual disaster of a suffering Jew. Jeremiah, weeping his lamentations over destroyed Jerusalem, the fall of the Temple, defeat, captivity and disgrace, was the archetypical eulogist of the extermination. The Bible provides all later witnesses of national disasters with a well formulated "rhetoric of martyrdom" and "liturgy of disgrace". Listing all disasters which afflicted Jews and handing them over to posterity has a long tradition. The period of crusades, expulsion from Spain or the Cossacks uprising of Bohdan Kchmielnicki in 1648 gave birth to numerous chronicle writers of pogroms and persecution.

### **Writing as prophetic formula**

Some of the Holocaust testimonies seen from the perspective of the Biblical tradition can be compared with inspired writing contained within a framework of specifically understood prophetism. The special meaning of this prophetism is due to the fact that it does not mean forecasting future events, revealing a Divine message or being a medium for a Divine Voice. This prophetism means the unquestionable duty of writing and testifying. The author understands himself as fulfilling a mission. He has to speak in the name of those who cannot speak. He has to preach the truth which should be known by the world. The imperative of writing is so strong you can not resist it.

A prophet acted despite the dangers awaiting him, despite despair and discouragement, even despite his own human and weak will. You can find the same determination among the testimonies of the Holocaust. The author is in a compulsory situation. It is not up to him

to chose but he is chosen himself, he is called.

### **Writing as a liturgy of the memory**

The sheets of paper, covered with texts, can resist a death inflicted on a mass scale and may overcome the destructive power of time. They are like monuments made out of words, in which immortal messages have been sculpted like in granite. They are like a sanctuary preserving and immortalising the names of victims. The registration of sufferings is an obligation for the descendants. Memory is a key-word for that strategy of duty. And the action of writing in and at itself becomes a liturgy of the memory.

An essay by Rachel Auerbach entitled *"Izkor"* of 1943 has exactly this liturgical form of celebrating a memory. The essay was written in November 1943. Its title means in Hebrew *"You will remember"* and it is a begging prayer said four times a year for the blessed memory of all the deceased of a family. These days are: the last day of the Pesah, the Shavout, Shemini Aceret (the end of the feast of Tents) and Jom Kippur. All the deceased are named during the prayer.

The essay starts with a description of flood which is a great metaphor for the deportation of the Warsaw Jews, of which only a mute scream and silence have remained. Then we can find a ceremony of bewitching, casting a spell on memory, inscribed into excerpts taken from the Psalm 137: *"If I forget those I had seen may me myself be forgotten and my name damned"*.

The Izkor prayer itself is a chain of acclamations of the particular groups or classes of the Jewish nation. In such a group portrait of the nation you can find little children, boys and girls, young people, pious Jews, rabbis and teachers, craftsmen, grandmas and grandpas, scientists, artists, musicians, painters, professors and tailors, watchmakers and doctors, poor men from dark town lanes and petty thieves, smugglers and street tradesmen, beggars and starving displaced people. They all pass in front of our eyes.

Rachel Auerbach ends her prayer commemoration with a declaration to say continuously this rite of memory, listing names of the murdered nation. This declaration becomes a call, addressed to all of us at the same time.

## **Writing - memory - salvation**

We are now at the climax of our consideration. The reading of the Holocaust testimonies has introduced us in the dimension of tradition, on which the decision to write itself was founded and which to a great extent modelled the language of description. And if now the voice of Rachel Auerbach's prayer is reaching us, calling for cherishing the memory, it is exactly due to the phenomenon of persisting in defiance of death and destruction, regardless of the distance in time and space. The voice coming to us from the very bottom of the destruction reveals a great mystery, around which we are circulating in our reflection. Memory is the key to this mystery.

Classic metaphors of memory describe it as a registration - a waxed plate preserving an inscription (Plato, Cicero). The action of writing down is connected already at its beginning with providing a confirmation to something volatile and transitory, - a transfer of our traces to the posterity.

The memory is one of the foundation of Judaism. The faith of the Jews is not based upon theological dogmas but upon the memory. History is a scene for the covenant with God. Judas Halevi, a medieval poet and philosopher, stresses that the Decalogue does not begin with a statement, or a dogma but with a reminder *"I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery"* (Ex 20,2). A Jew reasserts his faith by continuously remembering events in which his ancestors took part. We can find a warning in the Book of Deuteronomy: *"Only be careful and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen..."* (Deut 4,9).

An impulse of writing down to preserve, interpret or hand over a sense of experienced events is based upon an ancient tradition. Writing down used to become an opposition against the destruction, an act of faith in a better future, an act of hope that coming generations would learn, understand, evaluate and compensate.

The pages of the dairies, memoirs or relations made by the witnesses of the Extermination demand to be read. In return the act of reading enables the text to speak, undertakes and revives the heritage of the memory. Writing can

save the memory of existence i.e. the existence itself.

## **Handing over the heritage of the Holocaust - traps and dangers**

If we understand the tradition as a space of dialogue - through texts - on the basis of the memory - so the dialogue about the heritage of the Holocaust has been exposed to special shocks and dangers. An optimistic conviction of René Casin seems to be far from real. So let's sketch briefly those dangers which await such dialogue.

### **Barriers for the dialogue**

First, it is difficult to open the dialogue because even those texts which survived hardly reached their readers. The history of discovering the manuscripts buried by Jews of the Auschwitz Sonderkommando in ashes is symbolic. They could not be searched immediately after the war because there was a Soviet camp for German war prisoners in Brzezinka (Birkenau). When the Auschwitz Museum was created, the digging that had already started had to be stopped because there was too much excitement among the "gold-diggers" prowling the surrounding region. So, the manuscripts were taken out and saved only in 1961 - although if the place where they were hidden was well known from the beginning, thanks to rescued witnesses. The last manuscript was found by chance in the late fall of 1980 when a group of school boys planted trees around the crematory in Birkenau.

Second, the dialogue is embroiled in contradictions resulting from a fundamental question about the possibility to express an experience of Extermination. An imperative to say a truth to the world about the Holocaust (that phrase "You should know") runs into a resistance, resulting from a conviction that such truth can not be expressed as "no words can express it". And the world would not be able to understand it anyway.

Third, the roles in that dialogue are not well suited. Witnesses, rooted in the tradition, believe in the value of a written testimony. According to them, it is not only a warning and a lesson for future generations but it can also save a sense of victims' and witnesses' existence. However, the addressees of the testimony, who declare a great crisis of the art of wording after Auschwitz, stating that

language cannot express the inexpressible sense of the Extermination.

## **Multiple memory**

The memory of the Holocaust has many dimensions. There is a common memory and an individual one. There is the memory of victims, witnesses and of executioners. There is the memory of those who encountered help, care or friendship and the memory of those who were pushed away, betrayed, sold. There is the memory of suffering and the memory of hate. There is the memory of humiliation, shame, hopelessness and stupefaction. There is the memory of heroic resistance and struggle, and the memory of resignation and defeat.

We should also take into consideration all those testimonies which will never reach us any more. The suffocated voice of all those, whose names did not last and who did not preserve any traces of their existence.

The deposit of the memory is scattered, hardly accessible and very often lost forever. The message of the memory is exposed to many dangers. It can be deformed on different ways and even completely blocked.

## **Oblivion**

The memory which is a foundation of tradition does create an identity. Oblivion means a betrayal of grandfathers and fathers and a breaking of the bond. As a result it sentences us to non-existence.

What happens when the Holocaust becomes an area of oblivion? Is the message of the Holocaust really remembered in the contemporary world? When looking upon today's wars and slaughters, ethnic purges, living skeletons behind barbed wires in camps and upon mass graves, we must come to a conclusion that the world knows nothing, remembers nothing.

Henryk Grynberg, a child of the Holocaust and one of the most persistent of the Holocaust writers-witnesses, states that Holocaust does not teach us anything new or delivers a breakthrough. *"Great evil, and the Holocaust was an expression of it, can teach us that there are values, without which the human world can not exist, that there are some bans which should not be broken if you want to remain a man. And we know about it for some thousand years"* - says

Grynberg. Is this knowledge covered by oblivion?

The memory of the Holocaust can become an arena for lies and manipulation. The expression "Auschwitz-Lüge" describes the activity of false historians, suggesting that gas chambers and crematoria never existed.

### **Wounds of the memory and the memory of wounds**

The horror of the Holocaust cannot be understood, cannot be expressed. However, this is exactly an experience which demands an extremely powerful expression. It is an expression of pain and suffering, as well as of loneliness, desolation, of abandonment, of being sentenced to non existence and to vanishing without any trace. That is why the struggle for memory becomes even more important than the struggle for life, it is a memory of the very bottom of hell, a memory of excruciating and never healing wounds.

So, the memory of the Holocaust is a memory of wounds and at the same time it is wounded itself. It is wounded, since it is torn between the possible and the impossible, between the human and the inhuman. The absurdity of the mass extermination cannot be understood, however it should be remembered, i. e. we should hand it over to posterity and furnish them with that terrible knowledge.

However, how can a normal human memory grasp the heritage of the Holocaust? Such wounded memory of the Holocaust can become a nourishment for diseases and fears, which worry the contemporary world, which worry ourselves. Sometimes we want to nourish our own prejudices with the message of the Holocaust in order to preserve comfortable stereotypes. For example, this is the source for the competition of martyrdom between Poles and Jews which is going on since the War. Which of the two nations was persecuted more and suffered more? We can find origins of some attempts within the Polish historic publications submitting to an ideology to purge the Holocaust of Jews, to purge Auschwitz of the Jews. The question is whether the Jews were just only one of many nations murdered in Auschwitz. That is also instrumental in the case for understanding of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

The Jewish wound has its sources in experiencing indifference and betrayal by Poles, in the memory of those who tracked and blackmailed Jews for money. Such thinking is transferring itself into stereotypes pretending that a Pole suck his anti-Semitism with his mother's milk, or the stereotype of Poland as the biggest Jewish graveyard - a graveyard and nothing else.

The Polish wound has its sources in the experiences of the September of 1939 and the behaviour of Jews in the Polish territory, when occupied by the Red Army. The experience of installing the communist regime in Poland supported the common conviction about a union between the Jews and communism. Such thinking finds its expression in the stereotype of a "Jewish-commune" and of "Jew-ubek" (Jews as officers for the Soviet secret political police, which occupied Poland and persecuted Poles).

### **We should face the challenge**

The heritage of the Holocaust is extremely difficult to accept. It cannot be completely judged and understood. It is a moral and a theological scandal. The horror of this heritage may be perceived of as an overwhelming burden which can justify our helplessness to some extent. It frees us from taking the risk of understanding, and it provokes to create different self-tranquillising therapies.

Zygmunt Bauman, in his book entitled *Modernity and Extermination*, criticises the tendency in the Holocaust research, which focuses on creating defence mechanisms rather than on searching for the essence of this phenomenon. The thesis, that the Holocaust was a terrible aberration and a complete break of any continuity within culture and civilisation, is only the historians' wishful thinking. Rather, the Holocaust seems to be a fruit of modernity. The dark side of modern civilisation – not fully recognised and located beyond the horizon of our knowledge – is still presents a real danger. Neither anniversary celebrations, nor warnings against the repetition of the tragedy may effectively oppose it.

Condemnation of the evil by putting ourselves outside its range, and facing the challenge by trying to respond to the evil, are two different things. *"The most horrible about the Holocaust is not the presumption that it could happen to us*

*as well, but that it could be done by us"*  
- says Bauman.

### **A grain buried in ashes**

Let's come back to the symbolism of the word-grain, the symbolism of sown manuscripts, put into the ground with the hope that they would bring an abundant harvest. The collaborators of the Warsaw Ghetto Archives buried them with such a kind of hope in boxes full of documents and manuscripts. With the same hope, prisoners of the Sonderkommando in Birkenau, who worked in the crematory, hid their manuscripts in glasses, German army water flasks, mess kits, etc. and buried them in human ashes. The holes, where the ashes from the crematory furnaces were thrown, seemed the safest places to them. The history of the exterminated nation was hidden inside its own ashes. There is an incessant request, a kind of a litany, in those manuscripts:

*"Dear finder, look everywhere, in each piece of ground (...) look carefully and you will find a lot (...) Look for a hidden bigger material (...) Look over there in the holes (...) Keep on looking! You will surely find more!"*

Ladies and gentlemen, you walked on the paths of Auschwitz-Birkenau yesterday. Please remember the manuscripts buried by the prisoners of the Sonderkommando. The grain taken out of the crematory like it was taken from the ruins of the Egyptian pyramid should not be lost in all this chaos and noise. Today, we should be courageous enough to listen to this request that is written down on shreds of paper. We should be courageous enough to respond to that hope, buried as a grain in human ashes. ■

Daniel Susanto

## ***Family Life in Indonesia***

### ***Between Tradition and Change***

Indonesia is a developing country in Southeast Asia which has not less than 13,667 islands. The land area of Indonesia covers about 735,000 square miles, or about 5.3 times as large as Germany or 6 times as large as Poland. The total land and sea area of Indonesia amounts to nearly 4 million square miles.

As a heavily populated country, at this time Indonesia has approximately 190 million people. They are very heterogeneous. There are more than 300 different ethnic groups and more than 50 languages spoken. Besides, the Chinese, the Arabs, the Indians, and the Eurasians live in Indonesia; and some of them have lived in Indonesia for many generations. The majority of the population, approximately 88%, are Muslims. Christians, Catholics and Protestants, are approximately 9% of the population. The rest are Hindus, Buddhists, etc.

Although Indonesian people are heterogeneous and diverse, they are also a unity. They have a national motto "*bhinneka tunggal ika*", that means: various, yet one; diverse, but united. As a member of an ethnic group, an Indonesian has a certain sub-culture and region language. However, as Indonesian, he or she lives in the Indonesian culture, speaks the national language, "*bahasa Indonesia*", and holds the country's national ideology, "*Pancasila*".

For Indonesians, *Pancasila* is very important, because the unity and the diversity of Indonesia are manifested, sustained and guarded by *Pancasila*. This country's national ideology consists of five basic principles, i.e.: (1) One Lordship, (2) Just and Civilised Humanity, (3) Unity of Indonesia, (4) Peoplehood which is Guarded by the Spirit of Wisdom in Deliberation/ Representation, (5) Social Justice.

#### ***Tradition and change***

Since a long time ago, people in Indonesia have had their own tradition and culture. They keep their ethnic-group tradition as well as their national one. People living in the villages and elderly people often keep their tradition more strictly than people living in the big cities and young people.

Although people in Indonesia keep their own tradition, it does not mean that there are no changes in Indonesia. The influences from abroad coming to Indonesia have changed Indonesian people in a certain sense. The Indian culture, Islam, and the western culture have influenced people in Indonesia.

A long time ago, the Indian culture, through Hinduism, came to Indonesia and influenced people in Indonesia, especially the upper class. In the 13th century, through traders from Gujarat, Islam came to Indonesia and has influenced the majority of the Indonesian people. Islam was quickly absorbed by the mass. Several hundred years ago, the western culture came to Indonesia through the coming of the Portuguese, Spanish, English, and Dutch. Although the Dutch colonised Indonesia for approximately 350 years, the influence of western culture was mostly limited to externals.

At this time, modernisation, globalisation, and modern information and communication have influenced people in the world, including in Indonesia. This causes changes in many aspects, including in family life in Indonesia. The national development program of Indonesia also facilitates the change. Of course, this change is accepted as long as it does not damage the Indonesian culture.

#### ***Marriage***<sup>1</sup>

Marriage is an important event for Indonesian people. According to the Javanese<sup>2</sup> tradition, to marry and to become parents are the facts of nature and the

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## pastoral care and counselling in the tension between tradition and change

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*Rev. Daniel Susanto,  
Pastor and doctoral student, Indonesia*

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obligation to the order of life. Not to live up to this task is considered strange and unjavanese. For the Javanese, it is reprehensible for a man not to marry; for a woman it is even worse and considered to be a shame (*isin*) for the family.

This is a confession of a young woman to Niels Mulder: "I have to marry in order not to feel *isin*. Whatever marriage brings, I do not know, but for a woman self-respect is to be married and most males do not appreciate an advanced education. I want to finish my studies but having studied may prove to be an obstacle in finding a husband. They do not want us at the same level as they are; they still want to be served by their wives. Yet I hope to meet a modern-minded man who will respect me, who will see me as his partner in terms of equality".<sup>3</sup> This young woman was may be living in a traditional society and she wanted to be free from the tradition.

Traditionally, marriage is an act not only between two persons, but also between two families. Formerly, parents made the marital decisions for their children. A lot of parents chose a spouse for them. However, at this time, this tradition is almost gone. There is a freedom for young people to choose their spouse.

This is the result of the research of Diana L. Wolf in a rural area in Central Java in 1986. Parents of married women were asked: "In Java, who usually chooses a daughter's husband: parents, the daughter, or other people?" Twelve of the nineteen parents responding felt that daughters should choose their husbands, while two felt that it depended upon the child - some daughters could choose on their own and others would need more help from parents. Only two parents felt that daughters should be matched by parents, and three parents believed that parents and daughters together should make the decision.<sup>4</sup>

Usually Indonesian people make a wedding feast when their son or daughter marry. The religious ceremony is very important up to now. Besides, some traditional ceremonies are also done.

### **The relationship between parents and children**<sup>5</sup>

Traditionally, the relationship between parents and children is based on the vertical relationship pattern. In this pattern, parents are "paternalistic" in

the sense that their guidance should be accepted by children without discussion. In the Javanese tradition, parents are ritually and morally superior to their children. Children are dependent on their parents not only in material care but also in forgiveness and blessing. In this tradition, children should honour and respect (*ngajeni*) their parents. Ritually, children demonstrate their honour and dependence on parental blessing at the occasion of "Lebaran", at the end of the fasting month of Muslims.

The obligation to honour parents is supported by the widespread belief that "parents send punishment" (*walat*) irrespective of their personal will. Such retribution follows from the disturbance of their feeling and is brought about by their children's criticism and disobedience, or other actions that cause shame to them, such as arrogance and obstinacy. If the children's opposition is strong enough, they may be thought of as sinful and rebellious (*duraka*). Such children may be repudiated, no longer being acknowledged as belonging to the family.

This is a confession of a modern middle-forty man to Niels Mulder: "A few years ago, when my father died, I had to prepare his body for burial. It was then that I realized that it was the first time in my life that I touched his head and I felt rather shocked because of it. He was a real old-fashioned Javanese father, somewhat aloof and at a distance from his children, whom we awed and deeply respected. But now all this has changed; in my family my wife and I are close to our children; they address us in Indonesian, I play and talk with them, and all of us are really intimate."<sup>6</sup> This confession shows an example of change which has happened in the family life in Indonesia, especially for educated people who are living in the big cities.

A university lecturer in Yogyakarta also confessed to Niels Mulder: "All of us admire my father and respect him; all children, even the youngest, address him in *krama* (respectful form of language). When I speak to my mother I also use *krama* such as do my two eldest younger siblings; the others speak *ngoko* (jovial language) with mother. Personally I do not care; my children speak *ngoko* with me, although they should address their grandparents in *krama*. Well, things have changed".<sup>7</sup> According to this man, his relationship with his children was intimate and relaxed, while he, as father, should be

the protector of their welfare and spiritual development.

A university graduate woman confessed: "At home our relationship with the children is very different from my relationship with my parents; we are close together, more open, and far less authoritarian. We never hit the children, but try to develop mutual trust and their right initiative. They address their father in *ngoko*, but since I am their stepmother they address me in polite language (*krama*)".<sup>8</sup>

Nowadays, many middle class and educated parents want to break the hierarchical distance that existed between themselves and their children. They like to have a closer relationship to each other. On the contrary, children dare to express their opinions and sometimes to oppose their parents.

Niels Mulder wrote a case of his Indonesian friend in Jakarta who is not satisfied to his parents and opposes them openly. This man is a highly educated man who knows the world, a descendant of a well-known '*priyayi*' family whose father held high positions in colonial days. To him, his father had always been a distant person whom he did not much appreciate. When he was young, he did not experience much family life. He was brought up to feel himself a member of the widespread extended family and at the age of five he was given into the care of a Dutch family for the sake of his education. When the war came to Indonesia, he came back "home", doing his middle school in Surabaya where he became infused with nationalist ideas. All the time, however, his parents remained staunch supporters of the Dutch and could not understand the sign of time. In his opinion, the experience of a warm family life was a rare occurrence in the circles of his birth and he sees it as his ideal to develop more spontaneous and intimate relationship among the members of his family than he could experience in his youth. For a long time he remained unmarried, refusing to consider the well-born marriage partners his parents suggested. When he finally decided to settle down, he married a "Batak" girl which seemed to highlight the rupture between him and his parents. It was only upon his having children that a measure of normal relationship was re-established. Emotionally, however, he rejects his milieu of origin and has developed an aversion of its cultural manifestations. Even though his mother is still alive, he refuses to visit the grave of his father.<sup>9</sup>



Of course, not all of the Indonesian people do as that man. A lot of them still adapt to the tension between tradition and the demands of modernity more gracefully.

### **The role of pastoral care and counselling**

The role of pastoral care and counselling in family life, especially in the process of change, from traditional to modern life, is very important. At this period, people need to be helped to develop their own identity and to act in a way which is suitable with the situation. In this matter, the function of pastoral care as guidance is important. In relation to marriage, young people can face two main problems. First, if they have a freedom to choose their spouse, sometimes they are not ready to do it, yet. In this case, the role of guidance and pre-marital counselling is very important. Second, if the parents still keep the traditional value and they do not agree with the spouse chosen by their children, conflict can happen. If this happens, the function of pastoral

care as guidance and reconciling is very important.

Tension and conflict between parents and children can also be happening in the family, especially if they have opposite perspectives and opinions. Although at this time parents want to break the hierarchical distance, they often still keep some traditional values while their children keep the modern ones. In this case, pastoral care and counselling is needed; and the function of pastoral care as guidance and reconciling is important.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> This part is based on the results of the research of Niels Mulder, an anthropologist in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in 1979. See: Niels Mulder, *Individual And Society in Java: A Cultural Analysis*, Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> The Javanese is the biggest ethnic group in Indonesia. In 1984, the Javanese was about 47% of the total popula-

tion in Indonesia.

<sup>3</sup> Mulder, op. cit., p.33.

<sup>4</sup> Diane L. Wolf, "Industrialization and the Family: Women workers as mediators of family change and economic change in Java", in *Women and Mediation in Indonesia*, ed. Sita van Bemmelen et al., Leiden: KITLV Press, 1992, p.102.

<sup>5</sup> This part is also based on the result of the research of Niels Mulder.

<sup>6</sup> Niels Mulder, op.cit., p.78-79.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.81-82.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.83-84.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.79. ■

**George I. Euling**

## **The Impact of Westernisation and Commerce on the Family Values in Papua New Guinea**

This paper is written from a pastoral perspective on the impact of the Western culture and commerce upon the traditions and family values in urban Papua New Guinea. It also provides the pastoral problems that are faced by Church workers in counselling situations.

But first, some general information about the country is necessary:

### **Geographical features**

Papua New Guinea (PNG as it is called in short) is a very fascinating country, probably the most fascinating country in

all of the South Pacific basin. Within the country there are about 800 different languages (as recently assessed). With its diverse cultures and traditions - the way of life that varies from tribe to tribe and from the many ethnic groupings - Papua New Guinea stands to lose immense cultural wealth and riches with the imposition of the Western influence. Papua New Guinea has the largest land mass of approximately 90% of total land mass (960,000 square kilometres) of the entire Melanesian group of countries, it has a population of four million people. A country that is so rich in natural resources (with large deposits of copper, gold, oil, and forestry, fisheries, coffee and other cash crops) is the envy of many countries of the world. PNG

strives so hard to hold together the different ethnic groups for the purpose of national unity.

### **Colonial Administrators**

The country's government is democratically elected with 109 members representing the people in the national parliament. The political system is a "synthesis of traditional democratic structures, for an example clan-based common ownership of land, and modern democratic institutions, such as a federally-structured parliamentary system." Papua New Guinea was colonised by two countries in Europe; the Germans had under their administration the northern part and the islands of the

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territory which is called New Guinea, whilst the British administered the southern region - the Papuan Region. The British handed their part of the colony to Australia in 1902 followed by the German counterparts to the same administration in 1919. Papua New Guinea gained its independence from Australia in 1975 without any blood bath.

It was a ceremonial lowering of one flag and the raising of the other. On the 15th of September 1975 a baby began a political walk on its own. The reins were handed to Papua New Guineans.

There were mixed feelings by many people, as to its timing then. The western part of the country was managed by the Dutch from 1828 - 1962. What we know of today as Irian Jaya is now part of Indonesia. It became an integral part of the Republic of Indonesia in 1963.

Papua New Guinea is a tropical country with its highlands displaying a sub tropical climate with alpine mountains and snow-capped peaks. The coastal and the island regions boast of some of the worlds best diving and fishing spots. The country also boasts of its position as the second largest habitat of diverse flora and fauna in the world.

The highly fertile and rich environment made it possible for the people in the past to live by gathering, hunting and fishing. Today most Papua New Guineans concentrated mostly on root crop cultivation which puts them on a different board than the Australian Aborigines, who lived to the South of them, who still are hunters and gatherers and the Indonesians to the West who are primarily rice cultivators. They would rotate taro, kaukau, banana, and other root crops all year around. Rice and processed fish from Japan would form the main staple in any family home. (More on the diet later on).

### **Brief look into the country**

Approximately 80% of people live in the rural areas of the country. Rural areas in Papua New Guinea are unlike the rural in Europe. Rural areas in PNG would scarcely have adequate health, educational and power facilities. Death from preventable diseases like malaria, measles etc. would be a normal occurrence. In the midst of immense wealth Papua New Guineans struggle to understand why essential services are not reaching them. The State owns only 3% of the total land in PNG. The majority of land of 97% is culturally owned.

Investor confidence by foreign developers is somewhat dampened by land compensation demands by land owners. Some times such land compensation would run into (*not millions but billions*) in US \$. On many occasions compensation came about through ill planning of fair and adequate environmental facilities and monitoring systems by the State, independently from the developers (who are exploiters of natural resources but are not environmentally conscious). Standards of environmental checks would fall below western standards. The failure of the State to realise the importance of the safe guarding of flora and fauna and the eco-marine life has brought the country to its knees. The civil disturbance in Bougainville has seen thousands of people killed. In the last few weeks eleven soldiers were killed in one encounter with the land owner turned rebels.

Bougainville copper which is owned by CRA - Australia, abandoned its mining activities in Bougainville because it could not possibly pay US\$ 5 billion (current value) as compensation for the environmental damage to the land owners. And principally due to threats on the lives of the employees by the rebels. Obviously no Government or a corporate investor would pay that type of money anywhere. The land owners then resort to violence.

Ok Tedi Mining Limited through its management Company BHP Limited had to fight an expensive court battle in Australia over river pollution of the 1,500 kilometres of the Fly river. The A\$2 billion was abandoned in place of an expensive out of court settlement. The Government then came to the aid of the mining company by legislating against the right of the land owners to take the Company to an overseas Court.

Both cases almost sank the country.

Papua New Guinea was to use its vast natural resources as the means of obtaining necessary revenue for financing developments. In order to do this, the country handed over the exploitation of the natural resources to foreign companies, who would come in with capital and technology. The Country would then earn portions of revenue from exports and employ the 'yields' for national development. Nationals, and particularly land owners would enter into businesses that spun off from these large projects. The Bougainville situation saw the country devalue the na-

tions' currency and its subsequent float in late 1994. This has been the source of the troubles of a young rich and yet poor nation in the South Pacific.

### **Land rights and position of land owners**

While approximately 97% of the total land mass in Papua New Guinea is customary owned, legally all resources that are on or within the land are owned the State. But the actual position is not so. The State has difficulty enforcing that legal requirement for development purposes. This is due to the fact that land to a Melanesian is a birthright and can not be taken away for development purposes without lengthy consultation and dialogue between the State, the developers and the land owners. The roots of the Melanesian people can easily be identified through land ownership. And in addition to this, the cultural background conflicts with westernisation. The constitution of the country was prepared with a strong Australian presence. Papua New Guineans who helped with the drafting of the constitution were mostly educated in the west or were educated by westerners. Because of the influence of westernisation through the constitution most Papua New Guineans would find it impossible to express their culture in a constitution prior to the experience of governing the country. This has brought added violence in the country

*The Pastoral Requirements: A Church worker would normally find himself in a dilemma between the land owners who demanded that land compensation is inadequate and the State and the developer who both say otherwise.*

**L**et me now speak about the impact of Westernisation and commerce on traditional and family values in PNG.

### **The loss of identity**

The advent of the unavoidable western culture through education and commerce, and the fast growing urbanisation in PNG has caught the unsuspecting people off guard. In some parts of the country, the social groups, values and behaviour norms have not just been weakened, they are totally destroyed. Many people have lost a sense of identity. They do not have an aim and are uncertain of what is right and wrong.

This comes about when traditional social mechanisms, that have been in place for generations, are destroyed gradually. Traditional roles and relationships that guide members of communities are forgotten in the introduction of newer items and ways of life. Consumerism, a concept that preaches the message that '*the more products one can have the happier he becomes*', is strangling many communities in PNG. This has created tensions and has left the people powerless to counteract them. This would be true for people who live in the urban areas but is now generally true for people in the rural areas as well. This is because of the increasing number of large mining, petroleum and forestry developments that are being undertaken right across the rural areas of the country.

Certainly the majority of people who live in villages in the rural areas, (whose lives would be governed by strict traditional codes of conducts) are increasingly threatened by those that have returned from the towns, or by the large developments that are taking place on their lands. These developments bring direct challenges to the traditional values and norms. Most people would take to drinking, gambling or aggression as a way to fill the void of not having to identify oneself with a sense of roots. Many cultures in Papua New Guinea have a high traditional value on interpersonal relationships. This enhances personal growth and development. Achievement of status in a community brings about collective joy and honour to all members of the society. Independence and personal success is not the traditional way. In many cases, this calls for outright rejection of one from a traditional setting or village.

*The pastoral problems that are faced by Church workers are:*

*The village Church worker does not have the training and is not familiar with an imposing world view; nor does he understand the processes and the forces that disrupt the existing social roles and relationships that he is so familiar with. He too is caught up by the tension in a group and many times over would resort to violence against the State or a developer instead of seeking an answer. For the answer is not so much a question of personal morality. If this was the case he would have an answer. But the answer lies in the social and economic structures that the village Church worker does not have the remotest clue about. Violence against the*

*State can be described as a form of rebellion against the authority for its failure to create, and to facilitate, an educational program that would seek to answer the question of "What is happening".*

### **Marriage and family**

The effects of urbanisation are clearly seen and often are felt very strongly in the areas of marriage and family life.

In Papua New Guinea, and this is also true in other Melanesian countries, traditional life is characterised by separation of sexes. Physical and emotional needs are in most cases met by the same sexes. In the rural setting, men and women would live quite separately from each other. The men would live in 'man houses' while the wives, and children would live together in the family houses. Men would generally meet their wives only for procreation purposes.

The pattern is increasingly dying away as husbands and wives have to live together under one roof and even sleep in the same bed, particularly in the urban place. "Both as a result of closer physical proximity and because they are somewhat removed from the rural society and its expectation regarding the behaviour of spouses, husbands and wives have the opportunity to develop a closer relationship as friends and companions. While some urban couples have achieved this most are still engaged in a difficult process of adjustment."

The roles of the spouses have also changed quite dramatically. In the traditional setting, men would clear dense tropical rain forest for gardening. They would also take care of the heavy work. Planting of crops generally would be done by both parties. The role of the women is to nurture and harvest the crops. The yield would be seen as collective effort, and joy and satisfaction is enjoyed by both parties. Both parties see themselves as contributing equally to the needs of the family. The wife would be seen as the main provider. When the wife works regularly she sustains the family.

In the advent of "development" in an urban setting, reliance is not so much on gardening but on a fortnightly salary. In most cases the roles have changed, where the wife loses her role as a family provider. The husband alone earns a wage.

There are a number of problems that arise from this, as Brian Schwarz said:

a. "The wife suffers from loss of self esteem at not being able to contribute to the support of the family;

b. The husband who is the sole provider may feel resentment toward his wife who is now an economic burden, rather than an asset.

c. If, as is becoming common among the well-educated, both husband and the wife earn an income, then the wife is economically independent of her husband. She is not bound to him by her need of him; she can, if she so desires, manage alone. This situation can also be a source of tension. The husband may feel threatened by a wife who can rival or even surpass his earning capacity; he may feel insecure because she is not in some way dependent upon him and thus more firmly tied to him."

One of the major problems that affects marriages in the urban place (where family units are more independent, unlike the rural where family units are inter-dependent upon each other and where the welfare of each family lies in the hands of other members of the extended family and the village) is the heavy drinking habits that most men in the urban environment have taken to.

Employed men would drink all the money and come back home with empty pockets, and nothing for the family. In most cases, if not all, wives would take the children away from the husband and leave with them to her relatives. They would be separated from their husbands for long periods of time, in most cases the ultimate penalty of divorce would happen. Such a cost to the children would be unbearable.

The Courts are also alarmed at the increasing number of deaths due to fights between husbands and wives from alcohol related problems. Husbands are known to have died from stab wounds when the wives have defended themselves from their abusing husbands. In most cases much to the sympathy of the Courts the wives are put in jail for manslaughter. Husbands have been known also to have beaten their wives to death through alcohol related fights.

Last week my neighbour cut his wife's shoulder, almost cutting through the shoulder bones. At the same time he hit another woman who lodges with them with a heavy piece of timber at the side of her rib cage. He was lucky not to have broken any bones. He was 'drunk when he did that', was an excuse he gave to some one when he was asked to explain himself

There are a number of Pastoral problems that are faced by church workers when it comes to counselling:

a. Some times it is very hard, because of the language difficulties. Some times the 'trade language of pidgin' is used but many people who are caught in such a situation would be those whose comprehension of the language is very limited. More often than not, people will misunderstand each other due to the limited understanding of the language,

b. Other times, the affected wives or women, would be hesitant to talk to the church workers of their problems due to the differences in age particularly, and largely also because of the differences in the world view ( an educated church worker and an illiterate wife or vice versa) it makes it difficult to meet the pastoral needs of those who are in need.

c. Where the Church worker is old and his membership are fairly well educated, he finds that he would not be able to relate to them.

d. The cultural context would not permit the Church workers (in the case of male workers) to counsel women.

e. In the past, people lived together (village living). The problems were easily identified and talked about. Every body knew about the problems, because they lived together, the church workers' task was to bring the Christian response to the known problem. People never needed to learn how to talk about their problems to a stranger (church worker). Now because people have become independent from each other (urban living), and the problems are kept private, the church worker has two difficulties: he has to find what the problems are, and has to get them to speak about them; then he must bring a Christian response.

Sometimes both the husband and wife would not want the church workers to even inquire as to their health - let alone wife bashing through alcohol abuse.

### **Gambling in family life**

The introduction of gambling in the country has yet again added to the suffocating trend upon the live of the marginalised in the urban place. The Government introduced the gambling business under the gamings act (among other commercial reasons,) as a revenue raising measure. Much to the regrets of the Government many people who saved money under tremendous and tedious hardships, have thrown it all away in

poker machines. A story is told of a Woman in the highlands town of Goroka who used up all her savings in just an hour of play. She saved A\$ 2,000 over years of growing and selling vegetables to the town market. She was saving that money for her children's school fees. Much to her regrets, she could not take the money back. She lost it all.

### **The impact of the electronic and print media upon the family life**

There is now a gradual decrease (but at a very fast rate) of parental authority. In the past parental authority was very important toward the nurturing and the general welfare of the children. Magazines, videos, and TV programs have altered the power of parental authority. Children are turned to believe what is said or read through the print and the electronic media more so than to believe their parents.

I have known of men who wanted to divorce their wives and take on other wives, or have taken on two wives, because their wives would not model after women that are seen in movies and magazines.

The print and electronic media have also caused many marital problems as well. Many marriage break up each year due to the telecasting of the popular Australian rugby games. The break-ups came about when husbands and wives supported opposing teams. When one team wins and the other loses, there will be very heated and emotional fights over that between husbands and wives.

### **Eating habits in the family life**

In the past people lived on vegetables and occasionally would have protein as a complement to their vegetables. Such meat or fish would either be hunted or caught and would make up the diet of the people. The people were free from heart and kidney diseases. As the diet changes more and more people are living off junk foods, sicknesses and diseases that were never known in the past to be killers are attacking both young and old alike, because they are not careful about what they eat. Lamb flaps dipped in oil and fried on flat metal slabs is a favourite meal to many people in PNG. Lamb flaps, declared not good for human consumption because of the high fat content of 30%, are banned in Australia. The consumer bureau affairs department is in the process of banning it from PNG.

I have had to counsel a patient who was dying because of kidney failure. The doctors told me that the disease was caused by a non control diet.

People who live in the coast would settle for rice and canned fish for their meal instead of fishing for fish. I have had difficulties, convincing people we set up in a large vegetable farm not to sell all the vegetables, but to eat some and sell some. The people have had the tendency to sell the vegetables, so that they earn money to buy rice. Similarly people in the rural areas would go fishing and would sell their catch for money, so that they would buy a can of fish produced by the Japanese. To many Papua New Guineans, death caused by poor eating habits, with poor dieting procedures would not be seen as purely a health problem. Sorcery and the spirits of ancestors would be suspected as probable causes of death.

*The pastoral difficulties are:*

a. *The church worker finds difficulty in explaining to the bereaved families that such death is caused by irresponsible and poor dieting. Many killer sicknesses and diseases that are associated with poor eating habits are introduced into the country by the advent of the western culture and commerce and trade.*

b. *A young church worker who would be regarded as having no knowledge at all on how life is lived in traditional Melanesia, will be seen as lacking in both wisdom and insight into questions of death. He would not be trusted in any way at all, and would not be taken into any confidences. This is because traditionally the elders in the village were healers, even though infant and child mortality was very high while life expectancy was very low. The advent of the modern health care was normally viewed with suspicion.*

### **Added causes of divorce**

Divorce and family break-ups is becoming a real concern in PNG, as the traditional mechanisms that hold family units together are breaking down. Marriages in the past were held together by devotion and commitment to the welfare of not just the immediate family, but the village as a whole. Success and prosperity and good living in a village would depend, among other requirements, on how spouses conduct their marital responsibilities.

Polygamy which is a practice in the highlands for generations is on an in-

crease, right around PNG, as many young men become educated and are earning a wage. The Courts are also alarmed at the rate of killing by wives of their husbands or wives upon other wives. In traditional Melanesia, the wives would live together humbly, as their sole purpose is to serve the husband in accumulating wealth. In modern PNG today, wives fight over wealth from the husband.

*The Pastoral difficulty here is that, when people get married to more than one wife they just turn their backs on religion. No amount of counselling would help.*

The difficulty is made bigger by the fact that many parliamentarians have taken on more than one wife. The Governor General has more than two wives. Polygamy has now become a cultural norm and an accepted way of life. There is an act of parliament on bigamy, but this law like many other laws in PNG are not enforced. Status and money in the pockets are two factors that attract additional wives to men. ■

**Charles K. Konadu**

## ***The Effect of Social Change on the Matrilineal System of the Ashantis of Ghana***

**P**resently I live and work in Accra, the capital of Ghana, some 300 km from my home town in Ashanti. I live together with my wife and three children. In the home I was raised up my mother with her children lived together with the following people: Mother, two sisters and their children, mother's sister with daughter and children. My father lived some 100 meters away with the following people: mother, two brothers, two wives who stayed in their respective homes with their children. My father died a pagan while my mother became a Christian when I was 15 years old. I am the 8th child of the 9 children of my mother. My father had 15 children. None of my parents had formal school education.

Presently, none of my mother and the sisters are living together. Two are living separately with their respective daughter in Kumasi, the capital city of Ashanti. The other one is with the daughter in USA. None of my siblings are living together. At my village home now, only one of my cousins is living with her children.

What is written above is not unique about where I come from. It is a fraction of the story of the Ashanti people. What follows is a bit more of the Ashantis and the changes going on in their matrilineal descent system.

### ***The Ashantis of Ghana***

Ashanti is one of the 10 political regions of Ghana. Ghana is situated on the West Coast of Africa with a population (according to UNFPA'S Population Card, in October 1996) of 18.06 million and occupies a land mass of 238,000 sq. km. Ashanti occupies the central por-

tion of Ghana with a land mass of 25,123 sq. km. The population of Ashanti in 1984 was 2.1 million. Projected to 1996, it is approximately 3.2 million.

Formerly known as the Gold Coast, Ghana obtained its independence from the British in 1957 as the first black Sub-Sahara African country to attain an independent status. Ghana became a republic in July 1960. The country has gone through a series of military rule. A multi-party democracy was established in January 1993 as the 4th Republic of Ghana since 1960.

In the book, *Asante and its Neighbours 1700 - 1807*, J.K. Fynn noted that the history of the Gold Coast in the 18th and 19th Centuries "is largely the history of the consolidation and rise of the Ashanti kingdom and its relations with the neighbouring African and European people."

Ashanti is one section of the people known as the Akans in Ghana.

During the second half of the 17th century various Akan speaking people were organised into a military union, aiming at political and economic expansion. By the early 19th Century the Ashanti kingdom "was indisputably the greatest and the rising power of West Africa" Fynn states.

The region is rich in forest lands, mineral and vegetable products. The region is considered to be the richest in the country. Farming stands first among the occupations of the population. Cocoa has been a major product in the Region. Timber extraction is also a wide-spread industry in Ashanti.

Another leading industry is gold mining. Gold is the main basis of the reputation long enjoyed by the rulers of Ashantis for their wealth in gold.

There are also crafts-men, gold- and silversmiths. There are also cloth-weavers, basket-weavers and wood carvers. These carvers can make

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wooden drums and carve gold ornaments.

The Ashantis cherish a history of powerful kings and successful military adventurers.

Ashanti was fundamentally a military union. Thus military power provided the basis of the kingdom and it was by direct military action, rather than by any process of registration or negotiation treaty-making that Ashanti achieved its political and economic success.

One of the notable kings of Ashanti was Osei Tutu. He was also the political and spiritual head of the Ashanti nation. With his friend-priest, Anokye, they worked to weld Ashanti into a powerful kingdom. The priest was his Royal Adviser, seer and designer. The Priest promulgated the mysterious appearance of the Golden stool for the Ashantis. It became the emblem of the new kingdom, the symbol of its authority and the "Soul of the nation" of Ashanti. The Golden stool was supposed to contain the spirit of the whole Ashanti nation, and its strength and bravery depended upon the safety of the stool.

The Ashanti state was at the height of its powers in the early 19th century and became a major threat to British trade on the Coast, until it was defeated in 1873 by the British force. The Ashanti was finally annexed by the British in 1902 to become part of the British Colony of the Gold Coast.

The Ashanti's everyday life, like most of the people in Ghana is a communal life. Every household is a complete communal unit. All amenities are shared in common. Ashantis traditionally bear each other's burden as much as their own and by custom and practice are their brother's keeper. This was seen in the discipline of children and the eating from the same bowl by women and also men in a household.

Guests also have special and prior attention in every Ashanti home. Custom demands that one treats and devotes time to the comfort of guests.

Regarding the religious beliefs of the Ashantis, they believe in the Everlasting Creator of all. He is known as the unchangeable One. However, as kings linguists, so they believe the Mighty King has linguists in lesser gods who serve him. Also the Ashantis' religion involves not only the living but the dead and even those to be born. Divine powers are believed to exist in rivers, stones

or rocks and trees and sacrifices are made to them.

To the Ashantis, life and religion are indivisible. Daily activities fail or succeed not because there are natural forces but because there is a universe of spirit-power on which success depends.

Thus in times of calamity like illness, death, bad omen, people need to consult the divine person who know the reasons behind the calamity. Again, life is seen to be under the protection and the judgement of spirit ancestors and gods. The Ashanti believes in the continuance of life hereafter.

This section will end with the status of women in Ashanti. The Ashanti has high regards for women. "We are going to consult the old woman" places the woman as the final arbiter in all decisions in the Ashanti community. The woman is the custodian of all knowledge and treasures of the community. Queen mothers have held powerful positions in Ashanti. In fact wars have been started because the Queen mother said the war should be fought although the men and the chief would have settled for a lesser option. The final battle between the British and the Ashantis leading to the annexing of Ashanti to the Gold Coast was led by a woman. In Ashanti there is little distinction of sex in the social grouping or organisations.

Some cultural and traditional practices in Ghana are similar in many tribal and ethnic groups. However, there are some that are as different as night is from day. Matrilineal and patrilineal descent systems are examples of the latter. Let us look at them.

### ***Descent systems in Ghana***

In a rapidly changing society like Ghana, people face varied challenges, especially, in the area of marriage and family life.

People are usually bombarded with varied pressures: pressures of tradition, pressures of modern living and pressures of religious beliefs. The society continues to be more heterogeneous, as ethnic groups with their distinctive cultural norms and practices intermingle with others in marriage and other union.

Basically, there are two basic forms of descent in Ghana: patrilineal and matrilineal. The patrilineal descent system

traces descent through the male with people inheriting group membership through their father; whereas the matrilineal descent system traces descent through females, with people inheriting group membership through their mother.

Crossing tribal or ethnic lines to marry, for example, traditionally could pose a problem especially with the problem of inheritance and succession. Now industrialisation, urbanisation and education have changed demographic patterns in Ghana. Urban centres and towns are virtually ethnically very heterogeneous. How then does the Ghanaian handle these changes?

In traditional Ghanaian society, membership in a lineage conferred rights of access to farm lands and other resources of the extended family. These rights differed, depending on whether one resided in matrilineal society.

Let us look a bit more closely at those descent systems: patrilineal and matrilineal. We shall focus finally on the matrilineal system and observe how modern changes in the society are affecting such system.

### ***The patrilineal family***

Examples of patrilineal societies in Ghana are the Ewes of the eastern borders of Ghana, the Ga at the coast, the Tallens in the North and many other tribes of the North.

The common ancestor of the patrilineal descent is a male. The family is made up of the following:

1. A man's children - male and female.
2. Its paternal brothers and sisters.
3. Children of his paternal brothers.
4. His paternal grandfather.
5. paternal brothers and sisters of this grandfather.
6. The descendants of the paternal uncles in the direct male line.

A male parent, therefore, belongs to the same family as his children.

In patrilineal societies, residence is almost invariably patrilocal. A couple after marriage will either live in the compound of the bridegroom's father or in a house he himself has built. The Gas of Ghana, also a patrilineal group, provide an exception to the above. Their residential system, is duo-local. Here a husband and wife continue to live in their natal homes after marriage.

Succession and inheritance pass in the male line in patrilineal societies.

Detailed application of the patrilineal system of inheritance differs considera-

bly from place to place, the general rules in respect of ancestral or lineage property are fairly uniform. Lineage property is for the exclusive use of the lineage members and personal property, land or otherwise, passes from father to sons and daughters. As a rule, sons take precedence over daughters.

Traditionally, people tended to marry individuals from their own tribal or ethnic group because there was little mobility and industry was centred in people's own locality.

### **The matrilineal descent system**

As mentioned earlier, in the matrilineal descent system a person traces descent through the female, with the person inheriting group membership through the mother.

This system is practised by the Akan speaking peoples in Ghana, the largest ethnic group in Ghana which Ashanti is one. Prof. Nukunya of the University of Ghana has rightly said that "the key to the understanding of Ashanti society is matrilineal descent which forms the basis of their descent groups and inter-personal relations."

The matrilineal family is generally made up of the following:

1. A woman's children, male and female.
2. Her maternal brothers and sisters.
3. Children of her maternal sisters.
4. Her maternal grandmother.
5. Maternal brothers and sisters of the grandmother.
6. The descendants of the maternal aunts in the direct female line.

It is seen that a father does not share the same family as his children.

One important aspect of matrilineal system is that it is the mother's brother who performs the functions normally reserved for the father in patrilineal societies. Often a father has his residence with his matrilineal group while the mother stays with the children in her descent group. Thus, the fact that the father and child do not belong to the same descent group and also do not stay together often greatly limits the father's role in terms of authority and discipline. Is there any explanation of the Ashanti matrilineal descent system with its inheritance and succession? Usually three unconfirmed postulates are given to support the Ashanti's matrilineal system position, namely:

a) No cock has its chicks following it. Hence it is natural for children to follow their mothers.

b) It is only mothers who know the father of their children. Thus, there is no way the husband could tell if the child the woman is carrying is really his, and finally,

c) There is a story about a chief who was struck with a strange disease. When the gods of the land were consulted they demanded a human sacrifice for pacification. The chief conferred with his wife that one of their children be sacrificed but she refused to give up one of the children. The chief's sister after being consulted wholeheartedly gave one of her children. He was cured and when he was dying willed that because of what the sister did for him, his property should go to his sister and her children.

d) Ashanti concept of a person is used to explain the matrilineal descent. It is believed that at birth a person receives his lineage ties through the mother's *mogya* (blood) and from the father *sunsum* (spirit). It is believed that the blood is about 85% of the person, hence the maternal ties. In addition to the blood and the spirit the person receives the soul from the supreme Being.

Now let us look at some aspects of family life in the matrilineal descent system:

### **Concept of marriage**

In Ashanti, like many other ethnic groups in Ghana, a marriage is regarded primarily as an alliance between two kinships or family groups. It is only in the secondary aspect that it is considered as a union between two individual persons. Marriage is the normal state among adults in all rank of Ashanti society. Almost everyone unless handicapped by physical or mental illness is expected to get married upon the attainment of adult status.

### **The mate selection**

Since marriage is considered to be a communal event as shown above, decision about marriage is thus seen to be too important to leave in the hands of children alone. Traditionally, choice would come from the young person's locality. From the above, marriage based on romantic love or intimate friendship and acquaintance before marriage was not practised.

### **Purpose of marriage**

Procreation as the chief end of marriage was emphasised. In the matrilineal descent system as well as the patrilineal system, the importance attached to the procreation and ownership of children was vital. Thus in Ashanti barrenness or sterility is an ominous situation. It is considered a valid ground for divorce. Often families put pressure on husbands to either seek divorce or take on additional wife if the original wife is incapable of having children. In fact many children in a marriage is a sign of pride, no matter the quality of children. For example the birth of a tenth child to a woman is considered heroic. The father receives a congratulatory ram from the wife's family and he becomes the envy of his peers for that accomplishment.

### **The Ashanti corporate life**

The extended family forms the matrilineal descent system. The individual finds his true identity within this system and the community. The matrilineal family is seen as a source of support for its members. As we have seen earlier, the support system is quite wide and each member sees her self as supporting to sustain the system.

The individual has obligations and responsibilities towards the members of the family. The family is also the individual's strength and security which he can turn to anytime he is in difficulty. Illegitimacy is unknown in Ashanti. Children born outside marriage and adultery still belong to the matrikin, and hence get some sense of belonging. And since fathers usually did not care for their children such children born outside marriage have uncles to care for them.

### **Polygamy**

In Ashanti there is toleration and even approval accorded to polygamy. A marriage according to Ashanti law and custom is potentially polygamous. In its form and subsistence there is no legal impediment to the contracting of another marriage by the husband. The possession of a number of wives is normally a mark of importance and success in life.

### **Youth sexuality**

Premarital chastity was valued in Ashanti. Premarital pregnancy was frequently considered very shameful.

Girls were not expected to have sexual relations before their puberty rites were performed. These took place shortly after they had had their first menstruation. Girls usually married shortly after this ceremony and thus entered their first conjugal unions as virgins. Thus pre-nuptial chastity was highly valued.

The above constitute some of the basic features and character of family life as found among the Ashantis. We now want to consider some of the changes which have occurred as a result of modern influence. Factors such as colonialism, Christianity, money-economy, urbanisation, education and other social factors which have affected the matrilineal descent system will be examined.

### **The present state of family life in Ashanti**

Direct and systematic colonial administration exerted lasting changes on Ghanaian society in general and the Ashanti in particular. It could also be seen that colonialism gave support to other agents of change, namely, Christianity, formal school education and money-using economy. Specific areas of change are considered as follows:

#### **Forms of Marriage**

Traditionally there was one basic way of contracting a valid marriage in Ashanti. The distinctiveness of this marriage as discussed earlier, is the presentation of gifts by the family of the man to the girl and her family whom he wished to marry. The marriage rites are termed customary rites and they gave legality to the marriage. The gifts could be in the form of drinks (Whiskey, Gin) cloths, money, and ornaments. These days the marriage presentations and gifts are abused by families, especially when the girl is highly educated. As mentioned earlier, customary marriage is potentially polygamous. To remove this polygamous factor and make marriage more acceptable to the colonial government and the church, marriage under the Ordinance was introduced. This is marriage contracted according to the provisions of the marriage Ordinance. The most important features of this form of marriage are its monogamous nature and the fact that it cannot be dissolved except by a valid judgement of divorce. Many educated women like this

form of marriage because it gives security to them and the children. Some men shy away from it because of its monogamous nature, and the huge expenses in contracting it with its Western wedding rites. Some Christians prefer to have marriage under Ordinance in the chapel so it could be combined with formal blessing of the union in the name of the Lord by the Minister. The licensed Minister thus performs both a civil and an ecclesiastical duty during the ceremony.

There is another reason why some people stay away from Ordinance marriage apart from its monogamous nature, that is, some Ashantis and others feel that it is an alien institution, involving consequences inimical to the spirit and traditions of the Ashantis. What is being referred to is that Ordinance marriage puts emphasis on the nuclear family, rather than the extended matrilineal family. As a result of this, a man's loyalties are primarily directed towards his wife and children. This again is reinforced by the Christian teaching of 'one flesh' nature of the marriage union, emphasising the spouses primary loyalty to one another. This is clearly seen to counter the tenets of the matrilineal descent system.

As noted earlier, under matrilineal descent system, children and wives are not considered members of the father and husband's family as far as rights to his property is concerned. Customary laws of the Ashanti do not give rights to widows, sons and daughters except where the deceased chose to make a will in their favour. It is not uncommon to have lineage heads and sisters of the deceased locking out widows and their children from their matrimonial home only to protect properties of their deceased kinsman.

By their good behaviour children of a deceased father may be given the right of sojourning or residing in their own father's house. Ordinance marriage with its Christian implication and other recent laws (to be discussed later) try to remedy the issue so described.

#### **Choice of a spouse**

It has been said earlier that traditionally, choice of a spouse was the work of parents or elders of the extended family. Marriage was considered a communal event and a decision about a mate was too important to leave in the hands of children alone. Conflicts are being created now between some young people

and their families in the area of mate selection. Urbanisation, formal school education, ease in communication and transportation have made family control over many young people very minimal. Changed demographic patterns have created an ethnically heterogeneous society. Thus young people meet in urban centres and college and university campuses and fall in love. Often parents are unhappy about such relationships because most parents want marriages from their own ethnic groups. Another factor of modern changes that affect mate selection is the question of the two forms of descent systems in Ghana. Because of limited mobility the traditional Ashanti married from Ashanti. Things are different now and the challenge of marrying from an ethnic group with varied descent system has inherent problems.

#### **Urban life**

The growth of towns has brought with it many alterations in social life as well as many social problems not associated with the traditional social organisation. The modern life style of the towns and cities and related factors have weakened the hold of the extended family on the lives of its people. For example, one of the major alterations in towns and cities is the living arrangement. Here, most urban couples have common residence, separate from that of either family of orientation. It is noted that in such neutral territory, the conjugal family is a more cohesive social unit. And because fathers are staying together with their own children the children's education and welfare are catered for. The other side of the coin is that in urban centres marriages could be unstable because the traditional support system and restrictions are removed.

The following are some of the results of urban living.

- a) A prevalence of premarital and extramarital sexual relations. Here, the traditional restrictions and restraints have been removed. Money economy also contributes to this picture.
- b) there is also greater incidence of inter-tribal/ethnic marriages since the pool of eligible partners has increased. This often creates problems for the extended family.
- c) there is improved communication, educational and health facilities.
- d) youth problems are common especially unemployment and drug usage. The traditional system ensured that the



child's upbringing was a collective effort, involving all members of the extended family. In towns and cities the young person is unknown and people careless of what happens to him.

### **Male and female roles**

In Ashanti and as in most tribal societies in Ghana and Africa there are traditionally assigned sex-typed divisions of labour. For example, women are supposed to bear and nurse children, cook food, fetch water and keep the house clean. The men must hunt, build houses, and do the hard work on the farm, such as felling trees in preparation for a new farm. The problems arise when with improved education and a changing economy more women find themselves with career and formal employment. In a marriage of two career couple, who does what?

Many couples now use house helps to support the family in domestic duties. These house helps thus became the new agents of socialisation for the child. Often these house helps have little or no formal school education, and they spend the greater part of the working day with the child. Many cases of child abuse have resulted in such arrangements. Again, career demands on the couple plus harsh economic changes in the developing world have caused many couples to limit the number of children they can comfortably care for. This limitation of children by means of artificial contraception goes counter to the traditional Ashanti concept of many children for the family.

**T**he paper will end with discussion on what is being done or could be done by the government, the church and others to cope with the changing nature of the Ashanti society.

### **Coping with modern changes**

Social change is inevitable and a necessary part of life. The change results in complex challenges and stresses for individuals, families, communities. Governments, Religious bodies and other groups continue to battle with the product of change to see how its effect can be minimised, removed or coped with. The following strategies are noteworthy.

### **Government's legislation**

Throughout the history of Ghana, from the colonial period up to independence and since independence, there have been four main systems of rules and laws which govern the inheritance of property when a person dies intestate. The rules which would be applied depended on whether the person was married under the marriage Ordinance or under the Moslem family law marriage or Customary marriage expressed in Patrilineal and Matrilineal systems of inheritance.

For example, at customary law, for either matrilineal or patrilineal, there was very little protection for the surviving spouse if the husband died intestate. Neither spouse had a right to the property of the other. Children in a matrilineal system, as we observed earlier, were worse off. They have neither right to maintenance nor inheritance.

The Government of Ghana in 1985, therefore, passed the Intestate succession Law (PNDCL III) with a view of removing the anomalies in the existing laws relating to intestate succession. The idea was to provide a uniform law that will be applicable throughout the country irrespective of whether the deceased comes from a patrilineal or matrilineal community and the type of marriage contracted.

The provisions of the law are aimed at giving a larger portion of the deceased's estate to his spouse and children than was the case before the law.

The Church is to take advantage of this Law and educate her members about these provisions. Also individual family members are to be encouraged to make wills.

### **Church's family life education and counselling programmes**

The Christian Council of Ghana is an ecumenical body made up of 14 member churches and two affiliated organisations. Over the years the Council has tried to catalyse the churches to respond to societal needs through its specialised Departments, namely, Church and Society, Development and Environment, Church Relations, Theology and Research. The general purpose of the Council, in addition to spiritual upliftment of the churches, is to create awareness in individuals, equip them with the requisite skills for empowerment, development and transformation. Some of the prime foci is to confront

change, reduce stress and poverty and enhance the quality of life of people.

The Christian Council of Ghana for the past 30 years has tried to strengthen the integrity of the Christian family and to address some of the issues raised through her Family Life Education, Family Counselling and Family Planning Programmes. Some of the challenging problems of matrilineal inheritance can still be tackled through above named programmes.

The following can also be strengthened and promoted.

a) *Awareness Building* through Seminars, workshops and the setting up of Counselling and Christian Education Services in the Churches.

b) *Capacity Building*: Counselling Programmes to provide basic skills in effective communication and how to deal constructively with marital and other conflicts.

c) Provision of relevant *literature* which address some of the issues raised.

d) *Advocacy*: Mobilise church and communities to form pressure groups to speak against some of these cultural practices that dehumanise people. The need also to speak out on human rights for children and women is to be promoted.

e) Institutionalising *Premarital Counselling* and making it a pre-requisite before blessing marriages in the Church. In this way some of the issues of say, intertribal/ethnic marriages, child bearing, inheritance and succession and the changing nature of sex roles would be addressed before the marriage takes place.

f) *Family/Couples Support Groups*. Such groups could be a substitute to the traditional extended family which has lost most of its functions in the wake of modern change.

### **Conclusion**

What has been said about the Ashantis, an ethnic group forming about 18% of the population in Ghana, can be generalised to cover the whole country. The Ashanti society, like the bigger society of Ghana, is rapidly changing.

Individual, family and national concerns resulting from these changes are often complex and unyielding to simplistic solutions. People in our churches and communities need knowledge and understanding to grapple with these

changes. The Church can continue to examine the problems and evolve Biblical based solution to help people cope with such life issues.

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## **Conflict and Reconciliation in the Context of Two Different Cultures**

### **A Case-Study**

*In the socio-political, cultural and religious context of Fiji, the two major ethnic groups, (Fijians, the indigenous People, and Indians, brought in by the British 150 years ago), have various mutual concerns and conflicts. Racial tension had been a major issue which has erupted in political upheavals. Cross-cultural marriage is not the best way for racial harmony, many think. However, my case study shows it is possible. Mutual respect and sincere efforts to understand and appreciate one another's cultural traditions and religious values have resulted in happy marriage and family life. How Christian Churches and Pastoral Care organisations can learn from this and provide support system. When two cultures meet, from whatever world they came, a third culture is formed at the point of intersection. The encounters and experiences makes one a child of a new world. He/she has a unique perspective. He/she can discover his/her real roots, wonder at it and be enriched by it, although not without pain.*

(John Snehadass)

### **Ulrich Fritsche:**

John Snehadass is hospital chaplain in Suva and CPE-supervisor on the Fiji Islands. He presents a case study in which there meet, or clash, not only the Indian and the Fiji cultures but also different religious and social backgrounds. A ritual of reconciliation helps out of an otherwise unresolvable conflict.

One day, John Snehadass has an unexpected guest. John is a Roman Catholic priest, raised in India. For some years he has worked as a parish minister on the Fiji islands, at the present he has the position of a hospital chaplain and is co-ordinator of the program for pastoral care and counselling of the Society for Pastoral Care and Counselling in the Pacific. His visitor is Vinod, a young man of 26 years, whom he knows from his former parish. Vinod had gone on a two hour bus ride to ask Father John for help. He starts: "I have got problems..." Vinod is the fifth of a number of eight children (two boys and six girls) of a family of Indian origin. Both his parents were born on the Fiji islands, the father is a Brahmin (he belongs to the Hindu priest caste), his mother is Roman Catholic. Vinod's father had been working for the British government as a police officer and at the time is in a distinguished communal position. In spite of being a member of the Hindu priest caste, he values the faith of his wife. In the family he enforces discipline, obedience and submission to rules. The mother feels obliged to follow Indian traditions. She has a strong personality, was very strict with her children, and she expects that her children marry partners of Indian decent. The Indian family traditions are meant to be

followed in the next generation also. She shows little of her emotions, but she is patient, sometimes a little bit stubborn.

For Vinod, childhood was not easy. Though being the elder one of the two sons, his younger brother had always been the darling in the family. Vinod's twin sister has a dominant personality and is much more outgoing than he is. Vinod seems rather restraint, even shy. He has a strong mother relationship. Sometimes he drinks. He regards himself as not especially religious.

Vinod describes his problem as follows: He works as an electrician in a large company. His assignments he receives by telephone through a secretary, Tokasa, a young lady of 32 years who had fallen in love with him and now is pregnant by him.

Tokasa is a Fiji woman; she is a member of the original Fiji population. Her family lives on one of the more distant islands. Tokasa is the second child out of seven (three boys, four girls). Her father stems from a chiefly family, and he has the position of a community leader. The mother also stems from a noble family. Tokasa's parents have made arrangements to marry off Tokasa in the traditional way to a Fiji man. Both parents are Jehova's witness.

Tokasa was born on the island but has gone to the main island for further education. In the city, living by herself, she has experienced much more freedom than Vinod. She is very outgoing, is well educated, talented in languages and is able to manage her life well. One of her sisters is married to a British man. As many others, she thinks of herself as belonging to the "better" people.

The situation is complex. Both the families of origin have done first steps to marry off their children in a traditional pattern. Premarital sex is forbidden, and the "normal" social solution in a case as such would be: Tokasa and Vinod are not allowed to marry. Tokasa's means are too short to raise her child; however, she will not be allowed to return to her family either. Vinod will be expelled from his family. And with the dissolution of their family bonds, both, Vinod and Tokasa lose all of their relations and the nurturing source of the society, and they would find themselves at the edge of the society. For in both cultures, the Indian as well as the Fiji, the families are constituents for a gratifying life. Vinod had hidden his situation from his family for some time, but then had

asked an aunt of his to inform his parents. Consequently, his sisters and brothers and his parents had turned their backs on him, and he had no other chance than to move in with Tokasa into her small apartment. In this situation he had remembered John Snehadass, and he had made up his mind to see him. At this first visit, John promised to help as best he could.

On his next visit, Vinod brings Tokasa along. They consent - as a first step - that John will pay a visit to Vinod's family. A few days later John goes to see Vinod's family at the house which he had visited often during his time as their parish minister. The welcome is friendly but somewhat reserved. When he talks about the reason of his visit, Vinod's sisters leave the room, and the mother points out clearly that - because of his siding with Vinod - John is no more welcome in this house. Vinod's father, with whom John had had many good conversations before, says: "I feel sorry. You know my family. We cannot accept this."

Back home, John reports only to Vinod how he has been treated by his family: "This is how your family received me." Tokasa may have a guess as to what had happened. However, she learns more when she visits the parish in which Vinod's family are members. She gets enough hints that his people don't want to see her. Even with John, because he further tries to help the two, contact is avoided by the family and others. For Tokasa and Vinod there is no chance of experiencing and receiving the help and shelter of a caring community any more. If one of them or both would be struck by misfortune, there would be nobody who would take care of the children. Meanwhile it becomes clear that Tokasa is pregnant with twins. In this period of time, Vinod feels more and more drawn to John, and they both seek strength and guidance through prayer. Then, John takes a second chance. He feels: If anyone in Vinod's family is capable of openness, it would be Vinod's father, the Brahmin. Thus, John contacts him and meets with him secretly. On this occasion Vinod's father shows his willingness to see Tokasa at least once and talk to her.

### ***The Crucial Encounter and the Ritual***

When Vinod's father appears to the visit, Tokasa welcomes him in his language and calls him "aypa" (which is an honorary word for a father), she kneels in front of him and touches his feet with her hands. Because she knows how deeply he is rooted in his tradition, she adapts those elements from his tradition, that call on him as head of the family and let him stick to this role. Vinod's father is deeply touched, he lets all this happen and then answers: "You are my daughter." Then there is a long period of silence.

After this, John prepares everything for a ceremony that is known and performed in both the native Fijis as the people of Indian decent: the "Yaquona drink", a rite of drinking together out of the Yaquona bowl.

The Yaquona bowl is a hemispherical bowl out of dark hard-wood. The outside of the bowl and the edge are decorated, and the whole bowl is covered with a beautiful wickerwork which ends in a three feet long plaited cord. For the ritual, the host places the bowl in front of himself and arranges the cord in a way that it points to the guest who is seated opposite to him. The host prepares the drink, and an assistant on his left hand side passes the drink in a smaller bowl to the participants of the ceremony. The ritual starts when the host calls on the powers of the heavens and the earth and says a prayer in which he prays for the benefit of the community. Then he takes some powder out of a box made from the roots of the Kawa bush, pours it into a silk cloth and squeezes the silk cloth with the contents and puts it into the Yaquona bowl which is filled with water. The cloth and the powder absorb some of the water, and are moved and squeezed in the water until enough of the powder substance is dissolved in the water. The host tastes the drink and fills some of it into a smaller wooden drinking bowl, and the assistant at his side then offers the small bowl to the guest - with all signs of reverence. The guest claps his hands once, takes the bowl with both his hands, drinks until it is

empty and returns it with both his hands to the assistant. Then he claps his hands three times and bows down towards the host. All this is done in silence. The drinking bowl is filled once again and then handed to the person next in rank to the honoured guest etc.

The time of the ritual is holy time. Nobody speaks or gets up or moves from his or her place. If there are children present, they are strictly advised to follow the rules. Nobody passes the bowl on the side of the host. If someone

expensive traditional Yaquona dish

has to leave the room, he does so moving backwards and bowing down. If at informal meetings one passes the Yaquona bowl, one bows down and touches its edge respectfully with the fingers of the right hand.

With this ritual, John offers the father, the son and the young woman the chance of reconciliation. The four persons celebrate together. John prepares the bowl and the ingredients. The plaited cord of the Yaquona bowl points to the opposite side, towards Vinod's father. Tokasa is seated at John's left hand side, Vinod at his right hand side, and he is the one to assist John. With his consent to participate in the ritual, John's father has already indicated his readiness to reconcile. When John starts to call on the powers of the heavens and the earth, the realisation of reconciliation begins. Because Vinod's father as the head of the family readmits Vinod and accepts Tokasa, he binds the whole family into the process of reconciliation. A few weeks after the ritual of reconciliation, Tokasa gives birth to two girls. Vinod's older sister who had played a major part in his expulsion from the family is the first one to come into the

hospital for a visit. She brings the baby outfit as a present. The young family of four is assigned a living space in the house of Vinod's parents.

In the workshop, John shows a video that has been recorded shortly and which shows the family ten years after these events. John interviews the members of the family about the situations then and now - not only Tokasa and Vinod but also their respective parents, brothers and sisters and their children. Once again it becomes clear how big a burden the situation then had been and how happy the persons involved were, when the conflict could be resolved in a way, that was apt to clarify the relationships of the individuals with each other as well as those between the families. At first, the interview questions sound somewhat stereotype: "How did you feel then?" and "How do you feel now about these events?" Afterwards the questions become more specific and concentrate on individual persons. The answers are simple: "Good." "I feel good." "I am content, happy." What becomes quite clear is that on the Fiji islands, the family and the family relations have absolute priority over against the values of individual life. The family is the source of personal and social security. The family is the place, in which the identity of the individual is formed, nurtured and healed.

### ***The perspective of pastoral care***

Regarding this case study we ask: What is the pattern of pastoral care? For sure, pastoral care is brought about through the ritual, which forms the point of crystallisation in this helping relationship. Because in both cultures involved, the Fiji and the Indian culture, *Yaqona* drinking stands for revering and honouring people, and for the experience of community life, this ritual is a means of reconciliation. In both groups people say: "During our traditional ceremonies we feel deeply connected with each other." However, it is not only the ritual itself. In this case study we see that pastoral care takes place in John's personal participation in the fate of Tokasa and Vinod. He not only listens carefully, shows his understanding and his acceptance, but takes side with these persons who are in danger of falling out of the sheltering community. In consenting with Tokasa and Vinod, John initiates problem solving procedures in which he himself becomes active and runs the

risk of experiencing humiliating experiences and the loss of relationships.

The pastoral relation between John and the young couple is one of a common quest for the chances for reconciliation - in respect of the orders and structures of the Indian and Fijian society. The strive is not for the fortunes of individuals or the realisation of individual chances but for a life under the conditions of traditional social structures. ■

Ursula Pfäfflin / Gesa Jürgens

## The Power of Silence

**To love by silence?**

**To be silent in a realm of fog?**

**Silence - in order to move on with life?**

**Ursula Pfäfflin:**

For several years I have taught theology and pastoral care and counselling in intercultural seminars. It is in international conferences that I met Polish colleagues from Warsaw, Belchatow and Ustron. As we prepared for the conference in Ustron I realized that there were planned study-groups with cases from India, South-Africa, Barbados, and even the Fiji-islands but there wasn't any with a case of pastoral care and counselling by our host-country, Poland. Therefore, I suggested to prepare for a German-Polish study-group in which we would address the theme of the seminar by working with the story of a Polish family. I asked Gesa Jürgens, a family therapist and supervisor who was also interested in doing memory work by Polish and German participants. The Polish committee agreed to work with us yet it was difficult to find somebody who would offer a presentation.

*Question 1*

*How can trust grow in intercultural work in order for painful and shameful memories to find a room of shelter and of healing?*

Before the conference started I travelled to Poland in order to get to know the life and work of one of my colleagues better. I lectured for his students and we talked about the planning of the study group. I also had the opportunity to visit the Black Madonna of Tschenschow and learned about the persecution and traumatization of Polish people, especially by the Nazis who occupied the place and the church. I was deeply touched by his singing in front of the image by believers and I became once more aware of the fact that the family of my father was of Catholic origin while I was

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raised Lutheran and became an ordained Protestant minister. My father's family also was

- *How can I recognize and feel without constriction?*
- *How can I dissolve familiar patterns and images?*
- *How does healing happen?*

**Gesa Jürgens:**

Since twenty years I am working as a family therapist and training people from diverse cultures. My courage to work in Poland within the context of this seminar with a group using the method of family reconstruction and to address the big theme Germany-Poland is connected to my personal history.

*Question 4*

*How can I dare to address this issue - from my professional role - even though I do not have any objectivity in regard to this theme?*

I was encouraged by Ursula Pfäfflin with whom I did supervision in her parish 25 years ago and met once more in 1995 in Hamburg. I was also encouraged by pastor Elisabeth-Christa Markert from Kiel. She worked on memory work with German women in Auschwitz.

(Cf. Elke Markert, "Wir Frauen in der Kirche", in: *Der Anfang der Erlösung heißt Erinnerung*, ed. by Nordelbisches Frauenwerk, Neumünster 1995)

*Question 5*

*When will there be the right time in the seminar or conference to speak about my anxiety and my history? How can I speak up without taking away time and space of the history of a Polish person?*

Marek Izdebski who knew Ursula Pfäfflin promised his help in this difficult situation as a facilitator of the group.

*Question 6*

*How come I know so little about the historical sources of Poland even though I am highly educated?*

*How come that I have invested much of my energy in the investigation and transformation of families and systems?*

*How come that even today, when I read German books on history, I am stunned, I separate myself from my emotions, I hold my breath and feel constricted and lame?*

I am born in June of 1944, the daughter of parents who were caught in the Nazi-ideology. My father was a lawyer from November of 1942 to September of 1944. He worked for the enforced German administration in Poland. His task was to notify Polish people if they stemmed from German race or not. I do not really know up to now what it actually meant for these people to be classified Germans or not.

*Question 7*

*How can it be that I still feel constricted and blind even though I have gone through a lot of therapy? In regard to my wish for clarification, how come I feel like I do two steps forward and one step back?*

*Question 8*

*If I as therapist who has received that much support privately and professionally, have difficulties to deal with the past, how much more difficult it*

one the rich producers of Bohemian glass in the Isergebirge, very close to the Polish border. In 1942, the only son of my father was killed in the war. My father, I only learned this year, was participant in the Sport-SS, and, by the death of his son, became a fanatic Nazi.

#### *Question 2*

*How come I have to be fifty years old before I receive more details about the time of World War II and the experiences of flight from our homeland by my mother? How can it happen that even today it is taboo to talk about the convictions and the behaviour of German fathers and mothers during the Nazi time? What do generations of children and grandchildren of perpetrators, victims and helpers express in their biographies?*

I went to the conference knowing that it would be difficult to be confronted with the crimes done by our fathers and mothers and the many who went along. But it would also be necessary and healing to lift the silence and the denial.

#### *Question 3*

*Was the silence and the denial about acts done by perpetrators back then and today unveiled?*

What I found very helpful was the presence not only of German and Polish women and men at the conference but of colleagues from India, Indonesia, Ghana, from the US, Barbados, South Africa, the U.K. and the Netherlands. They raised different questions, they gave their own witness of their history. When we came to Auschwitz, one of my Czech colleagues took my hand and we walked together along the places in which the perpetrators had stored all the names and belongings of their victims and administered their crimes. But their names as perpetrators are not published even today, and thus their crimes will continue to have an effect throughout the world.

*must be for die Polish women and men, to address this history and to meet with us Germans in the seminar in Ustron?*

For me it was very helpful to speak about my personal background in the pre-conference and was not excluded. I was very touched by the way, the Polish women of the parish took care of us and the Polish men created a frame by their leadership in which we as Germans received space and care. It was deeply moving to me when I experienced the ministers in the first worship, women and men, expressing their cultural differences and their power. They gave witness to their belief in different mother- and father-tongues.

Some days later I got to know by asking that the Nazis had planned to kill all the influential people of the region and murdered all the Protestant pastors. I was stunned and could not believe that this must have been done also by Protestant soldiers.

#### *Question 9*

*How were Polish people able to deal with this?*

*How did they overcome all these*

*How were they able to receive us in their church?*

When I asked the Polish pastor Adrian Korczago, he said that they were able to do this work of transformation also by singing. Indeed, there were four choirs in this congregation which sang and invited us twice during the conference. I looked at these people with shame and relief. And I was moved that, at the beginning, we were not confronted with these dreadful facts. We were guided through Krakow and enjoyed the wonderful hall in the university. We heard about tradition and history in a lecture. Even there, our Polish hosts spared us the worst informations. The Nazis had all professors meet in a gathering and the transported them in order to murder them. These unbelievable acts have to be named today, otherwise I deny them once more and I am constricted again in silence. Horrible was the experience in Auschwitz, reading the many German texts and terrible lists in German language about the annihilation.

#### *Question 10*

*How could it happen in the conference that we used German more often than the Polish language? Did that reflect a planned gesture by the hosts, for us?*

#### *Question 11*

*How could we let it happen that there was more use of German than in Polish without a public reflection on these issues?*

## **The Study-Group**

We had planned to make visible the development of one Polish family who also had roots in German and Austrian lineage by drawing a genogram and doing a family sculpture. It was important to us to reflect this by diverse cultural perspectives. Especially, we wanted to establish a Polish reflecting team who would be able to include their knowledge of the regional history and culture. Our goal was to understand better how women and men of one family had lived, worked and believed

across generations in order to understand better what may reflect the history of others.

In our studygroup on "family reconstruction", mostly participants of German background showed up.

First, we were caught by surprise because we didn't see a possibility to do a reconstruction of a Polish family history in this group. So we changed our concept and asked the participants to think about their own familial roots across several generations and about their languages. We asked to write their informations on name tags and to show

them. We were surprised by joy that we found ourselves in one big multicultural group.

Many participants though had to go through some anxiety and had to unveil secrets in order to find out and to express that they have Jewish, Polish and other roots.

Unfortunately, we did not have enough time during the seminar in order to fully address the meaning of the wealth of this group. It is worth while many family reconstructions, to work with the experience of diverse roots and the threat to our own identity which is in-

cluded in historical facts. After recognising the multi-cultural tradition in our group we felt reinforced to open up for the history of the Polish family. We were moved by their personal experiences and addressed the following issues:

#### · **Change of names**

Several members of this presented family were forced by the political changes to change their first names several times from Polish to German and vice versa

#### *Question 12*

*When was which kind of language a safe and acknowledged one?*

*How did this change of names influence identity?*

#### · **Denominations**

There were Catholic, Reformed and Lutheran roots in the family

#### *Question 13*

*What did belonging to a certain denomination mean for personal survival, what did it mean for the minority? Which kind of importance do the denominations carry today?*

#### · **Nationality**

Different roots in the family led to Austria, to the middle of Poland and in areas of borders where German, Polish and Austrian culture met.

#### *Question 14*

*What was the effect of the difference of roots for the relationship of the members of the family? How did the evaluation of this change during different phases?*

#### · **Confusion**

The historical events before the war, during the war and after the war appeared as a very complex story of participation and involvement by different parts of the family. Within the group, only fragments came up.

#### *Question 15*

*Was there the possibility that the conflicts between German Nazis and Polish people which did not have a place to be worked through were shifted towards the level of familial relations or towards relationships with neighbours, for example Jewish neighbours?*

#### · **Patterns**

It was difficult to talk about certain persons of the family and their behavior. There was a tendency to evade dealing with them. - Violence was an issue hard to address.

#### *Question 16*

*Does the silence within the family of origin mirror the silence about the larger history of national traumatization?*

*How can chronic diseases, separations, and deaths be worked through so that the repetition of patterns across generations is stopped?*

We realized during our work that it is important to listen closely to the personal experience of all participants before it is possible to look at and reflect the imbeddedness in larger political interconnections. Also our co-operation was possible by listening closely to each other while we worked together and talking about all the events of this conference with each other.

We thank the participants for their openness and willingness to risk. We thank Mrs. Elisabeth Stoll for her editorial support. ■



Urias H. Beverly

## ***The Tradition of Racism in the USA***

### ***Racism in America***

Doing a workshop on Racism in America is a very difficult task for me. It is difficult because there are so many facets of this dreadful social ill that it is mind-boggling to try to put it in any kind of perspective. It is difficult because I believe that an hour and a half of discussing this topic will bare little fruit in terms of resolution. It is difficult because it is not an historical problem that existed a long time ago, but a current situation that I and many others must face every day. Talking about it simply brings to mind the fact that we hear, see, smell, experience racist pollutants in our environment all of the time. The only relief that I feel sometimes, is to escape the reality of this situation by not dwelling on it or thinking about it. And so to organise my thoughts into a presentation has been a tremendous challenge for me.

It is not a challenge from which I shrink, but a recognisably humbling experience that I have felt called to have on many occasions, the experience of standing in the gap between the oppressors (the racists) and the targets (the victims of racism). Because of my sense of calling and purpose and because of my choice to be a leader in society, I feel it is my duty to rise to the occasion of sensitising others to the plight of this disease which affects us all. The disease of which I speak, which has been at epidemic proportions in the United States for centuries, is none other than the de-humanising, demoralising and degenerating disease of racism.

What is racism? However we define racism, such as one race hating or despising another, one race feeling superior to another, one race being better than another, etc. etc., the one thing that is constant in any true definition of racism is that one race has power over the other race. Without the ability to

control, diminish and/or demolish a race, racism cannot exist. Along with the negative attitudes, the negative feelings, the philosophical concept, the moral precepts and, yes, the theological constructs about a race, the one outstanding factor that does not exist in many other situations is the fact that the race that embraces these feelings and attitudes about another race also has the power to control the race that it despises.

In answer to the question, what is racism, Dr. George Kelsey, in a profound book entitled *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man* (1966) states that: "Racism is a faith. It is a form of idolatry... In its early modern beginnings, racism was a justificatory device. It did not emerge as a faith. It arose as an ideological justification for the constellations of political and economic power which were expressed in colonialism and slavery. But gradually the idea of the superior race was heightened and deepened in meaning and in value so that it pointed beyond the historical structures of relation, in which it emerged, to human existence itself." In her book *Race: Science and Politics* (rev. ed. 1947), Ruth Benedict expands on the theme of defining racism as "the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to hereditary inferiority and another group is destined to hereditary superiority. It is the dogma that the hope of the civilisation depends upon eliminating some races and keeping others pure. It is the dogma that one race has carried progress throughout human history and can alone insure future progress." Martin Luther King jr. in his book *Where Do We Go From There: Chaos or Community* (1967) says, "since racism is based on the dogma that the hope of civilisation depends upon eliminating some races and keeping others pure, its ultimate logic is genocide. Hitler, in his mad and ruthless attempt to exterminate the Jews, carried the logic of racism to its ultimate tragic conclusion." King goes on to say "racism is a philosophy based on contempt for life. It is the arrogant assertion that one race is the centre of

value and object of devotion, before which other races must kneel in submission."

And so we understand racism to be an ideology, a dogma, a faith by which people live. In its ultimate practice, millions of lives have been destroyed mercilessly and even more millions are held in daily bondage and are victimised by the mind set of the race that is in the dominate position.

Racism is different from prejudice. Prejudice is a learned attitude and feeling that one person has towards another or another group of people. In many ways it looks like the same thing as racism, except that it is born of an internal feeling and does not require the one who feels the prejudice to have power over the other. Prejudice exists in the hearts and minds of both the oppressor and the oppressed. However, racism is often devoid of any feeling at all. An ideology does not necessarily require the person holding it to have any personal feeling about it at all. It is a common thing that racist behaviour and practices are acted out without any personal bias or malice in the consciousness of the one who is being racist.

The school teacher that says to the African American child, "you should take general math instead of algebra because algebra will be too difficult for you", may indeed be trying to protect the child, but is fostering a racist position. The friend who says, "I like you very much and would love to take you home with me, but my neighbours would have a fit", may not intend any put-down, but is yielding to racist behaviours and tactics. A person representing an institution may reject one based on race by saying, "it is not my personal feeling and I honestly believe it's wrong, but it is the policy", is still being racist in spite of the fact that he or she may not have personal prejudice as the primary motivate of his/her behaviour.

Dr. Valerie A. Batts, a psychologist who does workshops on what she calls "The New Racism", says the new racism is more dangerous than the old racism. In the old days you knew how people felt and they stood their ground for whatever their ideals and philosophies were. If you wanted to address the issue you knew exactly who to go to and who you had to deal with. In new racism the person is rarely identified. New racism is institutional. It is designed and maintained by a board, committee, or some kind of policy making group. Once the

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policy is formed, the committee disbands and nobody claims responsibility for its creation. When the policy is confronted, nobody has the power to reverse it or to even discuss its ethics, morals or injustice. Those who are hired to enforce the policy, do so without any personal conviction one way or the other; their only concern is to please the institution who pays their salary. This allows racism to go on and on unchecked, perpetuating itself endlessly. I will talk more about new racism later. Let me speak now about the birth of racism.

Racism as we have experienced it in the United States is a relatively recent phenomenon in the history of our world. There has always been slavery and class systems throughout the world for as long as we are aware. However, the kind of dehumanising and demoralising slavery and racism that we experienced in the slavery in the United States had its origin in the 15th century. Before that period of time, while there was a consciousness of race and colour, it was primarily to identify persons and the origin of their birth, rather than to belittle them or suggest that they were inferior to any one else. Most of the biblical characters were of African descent (in spite of the fact that the Bible has been tampered with in such a fashion as to lead persons to believe that biblical characters were some other race) but racism was never an issue in biblical times. Five hundred years ago Columbus was credited with discovering America. That credit is assigned to Columbus as though this was a land totally uninhabited. That is a racist notion in itself, that a land inhabited by Native Americans and people of African descent could be discovered by someone else. The powers that be (the racist powers) decided for political and economical reasons that the fact that people were living here when Columbus came does not count; hence Columbus is credited with discovering a land that was already known about for thousands of years.

### ***The origin of racism***

The origin of racism is inextricably tied to colonialism. Long before the colonial period, Europeans visited Africa for the benefit of what they could learn: mathematics, science, art, astrology and medicine. All of these things were far advanced in Africa before the common era. At the beginning of the colonial

period, however, Europeans who went to Africa observed African culture from a distance. They drew conclusions from what they saw and heard and wrote about it when they returned home. For example, when visitors to Africa saw a healing taking place from some distance, they interpreted the dancing, chanting and animated movements of the healer to be crazy nonsense. They called the healers witch doctors. Being on the outside looking in, they were not aware that these "witch doctors" were really holy men and women who had spent a minimum of 20 years of the most rigorous, sacrificial and disciplined training to be able to perform those healing exercises that were observed. This kind of misinformation and negative interpretation of experiences in Africa led journalists and human scientists to write extreme derogatory descriptions of African life, culture and religion.

Much of what was written was not taken seriously until some religious leaders added to the damaging reports theological and christological dogma that supported the ideologies of African people as subhuman, descendants from apes and lacking the soul that would bring them under the umbrella of God's saving grace. Once the clergy began to denounce African people as more animal than human, and if human at all, certainly not to the same degree as Caucasian people, racism was born and christened in the name of superiority and greed.

### ***The need for racism in America***

It was necessary to identify a people that were sub-human and at the same time were intelligent enough to follow the instructions of a land owner who was trying to generate wealth with his property. With the colonial expansion was a new land ripe for growing cotton and other things which began a world wide textile business in the United States. It is interesting to note that racism was not limited to people of the African diaspora, but also included Chinese, Native Americans and Irish. All of these races were involved in the tremendous textile industry that was developed in the southern part of the United States and it was through racism that labour was made available to do the work.

In the case of African people, the slave trade became an international industry. As more and more cotton was grown and the textile industry continued to

flourish, there was a greater and greater need for more labour to do the work. Even though slaves represented the cheapest labour that could be found (no labour cost), every effort was made to transport as many slaves at one time as a ship could possibly hold. They were packed in the lower part of the ship like sardines. The living conditions were so inhumane that millions of them did not survive the journey. Some estimate 30 millions lives were lost in the slave trade.

### ***Tradition of racism***

Racism was created because of a system of economy that required cheap labour. It was only with the ideology that one race was superior to another and that people of African descent were not really human, that made slavery able to continue and expand. In time the practice of slavery was challenged by persons who considered it barbaric, inhumane, immoral and sinful. The more slavery was attacked by those who wanted to end it, the more it was necessary to entrench racism in people's minds to justify what was going on. Racism soon became a broader tool than just one to support slavery. It became a tool to make one race feel better about itself. It became a part of the educational system and the acculturation of a total society. Racism became the tradition of the south in the US and around the world. Even persons who had never encountered a person of African descent personally, had heard the damaging reports about people of colour. The conclusions that were drawn and the comments that were made were presented to a world wide public as fact rather than ideologies. Laws were made to protect the tradition of racism and each racist considered it his or her responsibility to teach their own children how to be good racists.

After the Civil War ended in 1865, the economical system changed slightly; it changed from a system of slavery to serfism. The term for serfism in the United States was "share cropper". A share cropper was one who worked on a plantation owned by someone of the other race and would grow crops in the field. During the planting season, the share cropper would be loaned the seeds and tools for growing the crop in the field. Sometimes it was necessary to accept food on account while they waited for the harvest to come in. At

harvest time the share cropper was allowed to retain a certain portion of the harvest as his own. However, before he was allowed to realize anything for himself and his family, he would have to pay off the account that had developed as he needed supplies to grow the crops. In most cases there was nothing left and the share cropper had to work the land another year to pay what he owed. This cycle went on and on to no end.

### **Reconstruction**

There was a period of reconstruction in which the government sent troops to the south to protect the rights of the former slaves and other black people in the south. Once blacks obtained the right to vote, they were able to make laws that brought justice to them for a short period of time. By now racism was so entrenched that the whites were not willing to accept blacks as equals. Within ten to fifteen years the troops were removed and the political system was corrupted sufficiently to exclude most of the blacks from voting and consequently retained the power of the whites in the south. While blacks were in the majority by far, they met with resistance to exercising their political rights.

Some of the ways in which whites control the system was to establish a pole tax. Unless the blacks were able to pay the pole tax, they were not able to register to vote. Another way was to require blacks to answer a questionnaire, which would determine whether they were literate enough to vote. Since they had been denied the right to read and write in slavery, many of them were unable to even read the forms much less fill them out. Even for those who were literate, they could not answer the questions on the form because in many cases there was no answer to the question. For example, one of the questions was, "How many bubbles are in a bar of soap?" So while reconstruction seemed to offer great promise to black people for a very short time, by the turn of the century those gains had been taken away and controls had been established to maintain the tradition of racism in America. Jim Crow laws were established to maintain racism.

Where ever whites failed to gain the advantage that they wanted through legal, political and economic means, they resorted to horrendous violence. The Ku Klux Klan, an organisation of

people who covered themselves in white sheets and hoods and roamed at night, used armed force to resist any efforts on blacks to gain equality in the United States. The KKK became a national organisation and because their identity was not known, included people of high standing in the community and who held high political offices. While their symbol of terror was to burn crosses in the yards of black people, they were known to burn down people's houses, shoot them down in cold blood, lynch them by hanging them from a tree limb, drown them in ponds and rivers, mutilate their bodies, especially by castration, rape women, and generally terrorise them in any way they could. Whenever blacks tried to defend themselves, they became the victims of viscous lies which welded the white community together against them which was responsible for the death of many blacks. Most of the atrocities that blacks experience in this country right up to the 1950s resulted in little or no legal action against the perpetrators of the evil.

### **Industrial period**

In the early part of the 19th century we entered into an industrial period in the United States. Now the labour was needed not in the cotton fields in the south, but in factories in the north. Many blacks migrated from the south to northern cities where they found employment in the most deplorable situations imaginable. They worked in factories all day like they used to work in the fields, but they were paid a wage and were protected by the law from being split up from their families. But the tradition of racism made an adjustment during the industrial period. The question of whether a black man was a man in the eyes of the law had been answered. But their lingered the question as to whether a black man was inferior to a white man. Because the later attitude was accepted by most, blacks were allowed to work in the lowest, most menial jobs that were available to anybody. Under rare circumstances were they ever able to work their way up to a higher position. While racism continued to be blatant in the south, it was covert in the north. However, racism was the same attitudinally wherever a black person would go.

During the great depression, persons who had wealth and lost it often committed suicide. Blacks, who were used

to not having anything anyway, continued to do their menial tasks and survive during the depression. When the first world war began, there was a decision not to give weapons to blacks on foreign soil because they may have sided with the enemy. Racists have always believed that if blacks were ever allowed to gain any power, that they would immediately turn against their white oppressors in response to all of the hate and destruction we have suffered. Because of the necessity for soldiers however, black units were developed that fought bravely in the first world war. By the time of the second world war, not only did we have black units fighting in the war, but a black unit of air fighters was created. It was not long after that that the US Military was integrated, but racism continued to exist even with the integration.

### **Integration**

During the 1950s a strong move by the NAACP to integrate all America began. it was understood and accepted by many blacks in the country that the total problem of racism was due to segregation. If everyone was integrated, racism would have to die. It was during the '50s that Martin Luther King Jr. began to move against racism in favour of integration. This integration movement spilled over into the '60s in which a liberal agenda began to be raised. This liberal agenda sought to gain everything from repayment for slave labour through the centuries, all the way to total equality for blacks in the country and access to everything that existed. You watched on television how the efforts of the civil rights marches and agendas were resisted by fire hoses, dogs, police brutality and the Ku Klux Klan. By the '70s a number of doors and windows in the society had been sprung open for anybody, including, and in some cases especially, blacks to go through. Access to educational institutions, access to career opportunities, access to houses in neighbourhoods that had been closed to blacks, access to political office and access to dreams of the future were enjoyed for a while.

By the 1980s a conservative movement had begun which sought to undue all of the gains that had been made by black people in America from the '60s and forward. Efforts that had been made to accommodate blacks who had been unfairly denied privilege in early years, were turned back by those who felt that

enough had been done to make up for past injustices. It was during this period of time that Dr. Batts developed her theory of the new racism.

**New face of destructivisms**

Dr. Valerie Batts suggests that racism is only one of the destructive "isms" in our country; just as destructive as racism is classism, sexism, ageism, and ethnocentrism. She says because the new isms are not personal but institutional, three problems exist that make racism worse today than it was years ago: 1) it is harder to identify the perpetrator, 2) there is no personal guilt or responsibility, and 3) it is more difficult to change.

Batts suggests that the new racism is a co-operative system. In this co-operative system both the oppressor and the oppressed are participants in keeping the system alive. It is true that racism has been the standard for so long that many victims of racism believe in it as truth. Because of the ideologies surrounding the new racism it is easy to see how the system perpetuates itself with the assistance of both the targets and the oppressors. Batts suggests five dynamics of oppression that are responded to by five corresponding dynamics:

OPPRESSOR	TARGET
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· dysfunctional rescuing</li> <li>· blaming the victim</li> <li>· avoidance of contact</li> <li>· denial of cultural differences</li> <li>· denial of political significance of cultural differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· system beating</li> <li>· system blaming</li> <li>· anti-white, avoidance of contact</li> <li>· denial of blackness</li> <li>· not understanding or minimising of political significance of racial oppression</li> </ul>

**What needs to be done**

What we can do is listed under three headings. 1) Individual, 2) institutional, 3) societal.

As an individual there are two things we can do, one is to change our personal attitude. However, a change of personal attitude does little to change a system of racism. It is important that each individual not only change his or her personal attitude, but also influence

changes in the institution with which they are connected: such as school, church, work, government, community and social affairs.

Speaking institutionally the kinds of changes that need to be made is a change of policies and/or enforcing the policies that already exist. Another institutional change that is necessary to eliminate racism is affirmative action. Often people define affirmative action as exclusive opportunity for blacks to gain access to something from which they have been denied. That is true in part, however, the overarching definition of affirmative action is opening up the system to everybody and accepting the best qualified person. The need for affirmative action is due to racism and the "good old boys system". In the good old boys system opportunities that become available are not advertised publicly and only a select few people are aware that the opportunity even exists. Even if others become aware of the opportunity and make effort to take advantage of it, the good old boys system is one of accepting friends, those to whom we owe favours, persons like themselves or anybody that is not black. Affirmative action is a correction to this kind of system and makes the system more fair and equitable for everyone.

The way to change racism in our society is to use all of the power we have in the political system to demand that laws be passed that will eliminate racism. The US is a system of laws and persons do not change unless the law requires them to do so. In spite of all of the education that has been done around the benefits of wearing seat belts while riding in an automobile, many people, including myself, did not wear seat belts on a regular basis until wearing a seat belt became the law. The same thing is true about racism. People do not change their attitudes unless the law requires them to. The next thing we need to do on a societal basis is to educate ourselves and especially our children. Racism has been able to continue because parents have passed it down to their children, teachers have passed it on to children in school, pastors have passed it on to congregations and community leaders have passed it on to those who follow them. We need to re-educate our society, especially in our homes where children are young enough to learn the difference in love and hate.

Racism began 500 years ago because there were people who benefited from it economically. It continues today because there are still people who benefit from racism. Plato said, "what is honoured in the country will be cultivated there." Racism will continue to exist as long as our greed is more important than our morality.

*Focus Questions:*

1. Recall your earliest experience of racism.
2. Over what culture do you have power?
3. Toward what person or group of persons are you prejudiced?
4. How do you handle your feelings of prejudice and racism in your counseling?



# Sermon

by Ronaldo  
Sathler-Rosa

Opening service  
to the seminar

13 October 1996,  
Lutheran Church  
St. Jakobs,  
Ustron

## Scripture reading

### Hebrews 11.1-2

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the ancestors received divine approval.

Rev. Dr.  
Ronaldo Sathler-Rosa,  
Professor and President of  
Methodista College,  
Sao Bernardo da Campo  
(Brazil)

I would like to share three comments with regard to the main theme of today's Scripture reading: faith.

(1) Faith is an existential option. It means that faith is an option for life and a way of living. Or, faith is a quality of life. It is, therefore, more than a choice to live a heavenly existence or to wait for a promising future somewhere. To live by faith brings to our lives a particular perspective on the meaning of history. Our history is the stage, or arena, where we have been challenged to act, or to struggle, for the well-being of our neighbour, of nature, of ourselves and for peace among nations and families. History is the framework to be filled with the fulfilment of our essential human vocation: to be partners together with God and our sisters and brothers in the search for a world of sisterhood, of brotherhood, of justice. This is the major content that shapes our way of living. This is our heritage. This is the source of our hope.

(2) To live by faith implies to walk through the difficulties and uncertainties of our existences in a troubled world. This is another component of our faith inherited from the wanderings of Sara, Rahab, Abraham, Moses among others. Our life journey is encouraged by the fact that our belief is much more than philosophy, or just a conceptual matter. Our faith becomes visible in our commitment to keep our vision alive through working for a better world for our generations as well as for our descendants. Our commitment means educating ourselves and our children, students and parishioners to work for peace. In addition to that we need to teach each other

to express a *prophetic indignation* in the face of any violence; not only the urban or war violence but also the *invisible violence* of many close relationships such as family, peer, co-workers etc.

I would like to remember that education goes together with practice, action. As we start doing something that we find helpful to ameliorate life conditions in our societies we learn more about peacemaking. Furthermore, we do what we believe is expressed in the prayer: Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

(3) The choice to live under the experience of faith involves building up communities free of barriers such as gender discrimination, racism, religious prejudice and others. The children, the youth and the elderly are welcome in these communities. These human groups represent what Sharon Welch calls *communities of resistance*. We insist on resisting the widespread model of many cultures which stress individualism and discriminations to the detriment of mutual respect, collaboration and human understanding. What can we do in order to be consistent with our faith? We must try in small groups, or in church meetings to find the answers as we talk to each other.

Our gathering together is an important sign: it indicates that we are searching for a meaningful life.

This is a sign of hope. A hope that comes from the mystery of God's grace and human faith; from the shadows of the complexities of our common humanity we share with Sara, Rahab, Abraham, Moses... Amen

Some of the participants of the Seminar on Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling at Ustroń