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Reviewing the journey

The “Intercultural Seminars” 1986 to 1995.

A dialogue between Klaus Temme and Helmut Weiß

topics:

- discovery of “intercultural factors” in pastoral care and counselling
- pastoral care in the context of political changes
- difficulties of intercultural communication
- founding of the SIPCC

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Klaus Temme: *The first seminar in the year 1986 which was held in Kaiserswerth is still vividly in my mind. How did you get the idea of starting this type of seminar? What was your motive?*

Helmut Weiß: In 1978, when I was called to take over the “Zentrum für Klinische Seelsorgeausbildung” (Centre for Clinical Pastoral Education) in Kaiserswerth I intended to try and make contacts abroad right from the start. My aim was for the work done in Germany to receive some critical feedback “from outside”. In 1983, I made it a point to have our Dutch neighbours invited to the meeting of the section Clinical Pastoral Care Training of the German Society for Pastoral Psychology, among others Wiebe Zijlstra and Heije Faber.

But right from the beginning, there was also another thought in my mind: Everybody engaged in teaching has the possibility to participate in international conferences. But how about those engaged in pastoral care? Where do they have the possibility to exchange their views of and experience in pastoral care with others working in the same field? Wouldn’t an international seminar held now and then offer such possibilities?

While preparing the 150th anniversary of the ‘Diakonissenanstalt Kaiserswerth’ (Deaconesses Home Kaiserswerth), its then director, Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, suggested that every field of work should organise an event focusing on a particular subject. It was quite clear: If I was going to do anything special, it was going to be something international.

So I invited Howard Clinebell from California. At the back of my mind, I had the idea that he would attract many people to come to Kaiserswerth because his books were widely read across Germany and Europe. I spread the news of his impending visit especially in Germany and the Netherlands, but I invited colleagues from Eastern Europe, too. The seminar was successful to some extent. There was an

international crowd. There happened exchange between people from different countries, there was mutual learning.

But right from the start, there were also difficulties, for instance with regard to language and understanding. There had been an agreement with Clinebell: He would send us his papers so that we could have them translated. While he was giving his lectures everybody who did not know English should be able to follow the translated version of it. But Clinebell sent only short summaries. During his lectures he frequently improvised. We were not prepared for the amount of interpreting that was required. It was only under great difficulties and with little effect that we could change this by the end of the seminar.

Another difficulty came up during the seminar: Tension arose because there were various incidents of the audience and the lecturer not understanding what the other person wanted to say. Understanding was a problem, both on a contextual and on an interpersonal level. For instance, the lecturer did not pay much attention to the worries among his listeners relating to the Chernobyl disaster. This was hardly of interest to him. But this incident had occurred only a few weeks back and was a matter of great concern for the participants. They had hoped that this issue would be worked on, especially since the theme of the seminar was “Hope and Wholeness in a Threatened World”!

Tension reached a peak when participants declared that this could not continue. A steering committee was set up - ad hoc. There were violent quarrels which showed the different expectations and backgrounds.

Then and there, already during the first days, ‘intercultural tension’ emerged, without us being able to name it or even being conscious of it as such. But it was expressed in the words of some of the participants who repeatedly said “What he is doing is very American!”, while Clinebell considered himself very ‘un-American’ in the US spectrum.

Further tension developed when he started out on a discourse on the theme ‘Peace’. He made some suggestions for peace work which were long outdated in Europe. Obviously, he had not bothered to get himself informed on the status of peace work in Europe, and the audience was not able to attune itself to him.

Once again: Already at the initial stage, the question of different cultural backgrounds and how to deal with it emerged, but none of us was ready to address it in the right way. Our aim was to be international, but intercultural exchange had not yet come into focus.

K. T.: Looking at the list of participants and lecturers of the seminar in 1988 which was held in Kaiserswerth under the theme “Pastoral Care and Liberation”, it is obvious that we had become much more international than at the first seminar. But even then, we had not started to address the intercultural aspect consciously.

H. W.: The focus at this seminar anyhow was not really on the question of being international or of gaining intercultural awareness, but to come to terms with the changed situation after the closure of the Training Centre for Clinical Pastoral Care. I felt as if all energy for any future seminar had been withdrawn. Some of my roots had been cut off and at first it looked as though the seminar had lost its roots, too, because it had been deprived of its place.

If you are so intensely involved with the survival of your work, you don’t have the energy to look around at what others might need and what you might be able to

learn from them. On the other hand, at that very moment it was extremely important for me to receive international encouragement. People told me: “Your work is very important. There is no such international opportunity anywhere else!” It wasn’t just a few friends who said this. It became evident how important it was that pastoral care was further developed on a world-wide scale. And the seminars were necessary to ensure that this particular type of exchange could continue. On account of this wide support, I was able to plan further seminars even if they could not be held at the place where it all began, but had to be held at a different place, the Protestant Academy in Mülheim (Ruhr).

For me personally, the result of that seminar was: The contacts and relationships between us made it possible to share energies and encouragement. I will never forget how we formed a circle at the end of the closing worship, holding each other by our hands and sang. At that particular moment, I felt power and courage.

K. T.: It is becoming very clear that ‘encouragement’ has been a general feature throughout the seminars, and it is necessary that this remains so! George Euling comes to my mind, our friend from Papua New-Guinea. During the seminar in 1993, he had presented his situation and he had received much encouragement from the group. The following year, 1994, he reported how he had meanwhile launched many projects. May be, this sharing of energies was also one of the motives to move East?

H. W.: Well, when we held our seminars in Eastern Germany, in Groß-Dölln, and in Prague, in the Czech Republic, later on, our motive was to familiarise ourselves with the situation there and to see for ourselves how the people lived there and what their concerns were. The other motive was to offer encouragement through our being there, through our reflections, through our collaboration.

K. T.: Especially the participants from the East and the South have repeatedly and in more than one way expressed, even demanded that ‘give and take’ was exercised more widely. During our seminar in Prague, it was Biul from Papua New-Guinea who presented this point when he requested us to support him in his struggle against the destruction of his people and the destruction of their natural life resources!

H. W.: That means that intercultural argument both questions you and at the same time gives you enormous support. And I also believe: If we hadn’t experienced both in our seminars, to be challenged and to be encouraged, we would have long given up!

K. T.: In our last seminar, the same point was made again, when Edwin Decenteceo from the Philippines spoke of the sharing of burdens.

Regarding the seminar in 1988, I would like to mention one further point, i.e. the concept of “intercultural and ecumenical pastoral care” which was brought forward by Peter Hawkins from England in one of the workshops. When he spoke of “intercultural pastoral care” he was thinking of pastoral care administered to people from a different cultural background, i.e. the Pakistani people in England.

H. W.: With hindsight, you could make some critical comments on this: We invite an English pastor to Germany to talk about the work with foreigners in his congregation. He was prepared and qualified for this work through his long stay in the country where these people came from. That means: We invite a foreigner to talk about this issue and neglect our own intercultural and multi-cultural situation in Germany! This proves how ill-prepared we were to tackle the intercultural conditions in our own society, instead we externalised this issue! We have people fly

in so that they tell us something about this issue while we fail to visit the people who come from abroad and live in our own country.

It was to take another couple of years before we became aware of this and began to integrate into our seminars foreigners who lived and worked in Germany and in Europe.

Intercultural pastoral care in our own country definitely is an important challenge. Much more reflection is necessary. We would need to find a good combination of working more intensely than before with people from different cultural backgrounds living in Germany and Europe on the one hand, and on the other hand to offer pastoral care to people who have just arrived here from foreign countries.

Certain difficulties arise at this point, since the aspect of pastoral care does not really find consideration in the work with foreigners. Church-related as well as public groups put a strong emphasis on political work, also charitable help is given. But pastoral care and psychological assistance has had little room so far. By now, the psychological needs of these people are seen, but in my view they are not being acknowledged enough.

Meanwhile some beginnings have been made in this respect: Counselling offices attend to the needs of foreigners and refugees. I do hope that church congregations will offer more pastoral care in future, too.

K. T.: *I think what further aggravates this situation is the fact that after these people have finally arrived here, they fight for their survival and are incapable of verbalising their difficulties. They are not in a position to express the psychological needs they have. For us, it may be easier to do something, to act 'charitably', than to face the abyss of their inner selves.*

H. W.: A prerequisite of intercultural pastoral care - like any other pastoral care - is that you get involved. Schemes can be carried out, you can *do* something for others. In pastoral care, this is impossible.

K. T.: *The move from Kaiserswerth to the Protestant Academy in Mülheim (Ruhr) took place in 1989. The atmosphere there was very different. You could clearly feel that the place, that is to say the rooms of a villa which had been built at the beginning of this century to serve the representation purposes of a dynasty of industrialists influenced the atmosphere and communication. Can you tell us something about how you see this?*

H. W.: Kaiserswerth was more provisional and open at the same time. Compared to other places, the Academy villa has an adverse effect on communication, a more stunting effect. When we reflected on this at that time, I realised the strong effect places can have on communication. What is the influence then on a group, especially if this is made up of representatives from very different cultures? Which places intimidate people, which encourage them to be open? The buildings of the Academy were just not built to promote communal life.

K. T.: *To me, that seems to be only one factor among others, the original function of the villa vis-à-vis its present function. The second factor, as I see it, is the following: The villa is so very distinctly and strongly an expression of a very different culture, i.e. that of the top-level Prussian elite towards the end of the German empire that no other culture can bring itself to bear in its presence.*

H. W.: In Groß-Dölln, in that holiday camp of the former State Security Police, and in Prague, in that typical hotel of Socialist times, there were much more 'open' possibilities. We never allowed those places to have such a grip on us as

has the 'villa'. With regard to Prague, what came to bear is that it is a great metropolitan city which fascinated all of us.

The situation in Mülheim is that the atmosphere as we described it is 'built-in', this is true for the architecture, the administration, the whole style. From my point of view, the Academy's main intention is to *pass on information* and to *engage in matter-of-fact, political communication* and not to *promote inter-personal communication or interaction on a personal level* as in pastoral care. Isn't it surprising that the issue of the extent to which place and communication are inter-related came to the fore just when we met under the theme "Healing and Healing Community"?

K. T.: *Soon after the seminar in autumn 1989, the Wall fell in Germany. There had been visitors from the GDR and Eastern European countries right from the start. There had been many contacts. So it was natural that these issues were made the topics of the seminar in the following year. Was this the reason to link pastoral care and the conciliar process? The team then - Brigitte Hiddemann of the Academy, Klaus Cyranka from Halle (Saale), and you - formulated the theme as follows "Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation - A Challenge for Pastoral Care".*

H. W.: The conciliar process had received a lot of stimulation from the churches in the GDR and the experience there of living under an authoritarian regime. We wanted to draw from this experience. But there was another reason. The World Council of Churches had held a meeting in Seoul in Korea in March 1990 on the conciliar process. We wanted to show those engaged in pastoral care that it was also important for them to get involved with this process - to address the political and social questions of our time still more intensely. But we also wanted to show that the conciliar process is a movement of the people, i.e. if you ask what is justice, peace or integrity of creation you have to start off from the people. It is here that pastoral care can make a major contribution.

K. T.: *Through the theme as such and particularly through the introduction in the afternoon of the first day, a further issue came to the fore: the question of political events and their 'conveyance'!*

H. W.: I remember this afternoon very well: There were six people from the GDR, women and men, sitting in the centre of the plenum who recalled their experiences before and after the 'Turn' - among them, by the way, Joachim Gauck who was to become the director of the agency to deal with the State Security Police files later on. They conveyed political processes and spoke of their very personal experiences - but they were only partly understood. So the question was unavoidable: What is it like to have a part in political events, and how can such experiences be conveyed to other people who are little involved or not involved at all? Who has got the right understanding of what is being said? Which attitude is needed to understand? How do individuals come to terms with political events, radical changes, upheavals? From that time onwards, we have put our minds to such questions and will continue to do so in future. To this day, understanding between East and West is still a difficult matter in many ways.

K. T.: *This is not only a problem of East and West, but also a difficulty between North and South. This became repeatedly obvious in later seminars, for instance in summer 1991 when a participant from Zaïre heard about riots back home and was deeply alarmed - while we looked on, helpless. And again, during the last seminar with regard to the situation in the Philippines!*

H. W.: The question comes up here, how does the person concerned react when the others *fail* to understand? People come to us and talk about their situation. They do this in a very committed way because they are personally involved. Then there may be some who *will not understand*, some who put questions, some who are sceptical about the story. This will evoke a lot of different reactions in the narrator! Sometimes we could see how those who had told their story and were put back by others' reactions had difficulties to make a fresh start or to ask clarifying questions themselves.

What is needed is a two-way motion: getting involved in order to understand, and, at the same time, keeping some distance in order not to get too engrossed, not to get submerged. Without involvement on the one hand, and a certain amount of disassociation on the other, no exchange, no dialogue is possible. Fortunately, however, exchange does take place – and if it does, it is experienced as encouraging and strengthening.

K. T.: *I would like to go back to 1990 again. At that seminar, the issue of interpretation stood out again clearly. One of the lecturers, bilingual himself, used interpretation as a sort of a power struggle. He continually corrected the woman interpreter. It seemed he didn't really want to be interpreted!*

H. W.: Just looking at the language side, interpreting already is extremely complicated. But what is really difficult is to find the right interpretation of what is *meant* by what is said. In intercultural dialogue, many things cannot be conveyed using the words of a different language. Sometimes there is a lack of words, sometimes a lack of information about the background which would make the words at all comprehensible. We often experienced that the act of doing interpretation is an excessive demand which could lead to physical exhaustion.

K. T.: *There is another aspect of this seminar, I would like to just mention. Involving the Duesseldorf artist Hubert Begasse and arranging an exhibition of some of his paintings as well as a creative workshop with him, we tried to introduce another kind of 'culture' alongside the cultural medium of language.*

H. W.: Both, the workshop and the exhibition of paintings, were an experiment whether exchange was possible through other media since we had experienced how difficult language can and could be. But what we found was that exchange through paintings, through art is still more difficult! It had also been an experiment of being creative beyond the limitation of words. The workshop, however, was not attended by any 'foreigners', there were only creativity-obsessed Germans in it!

We had hoped that the paintings and looking at them might turn out as a new medium of intercultural exchange, but we had to concede that this was not the case. Our culture of painting is not on a level with other cultures of painting! The offered activity of painting did not hold the least bit of attraction for the participants from Africa or Asia. May be we should be on the lookout for other media, music for instance.

K. T.: *I am not sure at all! Just imagine, you are confronted with paintings or music from another culture without any 'mediation'. Would that get any exchange underway?*

H. W.: We haven't yet tried it all out! Most probably, in the case of other media, understanding would be limited or difficult, too! To me this means, that in the context of our seminars, concentration on the word, on using language is the appropriate thing.

K. T.: In 1991, the seminar was held in the small village Groß-Doelln, about 80 km north east of Berlin on the territory of the former GDR. Meanwhile, the organising team had decided to express the intercultural aspect by naming the plenary assembly “intercultural forum” and by giving each workshop a team of two leaders from different cultures. In doing so, you had made steps in the right direction which were to prove very important for the future.

H. W.: The plenary sessions have always been a great problem with lots of tension. We constantly discussed how we could handle the open situation in the plenum so that processes of understanding would happen at different levels, the cognitive, the emotional and the communal levels.

We had started out from the model of clinical pastoral care training with its open group sessions! We thought that in a plenum of 100 people similar processes would take place as in a small group and that the group as a whole would develop its own structures. But we were quite mistaken. It was only after some time that we realised that large groups needed other structures than small groups. And we had not realised either that such an ‘open’ kind of communication is something we are a little accustomed to in our particular cultural context, but which others could not handle, would even be frightened. So we reflected on the purpose of the plenary assemblies and how we could make good use of them. Finally, we decided that we wanted the plenum to be the place where people moved *in public* ! Which was the way to *make public* what concerned people deeply personally?

In Groß-Doelln, the following idea emerged for the first time: We came to realise that there was no reason why the organising team for the whole seminar should also preside over the plenary sessions. This could be done with the help of an extended team. So we selected a few people and with them we discussed what was to be ‘the order of the day’.

K. T.: What did you call that group at that time, ‘observation group’?

H. W.: It was called ‘process observation group’. Their task was to observe processes that were underway in the plenum and in the seminar as a whole and to report them back to the organising team. It proved to be painful sometimes to identify and agree on what was going on and how to continue any given process. Then we had the idea whether it would not be better if members of the observation group would chair the plenary sessions shortly, for instance Immanuel Lartey, a distinguished and clear-headed African. The approach was good basically, but we had not yet developed enough tools to make the whole thing meaningful. It was especially after Groß-Doelln that we extensively discussed the question of what it needed to chair a plenary assembly in the context of a large multi-cultural group.

One major aspect that we understood was that of *vulnerability* in such a public situation. The plenum feels hurt and so does the organising team. In 1991, vulnerability was discussed more frequently than at any other seminar. We then agreed: In intercultural dialogue, especially if it takes on a public character, people will be hurt and hurt others. This is inevitable, but the question arises of how to deal with it.

At that time, there were massive reproaches, for instance that the organising team had degraded people to mere objects, that in certain situations it had showed lack of sensitivity. We were said to have humiliated people from overseas. There were reproaches that we failed to see our own situation in Germany. Reproaches were whizzing back and forth.

Many must have left the seminar frustrated on account of these occurrences. We as the organising team neither had nor saw any means of avoiding these frustrations. That was not easy for us.

K. T.: *This is something that will occur again and again: You endeavour on something new - and that very moment you realise that you are entering virgin territory! This cannot be avoided through careful planning. You cannot tread on sure ground when you decide to plan the next seminar. There will always be new situations which could neither be foreseen nor planned ahead!*

H. W.: What has to be said about Groß-Doelln is that at that seminar, the idea of meeting with people from different backgrounds, cultures and attitudes and of expecting that this meeting would go off without a hitch, without a 'lame hip', was proved an illusion.

K. T.: *When you were looking for the themes for the 1992 seminar, you adopted a new procedure.*

H. W.: Liesel-Lotte Herkenrath-Püschel suggested to ask the overseas participants for *their* ideas of which topics to choose. This was a further experiment of intercultural exchange. At the occasion of the international conference on pastoral care in Amsterdam, a small group of interested people from Africa, Asia and America got together with Liesel-Lotte and myself. There, the suggestion was made to hold a seminar on marriage. From the point of view of the members of the above group, this topic was a 'necessity' and it was presented in a very committed way. Back in Germany, however, while proceeding with the necessary preparations, we realised that although this topic hit a problematic area it did not arouse our inspiration. So there was stress formulating a suitable theme. We also felt we should incorporate some other aspects which would appeal to us. Finally we agreed on the theme "...A Time to Love and a Time to Hate' - Intercultural Dialogue on Marriage, Gender Issues and Sexuality."

We had embarked on something new and we landed ourselves in a fine 'mess'. Not only were there problems during the preparation of the seminar, they really started when the seminar was underway. In my eyes, this was the most difficult seminar of all. There was so much tension as never before or afterwards.

The number of participants was small, the disparity between the groups wide due to the eventual mixture of sub-themes.

The missionary concern our African friends had had while accentuating the theme with a view to our Western and Westernised world, i.e. to acknowledge marriage as a Christian life-form, was 'countered'.

The people from the 'West' had difficulties showing esteem for others. This could be experienced in several workshops and individual encounters and went to the extreme of women being jeered at for defining their role as a married woman differently from some other participants. In some of the workshops, some extreme forms of 'deposal' of the group leadership through German participants occurred.

Our quest for dignity and esteem that has been running through all our seminars was abandoned at quite a few instances.

K. T.: *I would like to shortly mention the closing worship which ended in a debacle.*

H. W.: After the rather 'explosive' seminar, we intended the closing worship to be a sort of a conciliatory ending hoping that it would bring together again the

women and men who had participated in the seminar. Symbols were chosen as a means to come together again. We hoped that processes of the seminar might be picked up again and fresh contacts made. A certain group had prepared a liturgy centring round four elements which Jeremias, a marriage counsellor from Bethlehem, had brought with him: soil from Bethlehem, water from the Jordan river, oil and rose petals from the Holy Land.

During the service, people were given the chance to take from these symbols and hand them over to others with a word of blessing. Most of the people were familiar with such a ritual and had no difficulty accepting it. But to our great surprise, a young couple from England, both pastors, the wife having Caribbean ancestors, and a woman from Africa found the situation extremely difficult, panicked and left the chapel. When talking to them later we were told that some of these elements are attributed a totally different effect. In tears, the young woman told us, deeply shocked: "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!"

No solution of this conflict was possible. But it was apparent that these three people - and most probably quite a few others who did not show it openly - understood service as a time to preach the 'word of God' and not a time of appropriation of symbols. Faiths of people were worlds apart and the gulf could not be bridged.

K. T.: *Often, such unpleasant surprises occur when you don't not 'know' enough about the others.*

H. W.: Right now, I have no idea of how to go about such surprises and eruptive situations.

May be, we should explain things beforehand so that people know what to expect, especially if rituals are used that some people might not be familiar with. It may not be a question of gathering more 'knowledge', but of saying and making more transparent what we are intending to do. This would give people a chance to react, even to stay away. Transparency is a demand which has been repeatedly made from out of the plenum and which is very important - it is a must for all sectors of intercultural dialogue.

In intercultural exchange, you cannot rely on anything - you cannot rely on anything being clear! So we will have to try again and again and explain what is to be expected next, so that we may not overrun others or get them caught in a situation in which they can only react with fear. It is important that we try to avoid anybody feeling compromised - it may still happen any time.

K. T.: *What I would also like to go into is the question of 'mother tongues'. Mother tongues in their original voices have found a place in our worships and prayers even if the official languages at the seminars remained German and English. Somehow it appeared to me as if mother tongues had found their little extra 'place' here in the framework of the seminars.*

H. W.: Well, I think, this topic would have better be dealt with in the discussion about 'language and communication', a subject that has been mentioned at various stages already.

At the same time, your question is important: Where is 'room' for mother tongues in intercultural dialogue? Does it have a place? Is it not that you always speak a foreign language when you meet people on an intercultural level? I mean, in practical terms. It is simply not possible to communicate in your mother tongue when

people from different cultural backgrounds meet. As Germans, we may not have any idea what it means to have to talk to other people in your own country in another language which is not your mother tongue - like, for instance, in Ghana or in India. Leaving your mother tongue behind means leaving a certain security behind. You are confronted with something strange. Your mother tongue is an integral part of your own culture - this element has to be left behind when meeting others.

Perhaps we ought to look at the interplay of language and culture more closely. Moreover, we might also have to explore more thoroughly which aspects constitute 'culture'.

More than language, I think, it is history which is part of what moulds people culturally. We can again take the above mentioned service as an example. Part of the culture of this woman whose ancestors came to England from the Caribbean is a certain history, not a particular language! She does no longer know the language of her ancestors. But history which was handed down by her family and which she had not even experienced herself became immediately effective! History had immense power in that situation!

K. T.: At this stage, you could even make a comparison between you and me. In your life, your 'history', your ancestors from Transylvania, the war and your flight, is always by your side. One can feel how German history has left its impression on you. With me, there are other aspects of 'war' that left an impression. This personal moulding determines our 'existence' in the seminars in many situations!

H. W.: Our history accompanies us - we cannot leave it behind. Each single year, our violent German history, especially the two world wars, played its part in the seminars. When the Wall had fallen in 1990 and we listened to the reports of our colleagues from the East, we knew the war and its consequences manifested in the divided Germany had once again caught up with us. While we met in Groß-Doelln, right-wing extremists set fire to a home of asylum seekers - again the past became present. In 1993, when we met under the theme "Economy and Violence - A Challenge for Pastoral Care", one participant from Papua New-Guinea told us that also German firms were among those who were mining ore and gold in his country and destroying the environment. As a matter of fact, New Guinea had been a German colony before the first world war!

I am also much concerned about the question of how to meet others with a history of ours as it is. This will certainly become a focal issue when we visit Auschwitz in 1996.

I am sure, other cultures and other nations have their own ways of knowing and dealing with their own history and that of others. It would be good to explore this further.

K. T.: With regard to the theme of the seminar in 1993 "Economy and Violence", mention should also be made of the excursions which were part of the programme.

H. W.: Excursions as contextual and methodical new arrivals! The idea was to take participants out into a 'different' world, a different culture *in situ*, to give them an opportunity to have a common experience in a group of very different people and to reflect upon this from the different background of each individual person. This was an important step to achieve another level of contact between people. It was also important that we entered into realms that were no common

ground in pastoral care: factories, mines, jobless initiatives, etc. We confronted ourselves with such places and that set forth a lot.

The question remains why we began to do this so late. Perhaps it was not possible earlier. We had confronted ourselves with the intercultural issue earlier on, in direct confrontation, so to say, - and only after we had made certain experiences, had become more assured, could we embark on something new. This was a constructive step after the previous difficult seminar. The attempted discussion of “economy” from a theological or pastoral-care point of view, however, was achieved in a very rudimentary way only. But it was meaningful that we attempted to consider economy and integrate economic conditions as part of pastoral care.

This is typical: As long as we dealt with methods of doing our work or with ourselves (for instance “my gender-determined role in the church”) we could remain among ourselves. If we wanted to address economy issues we had to look around. A second seminar on economy would certainly be a good idea.

K. T.: The seminar in 1994 near Prague definitely was a very impressive one. I could go on talking about it. I would like to underline but one aspect of it, i.e. being in a country where ‘my own’ language was not spoken! To a certain extent, this is what we discussed earlier on, that you had to expose yourself in another new way.

H. W.: I could support what you are saying by what went on during the period of preparation. What we experienced then was to feel exposed over and over again. All those concerned repeatedly asked themselves whether this seminar could be a success. Would we succeed in exposing ourselves to the new and strange *and* still survive? Was it right to endeavour on moving into a foreign country with a different language and history? Would the seminar be a success with the limited funds that were available? Would the collaboration with the Prague friends be a good one? Never before had we entered into collaboration at such a distance. All these were open questions. During the months before Prague, we sometimes were under such pressure that it was doubtful whether we would be able to continue. That was a very, very critical stage.

K. T.: And what was it that helped?

H. W.: I would rather choose a different word: what ‘solved’ things? What solved our problems and ‘dissolved’ the pressure? And the answer is easy: To experience this city and the people in it, the people who had helped prepare the seminar. These people had been through much bigger and more serious problems - they managed their situation after the oppressive communist times with admirable energy. What eventually made the burden lighter was the experience that when one works through difficulties there will be survival at the end - not just as a promise, but as a matter of fact!

There was a second discovery we made. We had chosen the right theme together with Karel Schwarz and Jindra Schwarzova: Change of Values. So people who had registered for the seminar, came in order to get to know the Czech friends and the situation in that country, they wanted so see the golden city of Prague and they wanted to reflect on the change of values. After the seminar in Prague and the many experiences we were blessed with there, I was sure: Now, nothing can stop the seminars and the intercultural work in pastoral care any more!

K. T.: ‘Survival’ and ‘support’ - these two have always been crucial issues at many seminars and in our intercultural contacts, not only below the surface but

addressed openly, as for instance in a role play during the plenary session in 1995.

H. W.: In the first years, I started off having the naïve idea that international encounter was simple and nice, just like travelling as a tourist and discovering new things. Meanwhile, there has been the painful, but blessed experience that intercultural encounter means ‘exposure’. The person as a whole is exposed to very high demands. The person as a whole is questioned - and that is beneficial. Nothing can be taken for granted any longer. But this opens new avenues. The other side of the experience is just as important: If I expose myself, I will receive support. The more I open up, the more open others meet me. The more I accept others and the strange, the lesser need my worries be about myself. In intercultural pastoral care we are in the centre of pastoral care as such - in the centre of what pastoral means!

K. T.: *Questioning and giving support: That is what pastoral care is about!*

H. W.: In working on an intercultural level what we also learn is: faith. Here we can experience what faith means: To leave behind what is familiar and start off into a ‘land that God will show us’. God created many variations of humankind. He suggested many different cultural possibilities - in our intercultural work we can witness variations of his creativity and experience the challenge to look for him and get to know him in new forms.

K. T.: *The seminar in Prague offered many stimuli. Was one of the impulses to establish a society or has this idea lain dormant already earlier on?*

H. W.: Prague had given the impetus to continue and to re-concentrate on what we were doing. But the decision to establish the Society for Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling had gradually taken shape since after the seminar in 1994. The work we were doing was to have its own structures - a ‘tent’. Finally, in October 1995, we carried it out.

During the founding assembly there was much consent from various sides and much readiness to participate. I was quite overwhelmed. When I went to bed late that night, I thought I was one of the most blessed people on earth.

When I think back to our intercultural activities I remember many women and men I feel greatly attached to through our encounters. To me they seem like a cloud of witnesses as is mentioned in the epistle to the Hebrews. To be able to live in community with them and to have them as my companions on my way is a great encouragement and gives me hope in good days and difficult ones.

K. T.: *By now, we have mentioned several stages of the journey of the international seminars and touched some contextual questions. In my opinion, we should also discuss how we arrived at certain structures and methods, for instance how the “Intercultural Circle”, the place to discuss life stories, or the “Intercultural Plenum” came into existence. I am sure it would be important to describe ‘Intercultural Pastoral Care’ and intercultural communication in a more detailed way.*

H. W.: You are right, there are many more issues that would need to be discussed.

K. T.: *But I think this will have to do for today. Our dialogue as a documentary of the 1995 seminar will certainly help us in our further discussions. What is more, the future theory conferences and consultations can take up some of the issues. Since the ‘Society’ exists, there is a platform for these things.*

H. W.: At the last seminar, Roy Woodruff, our colleague and friend from the USA, said that at certain stages he had felt like being in the “Orient Express”. May be, intercultural pastoral care and counselling is like building a new railway line extending into not so well explored territory. But one thing is certain: There are many who wish to join in.

K. T.: *Let us see where the future will lead us and what course the journey will take. Thank you very much for this journey into to the past.*

H. W.: Well, you have been the engine driver and I have been the one to shovel the coal.