

# **The European Movement for Pastoral Care and Counselling**

An Interpretive History

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In the summer of 1985 the European Movement for Pastoral Care and Counselling was ten years old, not an enormous age as organizations go but for the few who have seen it struggle, develop and grow from its preconception stage at Arnoldshain three years previously to its  
10 birth in 1975 in Rüschtikon there has been an undoubted and marked development and change. The issues about which the still youthful movement is concerned now are very different from the earlier ones.

The themes of the first three conferences related to the Practice of Care and Counselling, to Supervision, Training and Learning. Subsequently meetings tried to deal with more  
15 fundamental human values indicated by the themes of Freedom, Spirituality, Story and Symbol, Pain and Power. The development of the conferences resembles that of a group. Individual members change but a group culture develops and is passed on from generation to generation and from conference to conference. It is not surprising therefore that earlier conferences dealt more with externals whilst more recent ones were concerned with deeper,  
20 more unconscious and more primitive areas of human emotions and conflicts. Biblical themes.

This has also been reflected in Biblical themes which appeared to be less significant in the earlier conferences. The theme of Exodus was first raised in Edinburgh in connection with the liberation of women. The Exodus theme continued and predominated in Lublin where the  
25 Passover meal which celebrates the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt played such an important part. In Turku, Genesis was the predominant theme so that Cain and Abel as well as Adam and Eve and the serpent were given a good deal of attention. The question thus arises: Where do we go from here? The answer is left to future participants and the dynamic of the movement itself.

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## *Background*

The background and roots of the International Movement for Pastoral Care and Counselling are many and varied. Prior to 1972 there were a number of personal exchanges among  
35 educators and trainers in the United States and Europe. People from several countries went to

the United States to be trained in the practice and theory of pastoral counselling, and the concepts of Clinical Pastoral Education (C.P.E.) spread to other continents. There were bilateral spontaneous meetings particularly between Holland and the U.S. ( Utrecht 1966) and Great Britain and the U.S. ( London 1968). In Holland a strong continental European adaptation occurred with research, practice and writing which spread to most of the continent. The work of significant father & (now grandfather) figures such as Faber, Zijlstra, and van der Schoot became widely known and the movement became more Europeanized. Formal and informal contracts increased significantly in the 1960s. In developmental terms this could be seen as a precourtship stage.

In Britain very little was happening in the field of training clergy in pastoral counselling skills between the end of World War II and early '60s. In 1962, Frank Lake founded the Clinical Theology movement and pioneered a training for clergy and other church workers in which insights from religion and psychotherapy were brought together. A few other training programmes started in the 1960s at hospitals and universities but each of them was going on in isolation and was largely unaware of what else was happening in this area until the Institute for Religion and Medicine initiated consultations at the request of the British Council of Churches. These consultations were the forerunners of the Pastoral Care and Counselling Association in Great Britain, but it was not until 1970 that the first formal Pastoral Care and Counselling Centres were set up, the Westminster Pastoral Foundation by William Kyle and Dymna Centre (Roman Catholic) by Father Louis Marteau.

In 1972 an American-trained German pastor, Werner Becher, took the initiative of bringing together a few individuals from different countries ( primarily Holland, Great Britain, the USA, Scandinavia, Germany and Switzerland), known for their interest in the Care and Counselling field; seventy delegates met at Arnoldshain, West Germany, under the auspices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. This could be seen developmentally as the engagement stage. There was no certainty about a forthcoming wedding but the parties had met, looked each other over and had a good and worthwhile experience: but they had also quarrelled and recognized areas of conflict and disagreement, largely about different modes of training. There were areas of polarization between the formalized and systematic C.P.E. model and the as yet rather unstructured, varied and changing models especially in England. At the Arnoldshain meeting a demonstration of a C.P.E. supervision session evoked an angry response from some participants who wanted diversity and flexibility of training; they clearly did not like the notion of a „quarter of C.P.E.“, so many verbatims, so many hours of supervised work and so many hours of personal therapy. This was at the same time a true appreciation of the American trainers and supervisors who had accumulated a great deal of experience and expertise; newcomers in the field could benefit and learn from this, but there

were also strong fears of American paternalism which was to be resisted at any price. For all that, there was enough to be shared and valued to plan another get-together at a conference which was to take place in Rüscklikon, Switzerland, where in fact the Union was formalized.

### *Birth of the European Movement*

In Rüscklikon the International Movement for Pastoral Care and Counselling was born. Perhaps the Union had already taken place in Arnolds hain and the actual birth happened after the Travail of those earlier years. The tensions already present at Arnoldshain continued as growing pains. There was still serious ambivalence towards the participants from North-America, a kind of love/hate relationship towards the „big father“. There was also the envy and fear of being swallowed up or being told what to do by the parent body. On the other hand there was also big appreciation and gratitude for the enthusiasm and generosity with which things were shared and for the patience shown towards the rebellious children who were of course not rebellious all the time. There was also a great eagerness to learn some of the new techniques presented and to imbibe some of the „good food“ handed down by some of the original father figures. One of Howard Clinebell's introductory sessions was not only memorable but also symbolic; participants were literally feeding and being fed oranges and experiencing as never before how much easier it is for most of us to do the feeding – a good reason to take up the professional roles we have chosen.

Meanwhile the European „children“ acted in a characteristically Oedipal manner by staging a ritual killing off of the father. They decided to have their own conferences and to „invite“ the „parents“ from across the ocean but only as observers at future meetings in Europe. At the same time a European father figure was elected as the first Chairman, Louis Marteau, a Roman Catholic priest who was born in Belgium, but lived and worked in England, one of the pioneers in his own right. Having gained their independent status, the „Children“ then began to fight and quarrel amongst themselves. Sibling rivalry took the form of vying for approval, attention and acknowledgement. Each one wanted to be special. Conflicts arose over a number of issues such as didactic vs. experimental learning, religion vs. psychology, theory vs. practice, formal vs. informal learning. C.P.E. was seen as a highly professional training which carried with it the risk of leading to rigidity and some loss of vitality. The English association represented the opposite pole with an ongoing controversy about the need to avoid too much professionalism for the pastoral carer; the result was that in England there were no clear standards of what constituted adequate training until the late seventies.

The conferences have highlighted how much pastoral counsellors from many countries, culture, societies and religious denominations have in common. At the same time it made each national association – each of the siblings – anxious about its own identity and individuality.

Adolescent struggles took the form of wanting freedom from all the organizational restraints. Adolescents frequently ignore the unpleasant reality of finance, and so it was with the young European movement. It had to accept that the sponsoring bodies and national organizations needed help with finance.

Another crisis centered around the drawing up of the constitution. Was it really necessary? Would it restrict freedom and growth? How could the diverse interests be accommodated? A constitution was drawn up, and it did not put the movement into a straitjacket. In fact, most of the time people have barely been aware of its existence. The fears may be justified, however. So many promising organizations seem to throttle themselves with their own rules and regulations. The Pastoral Care and Counselling movement has resisted up to now to become an association with membership. There are no officers except for those who plan the next conference, and there is no membership fee. But there are also disadvantages; decisions can only be taken by the committee which is planning the next conferences. Attempts at getting a newsletter off the ground have been successful and they have been dependant upon the initiative of individuals like Heijje Faber from Holland and Werner Becher from West Germany. Striking a balance between too much and too little organization is not easy but the fact that the movement has survived, developed and grown is not a bad achievement. Surprisingly perhaps we are too preoccupied with our early parents and siblings as well as with our standing in relation to allied professional disciplines such as psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and counselling to give much thought to the religious and the spiritual dimension or to be explicit about God. This did not mean that the pastoral element in Pastoral Care and Counselling was ignored. It was perhaps taken for granted whilst professional status and recognition was something many pastoral Counsellors still had to struggle for. The question of how the religious and counselling components could be integrated, whether they complemented each other or produced conflict is still with us.

It was probably not accidental that the theme of „The Spiritual Dimension in Pastoral Care and Counselling“ first cropped up in Eisenach, East Germany, the state which does not officially recognize the existence of God. It was the theme of the Lublin conference at which tensions about ways of worshipping together in an ecumenical setting became paramount.

Although written into the Constitution that we are in the „Judeo-Christian tradition“, it was only in Lublin that the movement acknowledged for the first time it was a Judeo-Christian movement in that a rabbi was present in an official capacity. The common origins of Jewish

and Christian traditions were celebrated by Rabbi Daniel Smith in a Passover meal, a very moving and memorable occasion for all present; the Polish nuns and students who had gone  
145 to enormous trouble to get the correct ingredients for the meal made it truly festive. The Polish priests and German pastors and the Jews and Germans sharing this Passover celebration made it a remarkable historical event itself. There was a realization that something had taken place.

The conference also tackled issues of mature and immature religion and reflected a distinctive  
150 growth in self awareness as well as the beginning of a willingness to look at ourselves, at our prejudices and at the shadow side of our lives as individuals and groups. We were brought face to face with the evil that man can do to man at Majdanek Concentration Camp. One of the Americans cried out „And to think that those who did this were men, too!“. It would have been difficult to go through experience of what had been hell on earth and come away  
155 unchanged. It forced us also to look at the potential for evil that resides in each of us.

Prior to Lublin was the first International Congress which took place in Edinburgh and which attracted four hundred participants from the so-called first, second and third world countries; this contrasts with the approximately one hundred and twenty who attended the 1985 European Conference in Turku. The very size of the Edinburgh Congress changed the nature  
160 of the meetings. Something is gained by bringing so many people together from a vast variety of cultures, countries and continents, but something is lost in terms of closeness, getting up to know people and feeling a part of the whole. Even with one hundred and twenty participants, a conference begins to have some of the characteristics of a large congress rather than a small group; in such large settings some people may not feel free to affect what is happening. The  
165 theme of the Edinburgh Congress was „The Risks of Freedom“. There were some excellent papers. The congress had gone for the big names. There was still a good deal of preoccupation with gained recognition from the world at large and with gaining approval from the other authorities, from the church and professions like psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Perhaps the movement had got to the stage of wanting to identify with the „parents“.

170 There was some irony in the extinct title „The Risks of Freedom“, since it seemed that the risks of giving some freedom to ordinary participants to make themselves heard were perceived as too great. There was virtually no space for free discussion. Everything was pre-planned and organized. The organization was indeed superb, but it allowed very little freedom to the individual. This created feelings of helplessness, isolation and dependency on the  
175 leaders.

The issue of helplessness and omnipotence was prominent again at Turku as were a number of other issues from other conferences. It was obvious that there would be tensions between people from Eastern and Western Europe, between the West and Third World countries,

180 between Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox as well as Jews and Christians. Some of these conflicts found expression in doubts about ecumenical worship but this was no longer a major issue at Turku which hosted the 1985 conference. The issue which seemed to arouse the greatest passions was the male/female conflict expressed in terms of who went to the sauna first and who had to wait, meaning perhaps who had the power and why.

185 It was at the Edinburgh congress that the meaning of the feminist movement was first raised as a major issues by the Dutch theologian Christina Halkes. She talked of it as a „freeing of men and women from the rigid structures which define both sexes in particular ways and stop them from becoming what they could be and from wholeness“. Halkes described the Bible as a „fundamentally patriarchal book which restricts and restrains women, at the same time giving a message of freedom through the good news.“ The church and synagogue developed  
190 male dominated, hierarchical structures in which women became invisible, were silenced, had no face and no voice and no responsibility“. She thought of feminist theology as „a theology of freedom and wholeness in which language and imagery of God can be expressed without sexist overtones“.

At the Pastoral Care and Counselling conferences women were not totally invisible but it was  
195 perhaps not insignificant that the first female speaker at one of the meetings was Halkes in Edinburgh...In Lublin most women were well segregated from the men and were accomodated twenty minutes away from the conference buildings. The questions which came to mind, therefore, were: Are women still perceived as too dangerous to let them get too close? Is man taking revenge on women for his dependance in early life? What perpetuates  
200 the split between the sexless virgin -mother, and the sinful, dangerous, sexual woman as represented in Mary Magdalene?

At Turku we did not shrink from the issue of men and women but it seemed that we might be in danger of simply reversing roles with women taking power for themselves and men relinquishing it. It did not happen and the hope must be expressed that it will be possible to  
205 find a more constructive way of using feminist theology, such as working together as equal partners.

The issues of equality also came up in relation to Jews and Christians within the Pastoral Care and Counselling Movement. Only one Jew (co-author Irene Bloomfield) was present at the early conferences. Edinburgh brought a couple a rabbis from the United States but it was not  
210 until Lublin that a rabbi was there in an official capacity, and not until Turku that the Jewish-Christian issue could be faced openly. Another Rabbi, Howard Cooper, brought an enormous optimism and hope in the air. The theme of the exodus, the liberation of the Jews from slavery in Egypt, was with us, focussed most movingly in the Passover meal we shared together. Leslie Virgo in his accounts says this: „there are two symbols which stand out beyond all

215 others as I look back at the experience of Poland – the symbol of the chimney of the  
crematorium at Majdanek, an obscene finger poking into the horizon of the camp: and a tall  
white candle at the Passover supper. Rabbis Daniel Smith and his wife Chani created a  
mysterious and powerful poetry for us all, catching us all up in a universal language, the  
language of the Passover“.

220 There was at the same time a recognition that we also need our psychological insights in order  
to try to make sense of the experiences – of Majdanek, the pilgrimage to the shrine of the  
Black Madonna and the Passover service....

A Jewish presence at the conferences has given them a special character. It made it necessary  
to confront unresolved issues, to acknowledge common roots and equally ancient jealousies  
225 as a prelude to any reconciliation of unresolved internal conflicts within our collective and  
individual psyches.

The theme of conflict between Jews and Christians, Jakob and Esau, was taken up again in an  
excellent paper by Howard Cooper at the conference in 1985 in Turku, Finland, but the main  
theme of that conference was „Pain and Power“ - the conflict between suffering passively  
230 adverse geographical and socio-political conditions, and fighting them actively.

### **Assisi 1989 Coping creatively with chaos**

235 I now come to the most recent conference. Like all previous ones it had its own particular  
flavour, and was very much affected by its venue. Assisi is a very special place. The beauty  
and simplicity of its architecture reflects very powerfully the life and work of St. Francis, and  
his influence was present throughout the conference.

The „Citadelle Ospitalia“ is an ideal place for a conference, and all our physical needs were  
240 attended by the Italian staff with great friendliness and efficiency. Arnaldo, the conference  
organiser, was determined to prove that Italians can be good organisers and he made his point.  
There were, in addition, some special imaginative and original touches even before the  
conference started. Correspondence to Arnaldo was answered on a post card which was a  
copy of a beautiful painting by Elena Mazzari called „Dal Caos al Cosmo“ which remained  
245 the symbol of the conference. Frans Andriessen, from Holland and one of the pioneers of the  
European movement, and one who always seems to have the finger on the pulse, chose  
pictures by Giotto as the medium of his address. He tried to help us see through images what  
previous speakers had tried to communicate through language. For language had proved at  
times to be a barrier to communication; despite excellent translation something was inevitably

250 lost. But in Giotto's picture, as interpreted by Andriessen, we were able to share in the universal and unifying language of art.

Andriessen's contribution, though the shortest – just 45 minutes – exemplified for me the essence of pastoral care and counselling conferences. He brought together insights from psychology and theology with the ease of a person naturally at home in both.

255 It is only now, as I am reflecting on all the conferences and what was distinctive about Assisi that I am left with the sense of the impact of colour, art and beauty in contrast to the greyness and absence of colour in some of the Eastern European countries. It would be quite wrong to give the impression that there were no beautiful monuments, paintings or icons in those countries, but they represented the preoccupations of former ages rather than being a part of  
260 the present. In Assisi it was the combination of the beauty of the landscape and art with the ever-living vision of Francis and Clare for a better, less materialistic society which had the most profound effect on me.

Francis also emphasised the enormous value and importance of our contact with the rest of the creation – the plants, animals, soil and wind. Who of us could think of „Brother Sun and  
265 Sister Moon“ of Francis' Canticle without also being confronted by our current loss of respect for „Planet Earth“ and its riches. It brought home the terrible tragedy of the wastefulness and destructiveness with which we deal with the earth' resources.

Such – together with many personal encounters – were my long-lasting, positive impressions of the conference. But at the same time some of its aspects were not so successful.

270 The theme of the conference was „Dealing with Chaos“; yet the one thing we seemed to try to avoid at any price was an *experience* of chaos; and the structure colluded with us. The timetable was tight, yet speaker after speaker went over their time cutting down on discussion and dialogue. Meals and worships had to be punctual, so the theme-centered groups were truncated, thus stopping interaction, discussion, reflection and the possibility of conflict and  
275 disagreement. I wondered if we allowed this to happen day after day because there was an underlying fear that real interaction might result in a chaos that we would not be able to deal with creatively.

Some of the talks took the opposite view. Marie Josephe Glardon from Switzerland in her key note address „Chaos and Creativity“ spoke of water as „ the womb of all possibilities for  
280 existence and for original or primordial chaos“. Immersion, she said, is a return to death, new birth and recreation. „Primordial chaos must be periodically revitalised by rituals,orgies, festivals, debauchery and creative violations.“ Marie Josephe's paper was a treasure trove of the myths, rituals and symbols of creation, but perhaps the possibility of involvement in primordial chaos evoked too much anxiety of what might happen if we began to experience it  
285 even in a mild form.

Frans Andriessen also spoke of the importance of chaos. „In the Bible the chaos before creation is the source of all possibilities....Chaos therefore remains with us after creation and can be the source of a new world....Coping with chaos means keeping contact with it, not declaring it merely an enemy, but seeing it also as an abyss out of which life comes forth.“

290 The richness contained in these few passages alone could have been enough to reflect on for several sessions. It seemed a great loss that there was virtually no time to do so.

The problem was aggravated for me because of the constellation of my small group. Three of the seven members did not approve of this sort of unstructured group, did not like it and could not see the purpose of it. They had very little or no experience of such groups and were very  
295 erratic in their attendance. Only two or three members saw this group experience as potentially the most valuable forum for exploration of issues in depth, for experiencing and observing interactions and for gaining greater self-awareness.

I know that other participants had very different and often good experiences in their small groups, but mine highlighted a more general problem, which raised fundamental questions for  
300 the future. Arnaldo had been remarkably successful in attracting a substantial number of delegates from France and Spain, countries hitherto almost unrepresented at these conferences. The Italian contingent naturally was much larger than previously, and there was also a number of people from Eastern European countries which before had only been minimally presented. But in all these „newer“ delegations the concept of pastoral care and counselling as  
305 it has involved in the West is virtually unknown. In consequence experience and levels of sophistication varied enormously, and for some the attempt to integrate psychological and theological insights was viewed with some suspicion. On the other hand some participants felt deprived of gaining insight into counselling because of the emphasis on the pastoral and theological. The question of how these different levels and interest can be reconciled will  
310 need some attention in the future.

That the emphasis in Assisi was very much on the religious, spiritual and theological was partly a reaction against previous conferences which had focussed much more on the counselling dimension. This was particularly so in the earlier conferences in which recognition, respectability and professionalism played a dominant role, as they then did in the  
315 respective national organisations. But it was also because in Assisi religion was all around us and the influence of Francis and Clare so positively pervasive. Nevertheless this reflects another polarisation or split which we have not yet managed to heal. We probably achieved the best balance between these components in Lublin where the external situation greatly facilitated the work towards inner integration.

320 When the editor talked to me about this article he wanted me to include something about the likely consequences of the recent events in Eastern Europe for the development of pastoral

care and counselling in those countries. Because the events were so unimaginable at the time of our conference and still hard to take in, it is too soon to make any predictions except that as barriers break down communications at all levels should be easier. So concepts and ideas  
325 should filter through more easily, and training programmes may start where none existed before.

It may sound grandiose and a little fanciful, but I wonder whether our choice of conference theme for Assisi - „Dealing creatively with chaos“ reflected some contact with the collective psyche of Europe which is in a state of chaos and appears to be trying to deal with it in a  
330 remarkably creative and hitherto almost unprecedented way. Perhaps there has also been a recognition at some deeper level that unless nations begin to *collaborate* to save our planet from destruction we will be doomed.

The message from Assisi that bears on this seems to be that in working collaboratively to deal with chaos we cannot shy away from conflict or try to smooth over tensions. Differences need  
335 to be identified and valued, for only then can we begin to heal the splits which still exist between us and within each of us.

first time published 1990:2 in „Contact“: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Pastoral Studies,  
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