

ONS KENMERK --
LEUVEN, 16 October 2007

Report about the activities of the Teaching Chair for Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf, Academic Year 2006-2007

1 Introduction

My main activities during this academic year were:

- Giving lectures
- Making contacts
- Preparing publications
- Making a website
- Service to the deaf community.

1.1 Lectures

Three courses were given.

The course about Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf, two hours weekly, was given in the international programme of the Faculty of Theology. The course was attended by 20 students, which is more than average for optional courses in the international programme. They were from the following nationalities: Belgium 2 (one of them a Greek-Orthodox priest in the French speaking part of Belgium), Germany 2, Nigeria 5, India 3, Sri Lanka 1, China 1, Vietnam 1, Poland 1, Northern Ireland 1, USA/Venezuela 1, Uganda 1, Kenya 1. Not all students were in the programme for Pastoral Theology; there were also students from the programme for systematic theology and the programme for bible studies. Two students were from outside the Faculty of Theology, i.e. from the department of Cultural Anthropology. Several students had had personal experiences with deaf persons, either in their personal environment or as a pastoral minister.

The titles of the themes treated were the same as in other years, but the content is more and more modified:

- Deafness made visible: about the necessity of a special course about pastoral ministry with the deaf; history of deaf people in several parts of the world (Western culture, Africa, Asia, Islamic culture); the role of the Churches in the early emancipation of the deaf (especially in the USA).
- An enabling view on deafness: about two different views on deafness, the medical-audiological view (included some technical information on deafness), and the social cultural view on deafness; deafness as a world view, a cosmology; consequences for pastoral ministry.
- The consequence of deafness for persons' functioning: communication and the effects of poor communication on personal, social, religious development; deafness and literacy; visual orientation; religious experience of deaf people; sexual abuse in schools for the deaf.
- Deaf people and their language: about a view on language for pastoral ministry, language as instrument of dialogue and encounter or as crystallisation point of alienation; aspects of conversation from heart to heart; sign language as a religious and liturgical language.



- The self experience of deaf people: What do deaf people tell about themselves? The place of deafness in deaf people's life journey; aspects of counselling with deaf people; how can deaf and hearing people meet each other really?
- Models of pastoral ministry with the deaf: pastoral ministry in the past from an institutional care perspective; the place of deaf persons in the community of believers: individual mainstreaming, integrated communities of deaf and hearing, deaf Churches; pastoral ministry with the deaf as contextual ministry; the role of deaf laypeople and deaf leadership.

Literature to be studied was:

- Marcel Broesterhuizen (Ed.), *The Gospel Preached by the Deaf* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007) A draft of this book was provided. This book contains the presentations of four deaf people (Thomas Coughlin, Beth Lockard, Cyril Axelrod, and Peter McDonough) on a conference held at Leuven, May 19 2003.
- Marcel Broesterhuizen, "Faith in Deaf Culture", in *Theological Studies* 66 (2), pp. 304-329, 2005.
- Marcel Broesterhuizen, "The Gospel Preached by the Deaf: Conversation as the Complete Form of Language in Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf", in *Louvain Studies* 27 (3), pp. 359-375, 2002.
- Maureen Langton, "Deaf Ministry," in *Eye People Ministering* (Manchester: Hennesy House, 1991). This book is present in the library of the Faculty of Theology
- Peter McDonough, "Presenting the Word of God in Sign Language," in *Effatha: Proceedings from the International Catholic Religious Conference 1996*, ed. Peter McDonough (Monmouth: A&K Publications, 1996), 55-80.

Four of them had had personal experiences with deaf people, mainly as teacher in a school for the deaf. Two deaf persons, teachers of Sign Language and Deaf Culture in schools for the deaf, wanted to register for this course, as students from outside the University, but that resulted to be impossible because they were too late to register as students for this particular course, and being too late, the University did not provide interpreter facilities. Application for interpreter facilities during the academic year should be done before June 15th. The next time when the course is in the Dutch-speaking programme they will participate. An announcement of the course will have to be made in time, and people interested will have been warned that interpreter facilities should be applied for before June 15th. One student from Nigeria decided to write a thesis about pastoral ministry with the deaf in Africa, but since the material about pastoral ministry with the deaf in Africa was very scarce, he decided to enlarge the topic of his thesis to pastoral ministry with people with disabilities in Africa.

One student from Belgium, who was still in the Bachelors' programme, was allowed to follow the course and decided to write a paper about the theme "Who has guilt of the suffering of deaf people?".

A course of one hour weekly, "Religion, Meaning, and Philosophy of Life", was given in the third year of the Bachelors' programme in the Department of Audiology and Logopedy. In each department of the Catholic University this obligatory course is given by members of the Faculty of Theology. The Dean of the Faculty asked me to give this course in the Faculty of Audiology and Logopedy. After a short discussion about the fact that this might not seem logical from the viewpoint of the content of my course and the self-definition of many deaf people, we decided to do. The following topics were treated:

- Who do people with functional impairments view themselves? The deconstruction of the concept of disability.
- What is language and communication from the viewpoint of religion, meaning and philosophy of life?
- Mainstreaming, the language debate, and cochlear implantation: backgrounds of the difference in ethical evaluation between deaf and hearing people.
- The religious life of deaf people; deafness and liberation theology.



Literature to be studied was the book: Marcel Broesterhuizen (Ed.), *The Gospel Preached by the Deaf* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007).

For the evaluation of the course students had to write a paper with six statements, from which I chose two for a discussion during the examination.

The group of students that followed this course, was very mixed. Several people worked in the field of deafness, as speech therapists, teachers, and Sign Language interpreters. Discussions with them were often interesting, sometimes critical.

A third course, two hours weekly during the second semester, was given together with my colleague Prof. Axel Liégeois, "Pastoral Work in Care Services: Practical Issues". In the first three academical years of Axel Liégeois's and my teaching chairs both of us gave a course in the advanced programme of the Faculty of Theology, as was agreed upon also in the contract established between the KU Leuven and ICF. In reality, however, the number of students in this programme was very low, not only for our courses, but for all courses, so a reorganisation of this programme and the courses was decided by the Faculty Council. Our courses were combined and made obligatory for all students in the Dutch-speaking and international programmes for pastoral theology, and optional for students from other countries. Axel Liégeois and I decided to divide the course in two parts, his part being oriented on the identity of the pastoral minister in care services, and my part orienting itself on the identity of the client. It was not easy to develop a course that was not a kind of duplication of my course about pastoral ministry with the deaf, but was still clearly related to the topic of the Teaching Chair. I made a choice for more general topics that were applied on the field of deafness. The following topics were treated:

- Theological reflection in pastoral work: experience, culture and tradition in conversation (functional impairment and world view and their effects on experience, view on culture and view on tradition).
- What is conversation? (Conversation and language; communication in different modalities; characteristics of conversation from heart to heart; a view on pastoral conversation; when language and narratives fail).
- What is conversation about? (How do people tell about their lives? What is the influence of the language used and the person addressed? The pastor: a carrier of narratives? Logocentrism in pastoral ministry).
- Pastoral work and the community (the place of people with functional impairments in the community; accessibility, empowerment and liberation theology; integration and plurality; pastoral ministry and the deaf community).

Literature to be studied was taken from:

- James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*. Revised and Updated (Lanham - Chicago - New York - Oxford: Sheed & Ward, 1995).
- Eric H. F. Law, *Sacred Acts, Holy Change: Faithful Diversity and Practical Transformation* (St. Louis, MI: Chalice Press, 2002),
- Peter McDonough, "Collaborative Ministry in the Deaf Vineyard", Paper presented to the Conference on Deaf Pastoral Ministry of the International Catholic Foundation for the Service of Deaf People, Mexico City, 2003.

For the evaluation of the course students had to write for my part of the course a paper with six statements, of whom I chose two for discussion during the examination. This method of evaluation showed to be somewhat difficult for students especially from some Asian countries who seem to be prepared more for reproduction of knowledge acquired than for personal reflection on it.

This course was one of the few courses in the faculty followed by Flemish and foreign students together, in English. Students were from Belgium, Germany, Northern Ireland, Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Rumania, Hungaria, Nigeria, Uganda, India, Sri Lanka, Birma (Myanmar).



1.2 Publications

Four articles have been finished and were submitted to journals in the field of theology.

One article, "The presence of God in the Deaf community", was submitted to the editorial board of Louvain Studies. Until now, several months later, no reaction has been obtained from the editorial board. The article is composed of three parts. The first part is about the role of community and communication in deaf people's life and that not seldom deaf people experience a presence of God when relationship between people is involved. In the second part an analysis is made about the concept of presence of God between people, as described by Fathers of the Church, modern theologians, and non-Christian authors. In the third part the consequences for pastoral ministry are described, i.e. a pastoral ministry in which communication and community praxis are more crucial than the narrative aspect of Christianity.

A second article, "Beperkte mensen als beeld van God" (Limited people as image of God) was published in the official journal of the Belgium Church province, *Collationes*. It had come forth from my lessons in the Department of Audiology and Logopedy. Western culture, secular and religious, have an awkward relationship with functional impairment. Functional impairment is disability, deviance from normalcy, how a person should not be. The effect of the use of this concept is that people who are very different and who have nothing more in common than every other people (deaf, blind, physically disabled, etc.) are lumped together into one category. The concept of disability divides people. A more adequate view on functional impairment might be developed from the ideas of theologians who have functional impairments themselves. Three such theologians are described: Jacqueline Kool, a Dutch female theologian with a physical disability, Cyril Axelrod, a deafblind priest from South-Africa, and John Hull, a blinded theologian from the UK. From their writings the following statements were distilled:

- Functional impairment is a "world generating state". It makes that people live in a different world than other people, a world that is not only not less valuable than the world of so-called normal people, but that put also the world of so-called normal people into perspective.
- Functional impairment is not something that a person should not be, but is an aspect of the created reality of humankind. Perfect people exist only in fantasies, and an ideal of a perfect person is oppressive for many people.
- Functional impairment is a personal task in life, a place in life in which meaning can be found and created.
- When theology occupies itself with functional impairment, it should deconstruct disability and not base itself on dichotomising concepts that divide humankind into two categories of people.

The consequence of this for the idea that the human person is an image of God, is that the image of God cannot not be based on individual characteristics (reason, mind, etc.), nor on human people's ability to enter into contact with other people. The image of God is better based on the covenant of God with humankind, by which people can discover the image of God in their community and in themselves.

A third article, "A liberating approach of human contingency", was submitted and accepted by *Gregorianum*, a theological journal that is published by the Pontifical Gregorian University at Rome. The article is a modified version of the article published by *Collationes*. This article proposes to use the concept of human contingency, the unavoidable fact that no human person is perfect, and that every person is more or less subject to human contingency. Even Jesus Christ as a human person was limited: he was a man, a Jew, a hearing person in a hearing world, a sighted person in a sighted world, and his risen body is a violated body. The fact that this contingent human person is an image of God should not be based on an image of God that we design in words on the basis of individual or social characteristics of people, but on God himself, who is beyond knowledge and words. That God can be



discovered in a community of people that accepts difference and contingency and the relativity of people's own worlds.

A fourth article, "Worlds of difference", was submitted to *Ethical Perspectives*, a journal on ethics edited by KU Leuven. The editorial board is willing to accept the article if a few adaptations are made. This article describes that hearing people and deaf people often have different views on central topics in the approach of deaf persons: mainstreaming / inclusion, communication, medical-audiological treatment of deafness, especially cochlear implantation. These different views may lead to very different ethical analyses of these themes. The article tries to put these differences into a framework, based on the observation that deafness and normal hearing are what is called by the blind theologian John Hull, "world generating conditions". Deafness and normal hearing lead to a different perception of the world, different world views, different choices in life, and to different worlds. Both worlds are not absolute and have to be put into perspective. When worldviews become absolute, a hearing view becomes audism, and a deaf worldview becomes deaf fundamentalism. Neither of them succeed in realising their goals. The article proposes to bring both worldviews into negotiation and a dialogue on the basis of equality. This may lead to cooperation and a mutual understanding, without the expectation, however, that for a hearing person it will be possible to understand completely a deaf worldview, and for a deaf person a hearing worldview.

A contribution has been written for the *Liber Amicorum* that will be offered to my colleague Prof. Lambert Leyssen, professor of sacramentology, who will be given this year emeritus status, "Waar taal en verhalen falen: doven in gesprek met een horende (?) God" (Where language and narratives fail: deaf people in conversation with a hearing (?) God). This article, that will be adapted for publication in English, starts with the observation described by many authors in the field of deafness that many deaf people, unconsciously, perceive God as a hearing person. Speech, hearing, language, word play a rather central role in the Jewish - Christian tradition. God is described as invisible and impossible to be represented in visual images, whereas the symbols of the Scriptures seem to suggest that God speaks, has a voice and can be heard. Christian tradition tries to produce images of God by means of words and language. Actual Christian tradition overrates the power of language – for which deaf authors use the postmodern term logocentrism – and underrates the expressive and illocutionary force of visual means, whereas Christianity knows traditions, acknowledged too by the Catholic Church, that recognize visual expression of the message as having equal worth as its verbal expression. This logocentrism, which might be typical for hearing people's culture, is perceived and internalised by deaf people. The consequence is that many deaf people in their personal prayer address God as a hearing person, in spoken language or in the way they sign to hearing persons. On many places there are no standardised prayers or liturgical texts in true sign language, in stead of a sign code based on spoken language. This cannot be resolved by providing deaf people with more adequate images of God, since words and language are not better able to give an image of God than visual means. Two solutions are proposed. The first solution is to help deaf people and deaf communities to discover the image of God within themselves and to express that in a deaf way. A second solution is that deaf people learn to pray in their own personal way. The end of the article describes what some deaf priests consider necessary requirements for good liturgies with deaf people.

In August of this year 2007 a book, "The Gospel Preached by the Deaf" was published by publishing house Peeters at Leuven, that has a special relationship with KU Leuven. The book contains the presentations that were given on a conference that I had the opportunity to organise in 2003. Four presentations were given by deaf persons who work in the field of deaf pastoral ministry:

- Thomas Coughlin, Catholic priest from the USA. In his presentation, "Ephphatha: A Challenge for Deaf People's Responsibility for Pastoral Ministry", he talks about the development of a house of studies for deaf young men who prepare themselves for priesthood in the Catholic Church.



- Cyril Axelrod, deafblind Catholic priest from South-Africa. In his presentation, "The Liberatory Role of Evangelisation among Deaf and Deafblind People", he describes how he discovered through his emancipatory work with deaf people in South-Africa and Asia and his pastoral work with deafblind people in the UK that the central aspect of evangelisation of deaf people is to give them human worth and the consciousness that deafness or deafblindness is the unique task that is given to them in order to show that every person, deaf and deafblind, have been created after the image and likeness of God.
- Peter McDonough, deaf Catholic priest from the UK, describes in his presentation, "Ministry among Deaf People", who in England deaf people are provided with opportunities to be formed in order to be fully qualified for pastoral ministry with the deaf. He describes the consequences of deaf people's sharing in the baptismal call of all the Church and the need of a deaf spirituality.
- Beth Lockard, the first deaf person and the first woman ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, describes in her presentation, "Biblical Foundations for Deaf Ministry from a Liberation Theology Viewpoint", the role of deaf Protestant ministers in early emancipation of deaf people in the USA and the development of a group of Christian people, deaf and hearing, who make themselves strong for the emancipation of deaf people within the Churches.

The book contains also two presentations given by hearing persons. One presentation given by myself, "Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf: From Pastoral Care for the Hearing-Impaired to Deaf Pastoral Ministry", describes the paradigm shift that has taken place in pastoral ministry with the deaf. A final presentation was given by my colleague Prof. Jacques Haers of the department of systematic theology, and coordinator of KU Leuven's Centre for Liberation Theologies, "Whose Creativity is it Anyway? Reflections from a Liberation Theologies Perspective". In his presentation, as an outsider in the field of deafness, he suggests a method of analysis and action, See-Judge-Act, that deaf people might apply to their own situation.

The book contains also a verbatim of the Forum Discussion led by Helga Stevens, deaf, lawyer and alumna of the KU Leuven, who was director of the office of the European Union of the Deaf at the time. Actually she is a member of the Flemish Parliament.

1.3 Meeting with the Dean in February 2007

In February 2007, Peter McDonough, Dan Harrison and I had a meeting with the Dean of the Faculty. During that meeting the development of the Chair was discussed, and some misunderstandings were clarified. The Dean expressed again his wish for expansion of the Chair, but he understood very well that ICF does not have the means for such an expansion. An expansion might serve the visibility of the Chair. From the side of ICF concern was expressed that the Chair should be recognisable as an ICF Chair.

After this meeting I finished my preparations for a website of the Chair. The website <http://theo.kuleuven.be/page/icf/>, gives information about the Chair, ICF, courses, publications, the holder of the Chair, and links to relevant other websites.

During this year, Rev. Jan van Eijndhoven has done a lot of work in order to find funds for expansion of the Chair. A Dutch fund, Porticus-Benevolentia, a fund of a Catholic family in the Netherlands, Brenninkmeijer, was found ready to give 30,000 Euros which is half of the sum needed. Porticus-Benevolentia supports also another programme in the Faculty of Theology, i.e. the Centre of Practical Theology, in which I participate as a holder of the Chair.



1.4 Contacts

This year the contacts with the Department of Cultural Anthropology, especially with Prof. Patrick Devlieger, were continued. Patrick Devlieger is also a research professor at the University of Illinois in Chicago and he has contacts with the social studies department of Gallaudet University. Prof. Devlieger started his career as an anthropologist with studies of deaf culture in African countries. Later on, in collaboration with people from Gallaudet College he did anthropological studies of deaf communities in the USA. At the moment his area of research is culture, religion and disability. In his view "disability" is a concept derived from a medical way of thinking that neglects the fact that "disability" leads to a different world-view and a different way of forming community.

In April and June I had meetings in Germany, at first with Josef Rothkopf, deaf deacon at Aachen in Germany. In his diocese he is responsible for pastoral ministry with the deaf and the hard of hearing. He has contributed a lot to activities with young deaf people during the Catholic World Youth Days at Cologne in 2005. He is president of the Catholic Deaf Association of Germany, and a member of the board of the Arbeitsstelle Behindertenpastoral (Work Office for Pastoral Ministry with Disabled People) of the German Bishops' Conference at Cologne. He serves the Catholic deaf community in the diocese of Aachen, that has a considerable number of participants from the southern part of the Dutch province of Limburg, where there is no pastoral ministry for the deaf.

In June I had a meeting with Josef Rothkopf, Mrs. Simone Bell D'Avis, and Ralf Schmidt, at the Work Office for Pastoral Ministry with Disabled People. In Germany the choice has been made to integrate the coordination of pastoral ministry with the deaf into a larger organisation for pastoral ministry with people with disabilities; such is the German choice. The Work Office publishes a journal, Pastoral Ministry with Disabled People, that tries to cover all the fields of the Work Office: deaf people, blind people, people with physical disabilities, mentally retarded people, and people with psychiatric disturbances. Simone Bell D'Avis is the actual coordinator of the Work Office; she comes from the field of pastoral work with psychiatric patients. Ralf Schmidt, hearing, Catholic priest, is the parish priest of the deaf parish, a so-called personal parish in the diocese of Trier, a diocese south of Aachen, near the French border. A personal parish is a non-territorial parish, which is made possible by Canon Law. This deaf parish is very active, has a large deaf youth programme, and an exchange programme with the Catholic deaf community of Chicago and Mike Depcik, deaf Catholic priest from the USA. Deaf parishioners from Trier visited Chicago and deaf youth from Chicago were guests in the Trier parish during the Catholic World Youth Days. There were some common activities like a pilgrimage to Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

We agreed to cooperate and formulated the intention to organise a meeting for people involved in pastoral ministry for the deaf in Western Europe (Belgium, England, France, Germany, Netherlands). A few days for that meeting Ralf Schmidt had returned from Chicago, where he had got news about the international deaf pilgrimage to Rome. The Cologne centre wants to organise a large German participation in this pilgrimage.

In September, I was present at the presentation of a book written by Bro. Maurice Buyens, member of the Brothers of Charity. Bro. Maurice Buyens, hearing son of deaf persons, has worked for many years with the deaf, as a social worker, pastoral assistant, and voluntary interpreter. For many years he was a member of the board of the National Association of Catholic Deaf Clubs. He presented a book about the story of deaf people in Belgium. At this occasion, a presentation was given by Bro. René Stockman, general superior of the Brothers of Charity, about the involvement of his congregation in deaf education. Deaf education in Belgium was started by the Brothers and Sisters of Charity, in the beginnings of the 19th century, when Sisters of Charity had been trained at the school of Abbé de L'Épée in Paris, and Brothers of Charity had been trained at the Royal Deaf Institute at Groningen in the Northern Netherlands. The Brothers of Charity founded schools for the deaf in various places in the Dutch and French speaking parts of Belgium. The Brothers of Charity have founded a broad network of hospital care, psychiatric care, and care services for mentally retarded in Belgium; they are very influential in those fields. During the reception after the presentation of the book, I had the opportunity to speak with Bro. Stockman and to talk with him about the activities of the Chair.



1.5 Other activities

Like other years my direct contacts with deaf people were on a private level – apart, of course, of my activities at Viataal at Sint-Michielsgestel.

We continued with a small faith group of deaf persons in the Netherlands, that meets monthly. It shows to be difficult for them to involve other deaf people. They are observing now with some fatalism how the Catholic deaf community is growing older and older, and seems to be dying. Young deaf people who are interested in faith go to the Protestant pastoral ministry with the deaf, to the Evangelicals, and to the Mormons. One deaf Sister, who participates in the group, is preparing herself for becoming a pastoral assistant.

I discussed my own personal situation with the direction of my diocese. I proposed them to leave my job as a psychologist at Viataal when I become 60 years old, and to work for pastoral ministry with the deaf on a voluntary basis, since they have no financial means to fund pastoral ministry with the deaf. The details will have to be discussed, since the diocese prefers to limit the involvement of lay people in pastoral ministry.

Leuven, 16 October 2007

Marcel Broesterhuizen