

Introduction

Do we understand the nature of a 'city'?

What does a 'small' city of some ten thousands have in common with a 'big' city of about 500.000, not to speak about a city of a couple of millions inhabitants? And what do European Million-size cities have in common with those Mega-cities like Los Angeles, Sao Paulo or Madras? Does the word 'city' still have a capacity to mark certain common things given to cities all alike? In how far do the realities of the phenomenon 'city' affect the life of people; how do they affect their religious behaviour, their life-style, opportunities and worries? How does the Church fare in the 'city'?

Do we, who work in pastoral care and counselling, give thought to the city as a integrity of its own? How does counselling with people living in a city respond to their situation? Can we make contributions to a 'therapy of the city'?

Questions like the ones above were shaping the work of the 13th International Seminar for Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling, which took place in Berlin, Germany, from Sept 13th to 22nd 1999, with the title: "Cities - Fragmentations of life" at the venue of 'International Meeting Centre Jagdschloss Glienicke'.

The discussions moved towards an emphasis on a closer look at the given realities and on a better perception of them. The city is neither a demon nor the kingdom of heaven! The city offers a space for life that has to be shaped, but the 'city' must be used critically, as the multitude of its layers contain many ambivalences. These ambivalences can be seen as the chances and perspectives of cities in their diversity as well as the crisis-events and gaps, the destructiveness and the disintegrated parts of broken structures. Cities remain fragmented, but they are designed for hope.

How about pastoral care and counselling fit into such situation? One of the foundations of Pastoral care and counselling is our perception. Therefore, its concern is to learn to read people as "living documents" (A. Boisen), and so to be able to come into contact and dialogue. But we see now, that also the context of people needs to be 'read' – i.e. only a systemic approach opens up our perception and awareness of the manifold possibilities of life.

For this seminar we had chosen this last aspect to be the focal point, i.e. to look at 'city' as a space for life in order to understand, how people can 'move' around in it, what causes their happiness there and suffering. We inquired into the ways that community can be empowered in a city-context. Much more than in a village or in rural structures, people who live in cities are challenged to get involved with one another within a complexity of life-styles, to create community and a public sector, and to invent forms of expression, shared rules and symbols for all this.

In this line of thoughts we have chosen the title for this edition

"Reading the city" - Perceiving life-spaces for diversity and community

We set three subdivisions for the articles:

- 1) "Reading the city" – on perceiving 'city'
- 2) Fragmentations in urban societies
 poor and rich
 individualism and community
- 3) Creating community by means of care and action

Part 1)

In the first article *Dr. Wolfgang Grünberg*, Professor for Practical Theology, University of Hamburg, Germany, searches for ways to find an access to the phenomenon 'city', to make it more accessible for our perception, too. He uses poetry, German 'city-lyrics', from the Twenties of the 20th Century, to prove that people project their state of mind on the 'city', charging it with emotions simultaneously. He then looks at 'city' in an objective one, using sociology and statistics. For the aims of pastoral care he suggests a structural and hermeneutic perspective, i.e. to look at the (historical) 'layers' of cities and their symbols, in order to detect forms of urban life.

Dr. Michael Mata, Professor for Practical Theology and Urban Ministry at the School of Theology in Claremont, USA, moves around in his neighbourhood in Los Angeles showing the reader what he is looking at and which kind of thoughts come to his mind. He discovers many cultures, values and religions and it is obvious, that he enjoys and appreciates all this. But he also realizes those groups of people, who are most vulnerable in a city. Finally he asks, what role the churches and believers can have in cities, ending with the conviction that we are called to be “messengers of hope”.

Dr. Stephan de Beer is working as pastor in the Pretoria Community Ministries, a partnership of city centre churches of different denominations in the Republic of South Africa, i. e. he is engaged in actual practice of the church right there. He outlines a way of historical, political and theological analysis of the city, describing a methodology for this way, also describing its single steps. Equally important for him is to put analysis into action. So he pictures various church activities in the inner-city; as well as his life among the poor and his engagement in their projects.

Part 2

In this part the authors reflect on fragmentations of cities being caused by wealth and poverty, by striving for either individualism or community.

Dr. Ronaldo Sathler-Rosa, Professor for Practical Theology, Methodist University, Sao Paulo, Brazil, deals with the question of “economic slavery” through globalisation and its impact on pastoral care. He pleads that the work in pastoral care and in the church should include the reflection on economic and political factors, in order to become ‘prophetic’. He would like to see pastoral care givers become deeply involved with the people –“down to the earth” – and also, that pastoral care might acquire a public dimension! He concludes with the idea that pastoral care is an active hope which can change the existing order.

Following these insights from a clear Brazilian background *Dr. Elaine Graham*, Professor of Social and Pastoral Theology at the University of Manchester, UK, describes the actual political and social situation in Great Britain. Did the Blair government and New Labour bring about remarkable change for the poor and the marginalized in society? She deals with social exclusion, with communitarianism, with the government programme “work for welfare” and she demands a new understanding of citizenship and participation of the people, especially of people “at the sharp end”. Starting from liberation theology she reflects the task of the church, including the task of pastoral care, and focuses on the catchwords of solidarity and “orthopraxy”. Not ‘orthodoxy’ but the “doing the good” would be the main task of the church in its care for people.

From Europe to India. *Dr. Nalini Arles*, Professor at the United Theological College in Bangalore, India, is concerned with those inner tensions, which people living in Indian big cities have to cope with. First the caste system humiliates, second the poor and rich gap, and last but not least, the encounter of Indian family tradition and individualism. She describes, how people in the cities try to deal with these tensions, that they are attracted by the cities and move there, but can’t stand the life there; that some come and win, but others come and lose. At the end she describes programmes and civil rights movements that create new opportunities, especially for women, and gives suggestions for pastoral care.

Part 3

Dr. James R. Farris, Professor for Practical Theology at Methodist University, Sao Paulo, Brazil, is looking into mislead perceptions of ‘community’ in theology as well as in church history and reality, pointing out that church is a “split community”. He describes existing diverse trends in theology (conservative – modern) and exemplifies the consequences on conceptions of pastoral care. He also, quite independent from E. Graham, comes up with the catchword “orthopraxy”, and he also is getting stimulations from Liberation Theology. His final point is that church and pastoral care have to face and incorporate the reality and the issue of suffering. Once we are able to share with each other what we have suffered and where we have caused suffering, then we are about to create community.

Dr. Daisy Nwachuku, Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar, Nigeria, leads the reader to Africa. She reflects community from an African background, uncovering the difficulties and ruptures of community-life, giving three case studies to exemplify. She suggests a number of points, how community could be created or restored in African cities. All her suggestions show a remarkable broad-minded intention to support pastoral and church activities. Her special point is that we should include in our concepts that not only the people but also the cities should be healed.

After all, it is quite clear that ‘Pastoral Care in the City’ must be “Pastoral Care in Plurality” (so a title of a book by Uta Pohl-Patalong). To this intent this edition might be a contribution, so we hope.

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