

VI. KNOWLEDGE OF CULTURAL/RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

ii. Navigating the Waters of Diversity

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I am a “boundary” person – having lived and grown up in Sarnia, Ontario, less than a mile, across the Bluewater Bridge over the St. Clair River, from Port Huron, Michigan. Moreover, we frequently visited my mother's sister who lived with her British-born husband, in a Detroit suburb, 60 miles (90 km) south. My development as a young person was geographically and relationally characterized by a sense of “otherness,” my own and that of others.

That sense of “otherness” was punctuated by my mother's response, when I was trying to persuade her to let me do something because everyone else in my peer group was doing it. In that circumstance, my mother would say: “If everyone else were to go down to the river in January and jump in, would you do that also?”

While it is important to affirm and build community, it is also important to experience self-differentiation **in** community.¹ In fact, at least so it seems to me, one really cannot build true community except among reasonably self-differentiated persons. One can really only say an authentic “Yes” to community if one believes that one can also say “No” to community.

It also seems to me that one can only avoid the pitfalls on the pathway of life in a multicultural world and navigate the crocodile-filled waters of multiculturalism if one is a reasonably self-differentiated person. One cannot validate the otherness of another unless one recognizes and validates one's own otherness.

Somewhere in David Augsburger's *Pastoral Counseling across Cultures*, the author asserts that “all pastoral counseling is crosscultural.” I am here asserting that all pastoral/spiritual care is crosscultural, indeed that all relationships are crosscultural. To live is to experience otherness – one's own and that of those with whom one lives, works, and is in relationship, indeed of all humankind. However, that sense of

¹ See the work of Murray Bowen as reflected in Kerr and Bowen, Richardson, and others

otherness is often mitigated by our natural, human, anxiety-driven desire for fusion with, and to be like (and liked by), others.

Thomas Merton told us that “No man [sic] is an island.”² We do need community. I am asserting that community grounded in fusion and a desire to be like (and liked by) others is a breeding ground for incapacity to deal with cultural and other differences.

I spent 15 months working at the Campbell Centre for Counselling and Human Relations Training in Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand. Christchurch is reputed to be the most British city outside the United Kingdom. In many respects, it is more like a Canadian city than are many USA cities and its citizens are more like Canadians than many USA citizens. However, every once in a while during those 15 months, when I was working with someone in pastoral psychotherapy or pastoral supervision or having a personal conversation, I would become aware of a significant cultural gap or disconnect. In my desire to empathize with, and enter into, the experience of the other which was being shared, I had slipped too easily into a pattern of not recognizing our “otherness” to each other. I came to characterize those moments of suddenly encountering cultural gaps as being like walking across a lawn and stepping on the business end of a lawn rake – which would cause the handle of the rake to flip up and smack me in the face.

I am here asserting that it is possible to become so focused on responding empathically to the other in pastoral/spiritual care that we forget that we are “other” to each other and, as a result, actually “miss” the other. That didn’t just happen to me in New Zealand. I have also made that mistake in working with Canadian First Nations people.

It is also important not to make assumptions that the “other” is going to be welcoming – even when our intentions are altruistic or otherwise not intended to cause harm to the other. During travels in Europe on my way home from New Zealand in 1990, I engaged in what some might consider a rather peculiar activity. When I had the opportunity, I would browse in “hardware” stores – getting a sense of some of the basics of household maintenance and repair in that country. I was assuming that this was an OK thing to do. But then, one day as I was browsing, all of a sudden I heard the owner

² Merton, Thomas. (1955) *No Man is an Island*. Sea Harbor Drive, Orlando, FL: Harcourt.

say, in thickly accented English, “Tourists are not welcome here.” Ouch! Sometimes insensitivity to others’ ways of being can result in painful experiences. One’s “otherness” is not welcome in some contexts.

So how do we avoid “the rake?” Actually, we probably cannot avoid the rake. No matter how sensitive we are, it is almost inevitable that we will sometimes step on it. The important thing is to recognize that it is happening when it happens and also, of course, to do our best to minimize the probability that we will step on the rake often. I don’t believe that this is just a matter of learning, although it is also that.

Learning How to Navigate the Waters of Diversity as Healing Process

First of all, we need to have done our own internal therapeutic work with our natural human need to seek fusion – to be like and to be liked. That work may prove to be extensive, depending on the level of deprivation we have experienced and the level of our anxiety about inclusion, acceptance, and affirmation.³ The work may be complicated by the kinds of messages we have received (particularly about persons who are “different”) from our parents and other parenting persons.⁴

If you are thinking that you don’t have any therapeutic issues, try putting yourself in a situation of extreme multiculturalism. In Canada, one way of doing that is through an immersion experience in a First Nations setting or in an Inner City social service agency. It can be even more powerful to immerse oneself in a situation outside of one’s own country. If you do have issues requiring therapy, you will know that is the case if you have really engaged with these kinds of processes – so long as you do so accompanied in the journey by someone who is an experienced spiritual mentor.

While visiting a counselling centre in India in 2003, our group of Pastoral Counsellors, CPE Supervisors/Hospital Chaplains, and Seminary Professors met a group of psychology doctoral students from a U.S. University. They were having a 3-week experience of observing and participating in the provision of counselling in the

³ See the work of Heinz Kohut and his colleagues

⁴ For example, my father would sometimes speak of something being “as black as Toby’s hind end.” At the same time, one of his good friends was black. This sent a conflicting message about racial stereotyping.

counselling centre. This kind of crosscultural immersion experience is also increasingly common in M.Div. education.

While living in Christchurch, I was going somewhere with a friend in her car. As we approached the vehicle, I was heading for the right front side. My friend said, with a twinkle in her eye: “Do you want to drive?” (In New Zealand, the driver sits in the front right seat.) Embarrassed, I changed my direction, mumbling an apology. My friend laughed and said: “That’s OK, John – you’re standing on your head.”

In this matter of working multiculturally, we all need to be “stood on our head!” There are times that a bit of disorientation can be a good thing!

For many M.Div. students, immersion in a CPE experience can be a crosscultural experience – especially when the CPE setting is a psychiatric or forensic setting! The Teaching Supervisor can intensify the experience of crossculturality by careful attention to the student’s narrative and by assignment of the student to a ministry setting in which they will most likely experience their “otherness” (of course ensuring that appropriate supports for learning and for minimization of harm are in place).

Learning How to Navigate the Waters of Diversity as Educational Process

The *Workbook*⁵ produced by the Society for Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling, is an invaluable resource for learning theory, method, and practical skills for the provision of spiritual care in a multicultural world. Moreover, it provides an honest documentation of the sometimes rocky road which has been traversed in the interest of understanding how providers of Pastoral [/Spiritual] Care and Counselling relate to each other and to carereceivers across cultural divides. In the introduction to the *Workbook*, Ulrike Atkins and Karl Federschmidt provide the following contextualizing statement – Towards a Definition of “Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling.”

⁵ Federschmidt, Karl, Klause Temme, and Helmut Weiss. (2004) *Workbook on Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counseling* (English Translation). Duesseldorf, Germany: Society for Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling. See Appendix for the Table of Contents and click on this [hyperlink](#) for access to a PDF of the complete Workbook. (This is a large file that takes time to download) Access to this copyrighted document is limited to members of the Canadian Association for Pastoral Practice & Education / Association Canadienne pour la Pratique et l'Éducation Pastorales per permission provided by SIPCC.

Since this documentation repeatedly deals with the expression “Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling”, the attempt of a definition is required. It is our wish that the expression is not to be understood in a rigid way, rather it should reflect a certain approach within the pastoral work, i.e. a hermeneutics, marked by the specific love and interest for another culture. To define Intercultural Care and Counselling *via negationis*, that is to simply separate it from the common kerygmatic, clinical or therapeutic ways of Pastoral Care would be all too easy and oversimplifying the issue. Indeed, there are modes within the movement of Intercultural Pastoral Care that readily apply to one or more of the more traditional ways of Pastoral Care and Counselling. Thus, the intercultural form of Pastoral Care refers to a sort of inquisitive approach. Its hermeneutics is marked by the main desire to consciously reflect on all cultural aspects, which might emerge in any given pastoral encounter. This reflection is not mainly fostered by theory, but rather through the actual practical experience which each and every encounter provides.

In doing so, the Intercultural Pastoral Care approach goes beyond the traditional concentration on the individual and his or her unique biography. Rather - as all of the contributions to this documentation prove - a multitude of aspects, such as the political, the societal, or the religious, are fostered and dealt within the pastoral encounter.⁶

Atkins and Federschmidt offer three Methodological Perspectives.

- Any pastoral encounter dominated by an empathic approach, traditionally aims to overcome feelings of distance and estrangement. Intercultural Pastoral Care on the other hand, stresses the continuous difference to the other, and looks for ways how to authentically encounter it. The basis hereby being the ongoing attempt to carefully listen to the language and the “stories” of the other person.

[The authors cite the fact that ...] The problems arising [in meetings of the SIPCC] from the different languages spoken at the seminars, the difficult

⁶ *Workbook*, p. 33

work of the interpreters, and the angry impatience which more than once erupted in the plenary sessions, signify how difficult it is to really listen to another person's story. All too often this can only be done fragmentarily.

- “Therapeutic” Pastoral Care concerns itself with the healing progress of the client, with his/her emotional integrity and the maturity of the personality. Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling reminds us how problematic this allegedly clear distinction between sickness and health really is (*see articles on Buddhism*⁷). As individuals of any given society we forever live in a state of cultural constraints, in demanding emotional and societal relations - literally with a baggage full of “burdens” (*see E. Decenteceo*⁸). Pastoral Care and Counselling therefore should not attempt to try and radically eliminate these “burdens”, but rather to make them more bearable for the “burden bearer”, through gaining new insights and lending more meaning to life in general.
- Although the modern movements of Pastoral Care and Counselling have long since been concerned with changing the image of the traditionally more patriarchal relationship between counsellor and counsellee, there remains an incline between the role of the professionally trained counsellor or pastor and the client, seeking help. Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling aims to enlighten the counsellor's own limitations, his/her particular, cultural way of understanding. At the same time the intercultural dimension aims at investigating in and acknowledging the genuine, vital resources of the other's personality and culture. Pastoral Care and Counselling thus advances into a dialogue, marked by solidarity and mutuality, which if successful, bears the chance of positively affecting *both* partners. In other words, from the start, Intercultural Pastoral Care is a correlative endeavour to bear the “burdens of life” together and, by doing so, discovering the manifestation of the life-giving God in our lives.

⁷ This is a reference to an essay by Komatra Chuengsatiansup of Thailand on “Buddhism, illness, and healing: A comparative review of textual and popular Buddhism,” *Workbook*, p.48 ff.

⁸ This is a reference to an essay by Edwin T. Decenteceo of the Philippines on “‘Burden-bearing’ as a metaphor for counselling,” *Workbook*, p. 116 ff.

In a chapter in which he reflects on the 1995 and 1996 SPCC Conferences, Federschmidt suggests that there are three ways of encountering the “alien” (other): as a “supposed world citizen,” as a “foil to set off” oneself, or in terms of an “hermeneutic of the alien.” The latter approach tries to “understand the alien without eliminating its being alien or different.”⁹ Federschmidt references Anton Boisen’s characterization of the pastoral encounter as an encounter with “the living human document” – and encounter that is “divinatory,” i.e. “a kind of revelation.” I think that the following paragraph from Federschmidt is absolutely critical for our understanding of how to navigate the waters of diversity.

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.¹⁰

Federschmidt goes on to reference David’s Augsburg’s *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures* (1986) as a still a standard work with regard to intercultural encounters. Augsburg distinguishes between three different attitudes in an encounter.

- “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 empathic 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. Augsburg 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

⁹ *Workbook*, p. 38 ff.

¹⁰ *Workbook*, p. 40

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?¹¹

To the list of questions which arise, I add – “What just is?”

There is a great deal more that might be quoted from the **Workbook**. I especially like the foundational theoretical-experiential essays by

- James Farris on “Faith and community. Reflections on fragmentation, suffering, and Gospel” (p. 70 ff.) written out of his experience as a Texan teaching in Brazil,
- John Foskett on “The ‘unknown’ in intercultural communication” (p. 128 ff), and
- Julian Müller on “Intercultural exchange: A discovery of being different” in South Africa (p. 119 ff.).

The reader is encouraged to explore the **Workbook**.

A Final Word about Navigating the Waters of Diversity

The final word is that there is no final word. The task is a journey – a pilgrimage – one in which we try to be open to self and other and to what is between us and within us and the other – one in which we experience self AND other as “alien” with the potential for community and for alienation – one in which we learn and succeed AND sometimes fail to learn.

¹¹ *Workbook*, p. 40. Also, refer to Augsburg, *Pastoral Counseling across Cultures*, p. 27-32.

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Appendix
Table of Contents: **Workbook on Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counseling**
(English Translation)
available in print and CD format from

Society for Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling (SIPCC)
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Editorial

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PART 1

THE PURPOSE AND STORY OF THE SIPCC

Mission statement of the SIPCC *Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Adopted by the founding assembly in 1995

The Pastoral Care and Counselling Seminars 1986-2003 *Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Themes, places and main-speakers

Klaus Temme / Helmut Weiss, Germany, 1996 *Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Reviewing the journey. The "Intercultural Seminars" 1986 to 1995.

A dialogue between Klaus Temme and Helmut Weiß

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Introduction to the first volume of "Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling"

Karl H. Federschmidt Germany, 1997 *Error! Bookmark not defined.*

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James R. Farris Brazil, 2000 **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
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Leonildo Silveira Campos Brazil, 2001 **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
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Ursula Pfäfflin Germany, 1998 **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
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*George I. Euling Papua New Guinea, 1997***Error! Bookmark not defined.**
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APPENDIX 1: LIST OF ARTICLES, WITH TOPICSERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

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