

Chances and Challenges of Solidarity

ICPCC from post-colonialism to global challenges

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Abstract: ICPCC as a movement is rooted in the idea of encouraging or empowering individuals to do their work in hospitals, elder care homes, in hospices, in the Army or in correctional centres or as religious leaders. This is a difficult task, it demands a lot of energy and mental and spiritual dedication to the work. Qualified persons from most different regions of the world join the ICPCC Congresses in order to present and learn more about the current state regarding practice and theory of Pastoral Care and Counselling.

Travelling seems to be one of the greatest pleasures of mankind. Whenever I read comments, letters, personal remarks in my research on the history of the ICPCC Congresses, the following words recurred:

“And after the conference we visited this wonderful country and had great experiences”.

Travelling and encountering places and people of meaning and significance for societies or at least for one's own life is the best part of an effective education. And it can help to build bridges and to develop peace.

When Pastoral Care and Counselling came to Europe in the 1960s one big challenge to deal with emotionally and intellectually was the Holocaust. It was a great historical burden and impact not only for those who had survived war and Holocaust, but also for the next generations to learn about. Documents of these early times, when ICPCC was not yet established, but the emerging movement of Pastoral Care and Counselling fascinated the Europeans as well, show details of the atmosphere of those meetings. They tell about impressive visits in Auschwitz/Poland, about Jewish speakers, about their lectures and reports on a Sabbath devotion with an intercultural group in the venue in a town close to Auschwitz. Visitors of this meeting were not only religious leaders but also members of the Solidarnosz, then being the uprising movement towards a humanistic socialism in Poland and in the rest of the socialist world. The “Iron Curtain” was the second subject of the international meetings at least in Europe.

Another subject for many years of the ICPCC encounters in conferences was feminism and its impact on emotions, on power and structures in religions and in civil societies. Since the beginning of this movement a lot of publications have been dedicated to this subject, either from hermeneutic feminist approaches or from sociologists, psychologists and psychotherapists – just to list the ICPCC frame of reference. The researchers as well as their subjects were “Western-world-style.” During recent years international feminism has had to consider the cultural gap in the world apart from “Western rationalities”. The recent discussions on the distinction between “Islam” and “Western world” seem to bring a new paradigm. They demand more sociological and ethnological knowledge to list the impacts of the worldwide situations of women. The abstract claims for matriarchal power mostly do not exactly fit for the worldwide realities of women. There is a demand for more sophisticated and detailed approaches to the empowerment of women within different cultures. This may emerge again when ICPCC is confronted with Asian cultures and their particular approaches to feminist thoughts.

The 300 pastoral counsellors meeting in Edinburgh 1979 gave this first Congress the title “The Risks of Freedom”. The subject was focused on the individual’s freedom from strong and patriarchal structures in churches and societies. The methods to achieve this goal were regarded in the individual’s introspection, and great emphasis was put on group encounters. They provided the vicarious space to prepare the “long walk to other institutions”. Psychoanalysis and Clinical Pastoral Education should enable students to “change churches and societies”. The emerging trainings in these methods were combined with upgrades for professional work and by this, at least in the Western European churches, became attractive.

A report about one pre-conference of this meeting in Eastern Germany/Eisenach opened an access to another big item of the implementation of Pastoral Care and Counselling in Europe and with that one part of the worldwide ICPCC developed: when meeting for the first time “behind the “Iron Curtain”, the Germans in the German Democratic Republic seemed to be “persons whom to approach with fierce and awe”, as an American pastoral psychologist reported. This led to the aspects of mentality and cultural backgrounds, as well as to the social situations in the regions where Pastoral Psychology was implemented. During these days Germans behind the “Iron Curtain” were economically more vulnerable than the inhabitants of West Germany and more afflicted by the material damages of World War II. They did not enjoy as much individual liberty as those Germans “in the West”.

Socialist societies did not provide wealth for the individual. People had a harsh everyday life. Americans and people from other Western nations sometimes neglected this fact. Their basic needs were already met when they approached items of psychology. Western psychology seemed to depend on an easier access to riches and liberty. And by that it sometimes missed the goal of being sensitive to cultural and social differences. Theories and practices of psychology aimed at individual happiness and smiling faces and an experience of well-being – and this was not always the most important goal in Eastern Germany; here people more clearly struggled for mental and physical survival.

In the second part of his report on the meeting in Eisenach the American pastoral psychologist added that he discovered more than the lack of a smile in the German faces. He encountered an authentic ethical attitude and signs of a serious understanding of Christianity behind these “fierce” faces of the Eastern German theologians. Maybe he even discovered the connection between the economic and political situation and the mentalities of these people. There was a big gap between the political status of churches in East and West in Germany as well, and the practical aspects of life were crucial when considering mental attitudes.

Africa 1999 was the great moment when ICPCC became worldwide and encountered the outcomes of colonial and post-colonial orders. ICPCC members were guests of churches in a society which was struggling economically and – compared to the international status of ICPCC’s member countries – less powerful politically. This more and more led to the reflections on North and South of the world and to the questions of globalization and its impacts on everyday life – the motto of the Congress in Bangalore/India.

Encountering Maori Culture in New Zealand 2011 led back to the subjects of spirituality and culture, indigenous healing and Western medicine – back to the great divisions of the world: rich and poor, powerful and marginalized. Again, and in a new way race and gender topics worldwide were raised – and last but not least, ICPCC found access to the dialogue of religions. In San Francisco this topic emerged, and presumably will be an important subject in Kuala Lumpur/Malaysia. In Asia the cooperation of religions seems to be crucial, especially in a secular country like Japan, where religions have to cooperate in order to bring forth their impacts and their contributions to society. The proportions of Christians in countries with major Islamic population

are not so small, and if religions begin to cooperate, they hopefully may help to develop and maintain civil societies and democracy in their region.

When reading preparatory texts for all these conferences I found a remark: The 8th ICPCCC Congress in Kryszowa/Poland took place with the title: *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels. Intercultural Perspectives on Pastoral Care and Counselling facing Fragility and Destruction*. The discussion emerged whether a biblical citation in the title may include the risk not to be understood. Secular recipients won't grasp the meaning of the context. The citation results from Christian tradition and world view, which is not familiar to the whole society.

Though perhaps the ICPCCC members understood what was meant, this discussion shows the progress of secularization in the Western countries. It may be a hint to be very sensitive and distinct in a region of the world where religions are in cooperation and sometimes in rivalry for reasons of acknowledgement and political influence.

A risk of freedom may be converted into other risks if ICPCCC does not develop a very sensitive view on the changing societies: There are risks for not being understood – whether we speak in religious terms or in psychological ones, whether gender accesses are discussed in different settings or whether racial aspects are used either to keep peace or to provoke hatred.

It is not a big secret that the ICPCCC finances are short: Regarding the situation of many members of ICPCCC all over the world, the finances altogether diminish, while expenses for the Congresses grow as well as the expenses of funds for those who are not able to travel around the world or even to participate in conferences. ICPCCC should maintain solidarity wherever it is possible. There is already a big gap between those member organizations who are able to contribute fees or send Congress attendants and those who are already kept back.

When turning to the Asian – Pacific region the members of ICPCCC will encounter profound cultural riches and diversity. They also will meet fragility and destruction in respect to nature and environment – whether there are man-made risks or results of big natural disasters. In this region of the world millions of people encounter threatening economical risks in everyday life.

Malaysia again may be a good place to travel and enjoy culture – hopefully it will become a place to *meet* as well – people from diverse “worlds” in their struggle for their lives and families, for their religious entities and for the improvement of their societies. Again pastoral counsellors have a chance to expand their concerns for humanity worldwide.

When turning to Asia in Kuala Lumpur/Malaysia in August 2019 ICPCCC members will encounter Christians from various churches belonging to religious and ethnic minorities within their special countries. Maybe there will be Congress participants from different religions – as in San Francisco. Malaysia and Indonesia are mainly Islamic countries, India has its indigenous Hindu tradition, Japan is historically influenced by Shinto and Buddhism. Christians of various denominations came to this part of the world either by colonialization or by some sorts of mission. Christian churches are – besides the Mar Thoma in India or few other groups – not a part of the ancient cultural traditions of this continent. If pastoral counsellors will be guests of this region of the world, the basic virtue of listening will be of outstanding importance. Listening and participation are two sides of the same medal. They both represent the willingness to understand what is really going on. And this is not only important for the goal of understanding. We will come to know the joyful cultural sights of the places and will meet the burdens of this region of the world - burdens like great economic shifts and the ongoing dangers and possible destruction of the environment for numerous reasons.

A special emphasis will be laid again on the empowerment of women wherever they are victims of unjust laws and practice. “Confronted Societies” as the Asian pastoral psychologist Padmasani J.

Gallup claims¹, provide rare chances for a profound change. While traditional life and customs erode, violence seems to be an alternative for those who feel left behind in the fast worldwide economic development. Men and women are victims of this situation, but women bear the bigger burden. Religions have a double-bind function in this respect. On one hand, they symbolize aid and relief for suppressed persons. Religions provide guidelines for “morals” and may protect those who need mental and physical shelter. On the other hand the powerful aspects of religions are regarded to be a challenge for modern women’s emancipation.

In modern societies in Asia, persons from many religious and ethnical descents have to survive and will have to cooperate in peace. They have to overcome the boundaries of colonialism. They have to preserve their environment in common achievements. They have to find their special ways to establish their authentic political systems. A training of religious leaders in Pastoral Care and Counselling may help to reach the goal: to develop and maintain democratic structures including men’s and women’s true needs: leading to tolerance and peace in the multicultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic societies of the South East Asian region.

ICPCC members are looking forward to this meeting with pastoral counsellors in Asia and their special gifts and challenges.

¹ Padmasani J. Gallup: „Subham“: The Concept of Wholeness in Pastoral Counselling in the Hindu Cultural Context, in: Ulrike Elsdörfer: Interreligious Encounter on cura animarum, Berlin, Germany 2013; p. 125

