

ICPCC Malacca August 4-9 2019

Theme: Learning to Serve People of Other Cultures

By ANZACPE Representative David Glenister

First I would like to thank ANZACPE for offering me the role of representative to the International Congress of Pastoral Care and Counselling and funding me to attend. Also, a big thanks to my predecessor in the role, Jenni Wegener, for her mentorship and non-parochial vision in wishing us to be included in the worldwide community of CPE and Spiritual Care, attending for the past 12 years. Jenni presented a workshop, *Beyond our Dominant Narratives*, which I didn't attend (because she'd already presented a practice run at an ASACPEV Twilight seminar prior to the conference!). Cathy Brown, QLD CPE Supervisor and ANZACPE Treasurer, also attended – at the end of this report I have some exciting news about both Jenni and Cathy, so don't go to sleep, something to look forward to!

I'll start this report at the end, on the final day of the presentations. Rev. Dr Canon Steven Abbarow, an Anglican Priest in West Malaysia and Coordinator of the Malaysian Indigenous CPE Centre (he made it compulsory for Anglican Ordinands), presented a paper on his long term work with the Malaysian indigenous people, the Orang Asli, whose traditional rain forest home is constantly threatened by other interests (palm oil, rubber and mining). . . He described the Orang Asli as "shy"; they have a concept which means if they believe they have given offence, even if only in their minds, they retreat, hence if other interests encroach on their village, they retreat further into the rainforest rather than confront and give offence.

Each keynote presentation was followed by a formal response, this time by Prof Daniel Louw from South Africa (author of major books and articles on Pastoral theology and practice): Danny apologised at the outset, saying his forensic analysis of Dr Abbarow's presentation would "hurt". And it did, in particular his critique of the missionary impulse, though Steven was graciously un-defensive and admitted his presentation left out many details, and showed how this was ameliorated by working to empower the Orang Asli, especially in developing a written language from their oral tradition, to help them negotiate and defend the rain forest from rapacious greed. Not either/or, black or white, but all at the same time, a confluence of cultures. The term Kuala Lumpur, we found out, means confluence of waters at the muddy place, a good description of the culture clash here, and elsewhere in conference..

This presentation and response, for me, encapsulated the Conference theme, revealing the fraught areas, the muddy borders, in ministering to the "Other" in Pastoral Care. What motivates us? Whose agenda is it, whose needs are being met, the perennial questions of CPE? It also revealed the level of engagement of the ICPCC delegates, intellectually, theologically, hermeneutically, and in fearless debate about the serious profession we are

involved in. It was very humbling to be in the minority– “not many whites” – and to witness this level of discussion and exploration. Each day we met in small groups, mine included people from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Samoa, New Zealand, Singapore, USA, amongst others.

Now I'll go back to the start of the conference –The first keynote speaker, Prof Felix Willard, a former member of the Vatican International Theological Commission and editor of the Oxford handbook of Christianity in Asia, spoke about missing the wood for the trees in these toxic times, and listed three areas, the Marketing of relationships, distorted Nationalism and constricted religious identity, which Pastoral care can help to detoxify. He described the many layers in each person, of which religious identity was one, a binder of the others, and asked *“Can we feel at home in others – sacred- homes?”* The responder was Prof Emmanuel Lartey (author of Intercultural Pastoral Care, and currently professor of Pastoral Care in Georgia Atlanta) who demonstrated his deep knowledge and understanding by exploring the historical and political origins of Nationalism and constricted religious identity, which are often related. For example Africa and his native Ghana, whose artificial borders were drawn up arbitrarily by the Nazis during the end of WW11, and their incongruence with peoples' experience of the flexible borders of their homelands, caused loss, unrest and conflict. He said *“we're not just belief systems – we need to understand the social and relational dynamics between people of different religious communities, to find ways to proceed.”* He demonstrated this theologically, from various stories in the gospels, and offered a Ghanaian quote: *“Truth is like a Baobab tree, one person cannot embrace it’.*

A question from the audience concerned pastoral care for the perpetrators as well as the victims, and at morning tea, Emmanuel suggested to a few of us that he believes all perpetrators are victims and visa-versa, we are all at times both, often at the same time. We also experience the Other, and are experienced as the Other simultaneously.

On Day 3, the first keynote speaker was Dr Brenda CrRuiz, who suggested Spanish is the language of heaven, then went on to describe hell, helped by PowerPoint photos: the terrible political situation in Nicaragua, and the cult of personality built around President Ortega, who as a revolutionary kicked out the yanks but now frames any opposition as counter-revolutionary, as the Other, and responds accordingly, brutally. Brenda wondered what it's like for each of us to consider ourselves as the Other? She described the effective work being done by the churches in offering Pastoral care and practical help to victims, often putting themselves at risk. Brenda also advised people to not take photos or post on Facebook about her talk – *“Being the Other is risky”*.

Today's Response to Keynote was by Ulrike Elsdorfer, Pastor, hospital Chaplain, Lecturer in Interreligious and Intercultural studies at Goethe University Frankfurt. As a German she suggested the Nazi regime seems to offer a template for rising Nationalist regimes, sadly, who want to keep out “the Other”. She also emphasised that the Other is not only human beings, but animals and the wider environment, which we have treated without respect,

often with cruelty. During Q & A time, Norwegian forensic psychiatrist Arsdorf arose and with what he called an “impolite” complaint, saying he felt compelled to ask “This is all very interesting but where is the angle about Pastoral Care and Counselling?” Ulrike looked offended, and Brenda looked uncomfortable along with many of us. Emmanuel Larty arose to disagree with Arsdorf, saying that Brenda allowed us to enter her awful dehumanising world, she invited us into a parallel process, with what happened on the ground. Re-humanising is an essential aspect of Pastoral Care, he suggested, helping people to find again “the ordinary things of life.” Again, this session and the disagreement showed the rigour of the congress.

The workshop I attended that afternoon was by Dr Abdus Salaam Musa, raised Baptist and a violent gang member in Harlem, now director of the Muslim CPE Centre in Brooklyn. He described ACPE derisively as *Christian Pastoral Education*, and suggested he, and other CPE supervisors have three roles, student and teacher, and “damned fool” at different times, and his fourfold credo is “Engage, Explore, Evoke, Empower”.

Closer to home Noel Tiano from New Zealand – a social worker, and now the rep to ICPC for our pacific region, which includes Samoa and Hawaii- presented his research in a forensic and mental health unit, developing a spiritual Assessment model based on the Maori concept of Tonofale-Pasifika, like four connecting sides of a house, family/tribe, culture, geography/land, and rituals. One of his key questions for inmates (if that’s the right word now) is “what do you do for inspiration?”

Day 4, after a night running to the “restroom” after possibly drinking the local water, I was dehydrated and exhausted, and the Keynote, Professor Vhumani Magezie, lecturer and Coordinator of practical and public theology at North Western university in South Africa. Positioning Care as being with the Other, Vhumani described the African concept of “Ubuntu” – very hard to translate, but roughly as the equality of being with others, generosity, hospitality and caring. “I am human because I belong”. As with Maori spirituality African is linked to strong community connection and expression. Vhumani will be one of our hosts at the 2023 conference in Jo’burg!

Pastoral care at Ground Zero, President David Ito and Indonesian psychiatrist Teresia Citraningtya discussed her work with tsunami survivors, with ordinary activities such as cooking and art as part of care, she invited us to write experiences of trauma, whether actual or vicarious, and explored “post traumatic growth”. I found it heartening to meet people from other related fields involved in Pastoral Care, psychiatrists, psychologists, a pastoral psychotherapist from New York City, and social work, amongst others.

What a long final day, and after dinner a long council meeting – and the nominations are, for President Jenni Wegener for President and gave a humble speech re-emphasising vision for coming years, thank past President David Ito, and promising to carry out his suggestion for future including renaming of the ICPC as International Congress of Spiritual Care. And

received a standing ovation. Then the nominations for treasurer – our ANZACPE treasure/treasurer Cathy nominated, again applause.

Conclusion

Other, victim/perpetrator, being the other, and seeing the other, my experience of being at the conference, I often felt in the minority, the Other, being amongst the worldwide community, and also a perpetrator, understanding more fully the destruction caused throughout history and now of colonisation and exploitation by first world countries. I also felt the victim, of bacteria in the Malaysian tap water. The experience of being part of a worldwide community, realising *these are my people*. Our regional congress, the Asia Pacific Council Pastoral Care and Counselling is in Sydney in 2021, hosted by the New South Wales College of Clinical Pastoral Education in Australia, and quite a few people at ICPCCC said they would be attending, so a great opportunity to be involved. I definitely intend to be there, inshallah, and at the congress in Jo'burg in 2023, which will include a safari.