

**Intercultural Pastoral
Care and Counselling**

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STORIES OF
HUMAN DIGNITY

Opportunities for
pastoral care and
counselling

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Introduction

Helmut Weiss

The 14th International Seminar on Intercultural Pastoral care and Counselling

**HUMAN DIGNITY,
CULTURE AND HEALTH
Opportunities for
pastoral care and counselling**

took place in All Saints Pastoral Centre, London Colney, St. Albans from September 24 - 29, 2000.

The Society for Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling had invited to this Seminar and members and friends in England had prepared this event together with the Seminar Planning Committee. In the Seminar brochure there was stated:

"The function of pastoral care and counselling is to encounter people in a way that enhances their dignity. Good practice in pastoral care and counselling is based on a right attitude towards human dignity. However, what happens in practice does not always reflect the lofty claims of theory.

Using the lens of healthcare, the seminar will seek to place theoretical and philosophical questions of human dignity in context. Contemporary theology recognises that the distortions in our society will often manifest themselves in individual distress. Individual health, therefore, is linked to the health of the community.

Ideological, technological, economical, social, cultural, religious, ecological and psychological pressures confront the world community today. Proposed solutions often threaten human well-being. The seminar will address current violations of human dignity, and the response of pastoral care and counselling to these issues."

Finally about 100 people from all over the world gathered in the Northern part of London close to the ancient city of St. Albans to bring to their awareness the theme of human dignity in the millennium year. Let me mention that in programme there were in-

cluded worships, small groups, study visits to different institutions in the city of London and other activities.

In the course of the Seminar the audience was listening to speakers mainly from Britain, but people from other parts of Europe, from the United states, from Africa, Asia and Melanesia made remarkable contributions too.

The major presentations are included in this issue, which has four sections:

PART I

Thinking about Human Dignity

PART II

Hearing the voices of those, whose dignity is violated

PART III

Socio-political aspects of dignity in health care and economics

PART IV

Human Dignity and pastoral care and counselling

Let me introduce very shortly the articles to you:

What is human dignity? How can we talk about it? These are questions behind **Part I. James R. Farris** shows that we have to start with us ourselves and we have to become open to a new understanding dignify others.

Using a play of Edward Albee for illustration **Frances Ward** sees in contempt the opposite of dignity and draws theological consequences: *"We are given a way to manage and resolve our own experience of contempt. 'God so loved the world*

that he gave his only Son ...' It is only by so loving what is contemptible that it can be changed."

Four authors from USA, UK, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea listen in **Part II** to stories of people whose dignity is violated and whose voices should be heard. **Kathleen J. Greider** introduces the reader to David Waldorf, an artist in the "Living Museum" of the Creedmore Psychiatric Center in New York City, USA. After hearing to the voice of this artist who is struggling for survival in the midst of psychiatric troubles, Kathleen J. Greider summarises: *"For Waldorf, Beethoven's nobility and Waldorf's own dignified courage to go on, are both found in fighting for equilibrium amid waves of ugliness and beauty, in the tensions between heaven on earth and hell on earth, maintaining a life worth living. Inherent dignity is rooted in spiritual poise on the common human journey between birth and death."*

Sheila Hollins is teaching us how to learn disability. From her own experience as worker in the a hospital and as mother her teaching is very concrete and powerful.

Women and youth raise the voices in the article of **Wilhelmina J. Kalu**. She introduces us to the difficult situation of young women in Africa today concerning reproductive health: They are drawn between traditional cultural expectations and modern western influences. Her conclusion: *"Current practices in maternal health have often violated women rights to life, personal liberty, and dignity... Women need to become watchdogs on policy change and implementation programs."*

Alphonse Saiho takes us to the island of Papua New Guinea. After PNG is meeting the modern world and the traditional structures of society broke down he sees the dangers for the youth very clearly. His appeal is that the government and society has to offer them new opportunities.

In **Part III** we get a look to human dignity from health care and economics. **Stuart Bell** is introducing some aspects of the British health care system and shows that health care can have an important role to social inclusion. **Malcolm Brown** is dealing with the issue, how the changing economy can destroy a dignifying social fabric. He is arguing that a civil society is necessary to build new communities

in a time where risk is on side of society and reward on the side of transnational companies.

Part IV comes to a closer connection between dignity and pastoral care and counselling. **Julian Müller** is telling a South African story. He tells about his own development in the South African society in the times of apartheid and after the changes. He re-reads and "re-authors" attitudes - and gives a vivid example about the work of pastoral care. With his presentation he did pastoral care to the audience: he showed that it is possible to move towards human dignity in looking at people in a new way.

Daniel J Louw is giving a theological and anthropological basis for intercultural pastoral care in combining dignity and pneuma. Seeing the whole human being as "pneuma", as a spiritual being, he can include the many anthropological and cultural powers into a socio-cultural analysis in pastoral care and counselling.

The issue is ending with stories from Prague, Czech Republic. The work of the SOS Center of the Diakonia is introduced by **Slávka Buliková**.

All articles focus on human dignity and show us opportunities for pastoral care and counselling: we are encouraged to listen to people in a new way and to see in them not only human dignity, but the divine face of humans as images of God.