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FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS  
(FOR HEALTH PASTORAL CARE)

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# **Proceedings of the XXIV International Conference**

*Organised by  
the Pontifical Council  
for Health Care Workers*

*Ephphatha!  
The Deaf Person  
in the Life of the Church*

**November 19-20-21, 2009**

**New Synod Hall  
Vatican City**

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Il Vangelo per la famiglia  
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## ADDRESS OF GREETING TO HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Most Blessed Father,

It is with filial devotion and gratitude that we thank you for receiving us during the proceedings of our international conference which this year has addressed a subject of great interest and contemporary relevance: pastoral care with and for non-hearing people.

During the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, on 3 December, the Jubilee of the Disabled also took place and amongst the disabled there were also many non-hearing people. The Holy Mass that was celebrated for that occasion was translated using sign language in order to allow a more complete participation. The Holy Father John Paul II, of venerable memory, addressed the disabled with the following words: 'In the name of Christ, the Church is committed to becoming for you increasingly a *welcoming home*'.

One may say that the XXIV international conference of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers – "*Ephphatha!*: Deaf People in the Life of the Church" – was organised to point out that the Church wants to become even more involved with deaf people so that they feel that in it there is for them a 'welcoming home'.

Our non-hearing brothers and sisters carry in their bodies, in their lives, an acutely-felt hope for 'liberation'. Without faith, this hope can take on tones of disappointment and dismay: sustained by the word of Jesus – '*Ephphatha!*' – it is transformed into living and working hope. The most sought-after goal, as Your Holiness emphasised during your recent visit to Jordan, is the full integration of people with disabilities 'into society and assuring that an adequate role and suitable provisions are offered in order to facilitate such integration'.

There are over 278 million people in the world with this invisible handicap which creates an impenetrable wall in communication and the sharing of all daily gestures. The difficulties increase as well and above all else in religious observance because of a lack of suitably trained priests and pastoral workers who are able to constitute a bridge so that non-hearing people (there are over a million and three hundred thousand Catholic non-hearing people in the world) can be integrated into all aspects of Church life.

Distinguished international experts and others have taken part in this international conference, amongst whom there are deaf speakers. They come from 67 countries in the world and came to Rome to make a contribution at the level of science and knowledge to the problem of deafness to secure the success of the process of the ecclesial and social integration of deaf people.

The families present during the international conference, who have one or more deaf members, offer in this sense important witness to true lived and suffered faith, as speakers as well. They have illustrated to the large number of people taking part in the international conference, about 500 people in all, the difficulties that are encountered every day in living their Christian faith.

Holiness: it is with authentic joy that we wish to express to you our gratitude for receiving us this morning, and with filial respect we prepare to listen to your words and receive your Apostolic Blessing which will accompany all those present and their families and will sustain them in their lives.

H.E. Msgr. ZYGMUNT ZIMOWSKI

*President of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers,  
the Holy See*





## ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the 24th International Conference organized by the *Pontifical Council for Health-Care Workers* on a theme of great social and ecclesial importance: “*Ephphatha! The hearing-impaired person in the life of the Church*”. I greet Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski, President of the Dicastery, and thank him for his cordial words. I extend my greeting to the Secretary and to the new Undersecretary, to the Priests, Religious and Lay People, to the Experts and to everyone present. I would like to express my appreciation and my encouragement for your generous commitment to this important sector of pastoral care.

Indeed, the problems that beset deaf people, who have been made the object of attentive reflection in these days, are numerous and delicate. It is a situation on different levels, which ranges from the sociological horizon to the pedagogical, from the medical and psychological to the ethical and spiritual and the pastoral. The reports of specialists, the exchange of experiences among those who work in this field, the testimonies of the deaf themselves have offered the possibility for an in-depth analysis of the situation and for the formulation of proposals and guidelines for an ever more specialized attention to these brothers and sisters of ours.

The word “*Ephphatha*” as the beginning of the title of the Conference’s theme, calls to mind the well-known episode in Mark’s Gospel (cf. 7: 31-37) which is paradigmatic of how the Lord works for deaf people. Jesus took aside a deaf mute and, after making some symbolic gestures, raised his eyes to Heaven and said to him: “*Ephphatha*”, that is, “*Be opened*”. At that moment, the Evangelist says, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue released, and he spoke plainly. Jesus’ gestures are full of loving attention and express deep compassion for the man who stood before him. The Lord showed the deaf man his concrete concern, drew him aside from the confusion of the crowd, made him feel his closeness and understanding by several gestures full of meaning. He placed his fingers in his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. He then invited him to turn his interior gaze, that of his heart, together with him to the heavenly Father. Finally, he healed him and restored him to his family, to his people, and the crowd, marvelling, could

only exclaim: “He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak!” (Mk 7: 37).

By his way of behaving which reveals the heavenly Father’s love, Jesus does not only heal physical deafness but points out that there is another form of deafness of which humanity must be cured, indeed, from which it must be saved: it is deafness of the spirit, which raises ever higher barriers against the voice of God and that of one’s neighbour, especially the cry for help of the lowliest and the suffering, and closes the human being in profound and ruinous selfishness. As I had the opportunity to say in the *Homily during my Pastoral Visit to the Diocese of Viterbo* last 6 September: “we can see in this ‘sign’ Jesus’ ardent desire to overcome man’s loneliness and incommunicability created by selfishness, in order to bring about a ‘new humanity’, the humanity of listening and speech, of dialogue, of communication, of communion with God. A ‘good’ humanity, just as all of God’s Creation is good; a humanity without discrimination, without exclusion... so that the world is truly and for all a ‘scene of true brotherhood’” (*Homily, Mass in Faul Valley, Viterbo, 6 September 2009*).

Unfortunately experience does not always testify to acts of prompt acceptance, convinced solidarity and warm communion for people who are unable to hear. The numerous associations that have come into being to protect and promote their rights, highlight the existence of a discontent society that is marked by prejudice and discrimination. These are deplorable and unjustifiable attitudes because they are contrary to respect for the dignity of the deaf and their full social integration. Far more



widespread, however, are the initiatives promoted by institutions and associations, in both the ecclesial and civil contexts, that are inspired by authentic and generous solidarity and which have contributed to improving the living conditions of many hearing-impaired people. In this regard, it is important to remember that in the 18th. century the first schools for the religious instruction and formation of these brothers and sisters of ours were being founded in Europe. From that time on charitable institutions in the Church increased, impelled by priests, men and women religious and lay people, whose purpose was to offer the hearing-impaired not only an education but also an integral assistance for their complete fulfilment. However, it is not possible to forget the serious situation in which they still live today in the developing countries, both because of the lack of appropriate policies and legislation and because of the difficulty in obtaining access to primary health care treatment. Deafness, in fact, is often the consequence of illnesses that can easily be treated. I therefore appeal to the political and civil authorities, as well as to the international organizations, to offer the necessary support in order to promote, also in those countries, a proper respect for the dignity and rights of deaf people, encouraging their full social integration with adequate assistance. Following

the teaching and example of her divine Founder, the Church is continuing to accompany the various pastoral and social initiatives for their benefit with love and solidarity, reserving special attention for those who are suffering, in the awareness that it is precisely in suffering that a special strength is concealed, a special grace which brings the human being inwardly closer to Christ.

Dear hearing-impaired brothers and sisters, you are not only recipients of the Gospel message but also legitimately heralds of it, by virtue of your Baptism. Thus you live every day as witnesses of the Lord in your living contexts, making Christ and his Gospel known. In this *Year for Priests*, you are also praying for vocations, so that the Lord will inspire numerous good ministries for the growth of the ecclesial community.

Dear friends, I thank you for this encounter and entrust all of you who are present here to the motherly protection of Mary, Mother of Love, Star of Hope, Our *Lady of Silence*. With these wishes, I cordially impart to you the Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to your families and to all the associations which actively work at the service of the hearing-impaired.

Clementine Hall

Friday, 20 November 2009

BENEDICT XVI





*Ephphata!*  
*The Deaf Person*  
*in the Life*  
*of the Church*



## SPEECH OF GREETING BY H.E. MSGR. ZYGMUNT ZIMOWSKI

Welcome!

It is with real pleasure that we give the welcome of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers to all those taking part in our twenty-fourth international conference which this year is on the subject: 'Ephphatha!: The Deaf Person in the Life of the Church'.

*Saluto cordialmente ciascuno di voi e vi auguro una proficua conferenza e una buona permanenza in questa bella città di Roma.*

I cordially greet each one of you and I wish you a profitable conference and a good stay in this wonderful city of Rome.

*Je salue cordialement chacun d'entre vous et je vous souhaite d'une part de profiter de la conférence et de l'autre, d'avoir une bonne permanence dans cette belle ville de Rome.*

*Serdecznie pozdrawiam każdego z was i życzę udanej konferencji i pobytu w pięknym mieście Rzymie.*

*Herzlich grüße ich euch alle und ich wünsche euch eine erfolgreiche Konferenz und einen angenehmen Aufenthalt in dieser wunderschönen Stadt Rom.*

*Saludo cordialmente cada uno de Usted y les deseo una muy provechosa conferencia y una buena permanencia en esta hermosa ciudad de Roma.*

I wish, therefore, to thank all those taking part, beginning with the heads of the dicasteries or their delegates, important figures, and experts who have come here to the Vatican to enrich this international conference. Here with us is the Italian Vice-Minister of Health, Professor Ferruccio Fazio; the ambassador of Taiwan, His Excellency Larry Yu-Yuan; the ambassador of the Lebanon, His Excellency Georges El Khoury; the Archbishop of Liverpool and the President of the International Foundation for Service to Deaf People, Monsignor Patrick Kelly; the representative of the Ministry of Health of Poland, Mrs. Monika Przygucka; and the

National Director of the Chaplaincy for the Deaf in Ireland, Reverend Padre Gerard Tyrrell. A greeting, even though he is not present with us here this morning for reasons of health, also goes to my predecessor at the head of the Pontifical Council, Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragán. With us to end our deliberations will be His Eminence Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini, the first President of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, a dicastery which on 11 February 2010 will celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of its foundation.



I would in addition like to refer, amongst others, to Reverend Savino Castiglione of the Little Mission for the Deaf and Dumb; the Auxiliary Archbishop of Washington D.C., Monsignor Martin D. Holley; Professor Marco Radici, Consultant in Otorhinolaryngology of the Fatabenefratelli Hospital on the Tiberine Island in Rome; Mrs Frankie Berry, a pastoral agent for deaf people in Dublin; Padre José Guillermo Gutiérrez Fernández of the Pontifical Council for the Family; and Mr. Terry O'Meara, the Director of the International Foundation for Service to Deaf People.

And last but not least, Dr. Silvio Mariotti, an expert on blindness and deafness at the World Health Organisation who has come specially to this international conference from Geneva, and the representa-

tives of numerous congregations and institutes of consecrated life who dedicate so much care and commitment to this sector which is as important as it is complex.

And then there are you, over 520 participants, above all deaf people and workers who serve them with love and skill, who have come here to the Vatican, representing over sixty countries from all the five continents of the world. It is really worthwhile to refer to all these countries given the difficulties that were overcome to arrive here. They are:

Angola  
Argentina  
Australia  
Austria  
Belgium  
Benin  
Brazil  
Burkina Faso  
Burundi  
Cambodia  
Cameroon  
Canada  
Chile  
China, Republic of (Taiwan)  
Colombia  
Congo  
Congo, Democratic Republic of  
Croatia  
Ecuador  
El Salvador  
France  
Germany  
Ghana  
Great Britain  
Guinea  
Holland  
Holy See  
Hungary  
India  
Indonesia  
Ireland  
Italy  
Ivory Coast  
Japan  
Kenya  
Lebanon  
Lesotho  
Madagascar  
Malaysia  
Mali

Malta  
Mexico  
Mozambique  
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Rwanda  
Slovenia  
Spain  
South Korea  
Switzerland  
Togo  
Trinidad and Tobago  
Ukraine  
Uganda  
USA  
Venezuela  
Zambia  
Zimbabwe

We thank the translators, especially those involved in communication between the four official sign languages (Spanish, Italian, English and North American English). It is thanks to their work as well that we can all fully take part in these three days of analysis and study of the ecclesial, health-care and social reality of deaf people, whom we estimate to number in the Catholic Church a million and three hundred thousand, and in the world over 278 million, of whom about a fifth have profound deafness. This is a particularly grave reality in the less economically advanced countries where it is estimated that 80% of deaf people live and where two in every thousand children born have hearing problems.

We will therefore address the question of the prevention and treatment of deafness, outlining its principal causes, beginning with illnesses such as measles, scarlet fever, meningitis, and the questions connected with possible forms of help such as external and internal acoustic aids.

We will then analyse the psychological and sociological aspects of the question, including those connected with education and the family, and those connected with the Church, in terms of lay and consecrated life, which this year is paying special attention to the Year for Priests. We already know many of

the major challenges, for example the training of a sufficient number of seminarians, priests and men and women religious in sign languages, and we will look for the best solutions to achieve this.

A culminating moment of the proceedings will certainly be the audience that the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, will grant us on Friday morning.

A truly rich and full agenda for this twenty-fourth edition of our international conference, therefore, which constitutes and will constitute a privileged opportunity to examine experiences in various contexts, outline elements of success, and explore useful pathways to the full integration of all those who are affected by hearing problems.

To illuminate our journey there will without doubt be the healing of the deaf man that is narrated in the Gospel According to Mark and which the conference takes as a point of departure. Jesus said “*Ephphatha!* Open!” This gospel account may be taken as an icon for all the questions and issues involved: God who became man was so near to suffering that He touched it with his hand and overcame it.

*Salvifici Doloris*, the apostolic letter whose jubilee falls this year, in addition to emphasising the salvific value of suffering also calls on all of us to be like the Good Samaritan, who comes to the help of the wounded person, the person in difficulty; that is to say it calls us to goodness and, with special reference to the world of those who cannot hear, to nearness, thereby breaking the isolation to which many of them still seem to be condemned.

This is an international conference which has required great efforts at the level of organisation and the hope is that it can be a seed that is ready to sprout and to be transformed into a tree laden with fruit.

*Possa la Madonna del Silenzio aiutarci e sostenere il nostro lavoro per migliorare la vita della persona sorda specialmente nella Chiesa!*

May Our Lady of Silence help and support our work to improve the deaf person's life especially within the Church!

*Que Notre-Dame du Silence nous aide et nous soutienne dans notre travail en faveur de la promotion des personnes sourdes et particulièrement dans la vie de l'Église!*

*Möge die Gottes Mutter Maria, Madonna der Stille helfen uns und begleiten unsere arbeit zu Gunsten der taubstummen in der Kirche!*

*Niech Matka Boża Cicha wspomaga nasze wysiłki w celu polepszenia warunków życiowych osób niesłyszących przede wszystkim w Kościele!*

*Que Santa María del Silencio nos ayude y sostenga nuestro trabajo para mejorar la vida de la persona sorda especialmente en la Iglesia!*

It is with the help of Our Lady of Silence that I declare open the proceedings of this twenty-fourth international conference.

I now give the floor to the general chairman who is H.E. Msgr. José L. Redrado, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers.

H.E. Msgr. ZYGMUNT ZIMOWSKI  
*President of the Pontifical Council for  
Health Care Workers,  
the Holy See.*





## Greetings of Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragán

I greet H.E. Msgr. Zygmunt Zimowski, the President of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers

I extend a very affectionate greeting to all of you now taking part in this international conference of this Pontifical Council. A special greeting goes to His Excellency Msgr. Patrick A. Kelly, the Archbishop of Liverpool, whose guest I had the pleasure of being and whose great pastoral zeal in

the work of evangelisation of the world of non-hearing people I also had the pleasure of experiencing. I congratulate you on the fact that the Holy Father granted that this conference would address such an important sector of pastoral care in health.

I hope that this international conference, in addition to its immediate pastoral significance, will acquire a universal value so that the need is understood for our so-

ciety to 'open its ears' and to listen to the Word of Jesus, and receive from him a language that can proclaim that he is the only authentic and fundamental value in each sphere of culture that claims to be such.

H.Em. Card. JAVIER  
LOZANO BARRAGÁN  
*President Emeritus  
of the Pontifical Council  
for Health Care Workers,  
the Holy See*

## Greetings of H.E. Msgr. Kelly

I will always remember one day when I was a student here in Rome. Our professor was helping us to receive the Gospel according to Saint John. For two weeks we had studied these signs:

– In the beginning was the Word.

– The Word was with God.

– And the Word was God.

Then he came to us and signed: cross out your notes from the past two weeks. I have read again all the teaching of Saint John. It should sign: the Word was towards God. When Saint John uses the word: P R O S; he always wants to sign towards. So those three lines teach this:

In the beginning was the Word.

And the Word was towards God.

And the Word was God.

The Word is love towards God.

The Word is not dead, cold, boring.

The Word is longing and we can dare to say: a pilgrim.

And this Word, this sign, this love, this pilgrim became flesh and dwelt among us.

And our professor explained: that is why St John's Gospel is told as seven journeys. And the last one: I ascend to my God and your God. I ascend to my Father and your Father.

I come here today after a wonderful journey. More than thirty years ago an Archbishop in England chose me to help people preparing a prayer for the Mass, a prayer in BSL. I had to make sure: this gives to our sisters and brothers who are deaf the wonder of the Mass, not just a part of it. I finished that work. And this prayer was accepted here in Rome as good and true and to be used by people whose signs are BSL.

Then I was chosen to be a bishop: and the bishop before me there in Manchester had walked with people who are deaf. So my journey among and with deaf people

went forward. And year after year Jesus gave me this blessing: to walk with deaf sisters and brothers from all over the world: I went to Guadeloupe; to Florida; to Washington; to Holland; to Ireland. And now to Rome; to be strengthened by coming close to the Holy Father. It is good to be here.

In the name of very many good people, some here with us, and some who have made their last journey to Our Lord in heaven, I thank Your Eminence, Your Excellencies, for offering the gift of his conference.

In the words of Cardinal Newman who will soon be declared blessed: so long thy power hath blest us, sure it still will lead us on.

H.E. Msgr. PATRICK A. KELLY  
*Archbishop of Liverpool,  
Great Britain*

# First Session

## Deaf People in the World Between the Past and the Present

SAVINO G. CASTIGLIONE

### 1. Deaf People in the World Between the Past and the Present

For someone like myself who is honoured by being a member of a the religious Congregation 'The Little Mission for the Deaf and Dumb', which was founded in Bologna in the now distant 1872 by Don Giuseppe Gualandi and his brother Don Cesare with the sole aim of educating deaf people, to be with you here is a moment of a very great joy principally because, for the first time under the lights of an international conference organised by the Pontifical Council for Health Care workers, we see deaf people as a living limb of the Church of Christ.

The attention that in this very important context is given to the deaf, the bearers of a invisible sensorial handicap and a handicap which is at the same time grave and devastating, although it on the one hand allows us to demonstrate empathy for their suffered and difficult past, on the other enables us to recognise the initiatives and the care that in past centuries the Church has sought to give to the world of deafness in the educational, ecclesial and pastoral field in the forms and ways suggested from time to time by the times and social contexts, thanks to a full-some array of qualified representatives.

Before continuing, believing that I can render a service to those who are not very familiar with the world

of deafness, I think it is advisable to throw light on the individual who is the bearer of this disability as such. Thus I will attempt to ask: who is a deaf person? What does it mean for an individual to be or not to be able to hear? And what is the role of the faculty of hearing in human life?

In summarising form, we can answer these questions by stating that: a deaf person is a normally endowed individual in intellectual terms, leaving aside the hearing disability that has struck his or her hearing organ which is biologically peripheral; one should bear in mind that through the faculty of hearing an individual can move out of the narrow world of his or her own being and have contacts with the minds, the hearts, and the world that surround him or her, becoming through spoken language a member of the human family; in addition, thanks to hearing it is possible to have a constant and imposing flow of information and communication between individuals and groups, without limitations in terms of thought, reactions, feelings, commands, warnings, threats and instructions. It is undoubted that the ability to hear has a kind of primacy as regards the five senses, making man a social being to the utmost: the ear, by which we receive 80% of the information that comes from the reality that surrounds us, is for each

individual the great window onto the world. Differently from the eye which has a direction and perception, that is to say its own visual field, hearing is stimulated by vibrations and sounds that come from all directions; and deafness as a barrier – the barrier of silence – more than sight halts the conversation between the person who has been wounded in his or her hearing with the environment, it deprives him or her of messages of information and leaves him or her in a state of isolation. The writer Hellen Keller, who became deaf and blind at the age of nineteen months, said one day: "What makes me suffer the most is my deafness because my blindness separates me from things but my deafness separates me from people".

*What do the numbers tell us?*

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO):

– In the world *one child in every thousand* is born deaf or becomes such during childhood.

– In developing countries which do not have a programme of health prevention as regards children and do not supply the vaccinations that are required, the percentage increases and is about *two children for every thousand live births*.

– *10.5 in every thousand is the*

figure in the world population for those who suffer some kind of hearing disability.

– Given that the population of the world is about 7 milliard, one needs to do little at the level of arithmetic to realise that we face a problem of great social relevance.

– In addition to causes of a genetic character, amongst the causes that give rise to deafness there are: meningitis, ear infections, marriages between people who are related, the use of ear-damaging medical products at overdose levels, birth traumas, and measles (the cause in 40% of cases of deafness).

### A Look Backwards

The idea that the trembling of the tongue of a deaf child should be broken so that it should be loosened (cf. Mk 7: 31-7), thereby enabling the child to speak correctly, forms a part of the inheritance of the most ancient and cruellest practices of medicine. We can now say that from the beginning of the last century medicine and technology have taken giant steps ahead to eliminate the causes that give rise to deafness, to solve the problems that are connected with deafness, and consequently to improve the quality of life of people who are afflicted by deafness.

In this sense we may think of hearing aids, especially the last-generation hearing aids, which are miniaturised and are able to conceal background noise, and also of eardrum implants and ear micro-surgery.

And then there is the amazing technological progress linked to telephony which in recent decades has really revolutionised the life of those who are without the faculty hearing. One need only think here of the possibilities offered by the messages sent by SMS or by video calls on mobile phones.

We could summarise the situation by saying that a more modern way of thinking about life in the social, family and religious sphere, on the one hand, and technological progress on the other, have made less arduous the carrying on one's shoulders of the heavy burden of a disability that in fundamental terms afflicts the possibility of interacting

normally with the surrounding world. But such has not always been the case.

In past centuries, the passing of the human existence of a deaf person was for the most part a pathway bedevilled by obstacles, of incomprehension, of isolation and of daily frustrations. An education, instruction and a social role for a deaf person are things that have been created by modern society. In antiquity, indeed, with the exception of some sporadic cases mentioned in literary works, the deaf person received neither education nor instruction. The lack of upbringing and education made a deaf person be seen as being on the same level as an idiot.

During the *Renaissance* the process began of educating deaf people, but this was something for the lucky few because these were the children of rich people or noble families. The first didactic insights of the Spanish Benedictine friar Pedro Ponce De Leon themselves arose in an elite context and were for the benefit of two deaf children who were the children belonging to the Valesquez aristocratic family.

Until the *medieval period* those people whose hearing was damaged were the prisoners not only of deafness and being dumb but also of a series of prejudices: a) *a psychological or cognitive prejudice*: it was denied that a deaf person had the cognitive capacities that were sufficient to be of sound mind and thus it was thought that he or she would not benefit from education and instruction; b) *a clinical or physiological prejudice*: deafness and being dumb were seen as independent entities. The clinical concept was absent that it a single disability, namely deafness, that gave rise to the subsequent disability of being dumb. In the absence of clear diagnostic principles, no serious process of education could be begun; c) *a juridical prejudice*: a deaf person was put on the same level as people deemed 'lacking in responsibility' and was declared incapable of certain juridical acts, for example property transactions; and d) *a religious prejudice*: a deaf person was held to be an inferior being whom it was impossible to educate and who was incapable of achieving knowledge of the 'true faith'.

Many years passed and we can

recognise that the Benedictine friar *Pedro Ponce De Leon* (1510-1584) had the great merit of demolishing the psychological or cognitive prejudice by educating and instructing, and with excellent results, two deaf and dumb children of the Spanish aristocracy. The intellectual *Gerolamo Cardano* (1501-1576) had the merit of demolishing the clinical prejudice. He was interested in deafness and dumbness because he had a deaf child. He established the bases of contemporary audiology when he stated that 'those who are born deaf are necessarily also dumb, given that there is a relationship of cause and effect between deafness and dumbness – *surdus ac deinde mutus*'. This learned man, and this was something very important for those times, grasped the need to base the learning process of a deaf person around the principle of visual sensorial vicariousness and thus not learning based upon acoustic images but upon visual moving images. Cardano wrote: 'we can thus ensure that a deaf person when reading, hears, and when writing, speaks'.

Once the principle that a *deaf person could be educated was established* based upon *sensorial vicariousness*, beginning with the eighteenth century and the opening of the first state schools, the period of the selection of methods for the instruction of deaf people began. In this way various teaching systems were created. Amongst these there prevailed *the method of systematic mining of the French school* and the *oral method of the German school*. The supporters of the two principal educational methods and systems continued to confront each other in a controversy that has lasted until the present day.

In the meanwhile, beginning in the nineteenth century, in Europe, in the United States of America, in Australia, in New Zealand, in Canada and in Latin America, the first legislative initiatives of various governments took place designed to assure that people with hearing disabilities could have in the first instance compulsory education and then be directed towards work.

On 21 September of 1951, in Rome, the founding document of the *World Federation of the Deaf* was signed.



The decision of UNESCO to celebrate every year, on the fourth Sunday of the year, the *World Day of the Deaf*, had its roots in this event.

Only a few years passed and on the occasion of the *Fifth World Congress of the Deaf* which was held in Paris in August 1971 the solemn *Declaration of the Rights of People Afflicted by Hearing Disabilities* was promulgated and published.

The Congress of Paris also established the bases for the recognition of sign language understood as a form of expression necessary for people who are not able to express themselves with a spoken language. Sign language was recognised as having all the characteristics of a language, with the exception of vocal sounds.

In the meanwhile, although every nation had its own sign language codified with signs, the World Federation of the Deaf entrusted a group of experts with creating an international sign language which was subsequently given the name '*GESTUNO*'.

It is truly curious to observe that the first historically documented use of sign language is to be found not amongst deaf people but amongst people with hearing.

Monks, who by their vows were obliged to be silent, used sign language in monasteries until the year 328 and they still use it, although the practice of silence has been rather reduced. During the medieval period the lists of signs from various monasteries on average reached an average of 400 signs.

The more numerous the signs contained in the list of a monastery, the more rigid was the vow of silence. Obviously enough, these signs were different from many of the sign languages used by the deaf.

### The Overcoming of the Religious Prejudice

As has already been observed, amongst the various prejudices borne by deaf people for very many centuries unfortunately there was also the *religious prejudice*.

It was argued that a deaf person was not able to engage in a conversation with the speaking world and

thus could not benefit from instruction of a normal character, and thus even more could not benefit from instruction of a supernatural character, which was much more abstract and demanding.

To complicate things even more, there was the erroneous interpretation on the part of some theologians of the words of St. Paul (Rom 10:17) in his Letter to the Romans in which the Apostle writes: '*Igitur, fides ex auditu* – faith, therefore, comes from listening to preaching'.

The logic and erroneous conclusion of those times was that as a consequence people without the faculty of hearing could not achieve Faith.

The interpretation of the commentators during the next centuries had such a negative impact that the theologian B. Roetti, in his book published in 1879, declared: 'the theologians agree that Holy Communion can never be given to people deaf from birth because they are perpetual infants, and thus in the universal practice of the Church its administration to them is prohibited, when there is a danger of death as well'. And all of this took place despite the fact that authoritative personalities in the Church, both Popes and saints, acted and expressed themselves in a completely different direction.

Despite this grave prejudice, the Church, the Church that is to say of the pastors of souls, never ceased to care for deaf people.

Inevitably one's mind thinks of what over recent centuries, in every part of the world, the vast flowering of noble figures of ecclesiastics and male and female religious Congregations which were created with the aim of attending to the human, spiritual, moral and educational formation of deaf people, has represented for the Catholic Church.

If anything, if this was needed, I would like to add that the most evident demonstration of the complete overcoming of all forms of religious prejudice in the Church has been the priestly ordination of a very large number of deaf priests. This is an event that expresses more than anything else the care, the love, the esteem and the trust that the Church feels for deaf people and their real capacities.

And today's assembly is hon-

oured by having present a number of deaf brothers in the priesthood who represent the thirteen priests without hearing who at the present time work in many parts of the world.

Their presence, while on the one hand it gives us joy and hope, on the other urges us to work ever more and ever better so that the groan, indeed the cry of Jesus – EPHPHATHA – Open, echoes in the hearts of all the deaf people who are at our side or who are spread throughout the world.



Lastly, like all the categories of people who respect themselves, as a result of the recommendation of Pope Pius IX, deaf people also have in St. Francesco de Sales, who was a bishop, their patron saint whom their commemorate every 24 January. (In North America, however, the Jesuit Canadian martyr, Renato Goupil, who was deaf, is commemorated; in the Anglo-Saxon world this honour is held by St. John of Beverly).

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PATRICK GRAYBILL

## 2. A Deaf American Person in the Life of the Church

*Psalm 126:3: "The Lord has done great things for us; how happy we were!"*

It is our blessing that God continues to create great things for us. Yes, God has surrounded us with a million reminders of His presence. I indeed believe that this day is a new Pentecost for our universal Church. When we first learned the news of Bishop Redrado of Spain expressing strongly that the needs of deaf Catholic persons be brought more to the forefront of our Church's attention, we deaf people, our families, friends, and allies were filled with joy. Thanks to God in the good bishop, this conference is taking place. Yes, it is a sign of God's presence.

*Ephphatha!* Be open! The command of Jesus Christ is not only made for us deaf but also for all others. Open to God inevitably results in our openness to others, especially those in need. Maybe those in need include some of you who do not have an experience meeting a person who has no idea of what it is like to hear. Today it is your opportunity to meet me, for I was born totally deaf. I was born to a hearing Catholic father and a hearing Protestant mother who eventually converted to Catholicism on my sister's First Communion. My good parents did not expect to have five deaf children in addition to two non-deaf daughters. I believe that my deaf siblings and I were God's gifts to our parents and sisters who learned about us and our Deaf way of life.

*Ephphatha!* I also believe in my heart that we deaf people have been God's gifts to our universal Church. However, how can I explain the truth in such a brief paper? Like a camel walking through

the eye of the needle, seventy years of my life as a deaf American Catholic and my involvement in the deaf culture need to be condensed into less than twenty minutes. When I do that, it will be a miracle!

*Ephphatha!* One of my challenges is to be true to myself as a deaf person and open myself without feeling responsible for making you happy. In truth, God is the only one who is leading all of us to the Kingdom of peace and joy. Let me explain who we deaf people are, what gifts we have offered to our church, what needs we daily face, and what hopes we have for our church.

We deaf appreciate very much that this hall is well-lit, for we depend on our sense of seeing. Frequently, swanky restaurants or fancy hotel ballrooms are dim in order to create a mood for intimacy or romance but we deaf people more than often groan about that form of injustice. We need to see each other while conversing with our hands, actually not only our hands but also with our eyes, brows, mouth expressions, nods and head shakes – the visible signals which are equivalent to vocal inflections. In fact, we can be disappointed, too, about dim-lit churches, for we want to see lecturers, interpreters or homilists who communicate with their hands to us. Sometimes priests officiating the Eucharistic offering ask interpreters to stand far from the altar; it means that we deaf have to twist our necks trying to follow the ritual and watch the interpreters at the same time. It is a challenge for us to maintain our faith as Catholics instead of giving up.

For your information, there are twenty-six million deaf and hard-of-hearing people in America.

However, a very small percentage of these people identify themselves as members of the culturally deaf community. They, including most deaf Canadians, use a language known as American Sign Language (commonly known as ASL). Each country has its unique sign language; therefore ASL is not a universal sign language. It does not have a written system. We have borrowed English to write about our way of life. It is easily assumed that ASL is a simple language. In fact, it is a complex and three-dimensional language. It takes three to seven years to learn how to be fluent in ASL. It has not had a smooth and easy journey. The path to being recognized as a legitimate language has been long and difficult, and the history of ASL must be studied or understood to appreciate the language as well as the way of life of deaf Americans. Although sign language has been used around the world for centuries, only within the past forty years has been recognized as an actual language. Without knowing the history of ASL, without accepting myself as a Deaf person, I would not be who I am – a professional actor, a college professor of Theater and Literature, a permanent deacon for twenty seven years, and a co-professor of Old Testament, New Testament and Deaf Culture at St. Thomas University, which has been offering an opportunity to deaf and hearing pastoral workers to achieve a master's degree in Pastoral Work with Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing People. Besides, we have seen deaf people being able to assume roles of leadership and service in the Church as priests and deacons, as lay pastoral workers, as catechists, lec-

tors, and Eucharistic ministers. The United States of America currently has eleven deaf priests and seven deaf deacons, and Canada has three deaf deacons. God willing, a deaf seminarian will be ordained in less than two years. In fact, the number involved in these ministries seems to be quite small, but we are happy to see some progress being made. In a word, it has been exciting to learn, show, and understand the gospel of Jesus through ASL. The language is God's gift to our church, and it includes visual orientation and stories of our experiences as deaf Catholics on our faith journey – in a way, similar to Jews and their desert experiences on their way to the Promised Land.

We celebrate the Good News of our faith even when we face our needs and challenges. We deaf people come from a variety of backgrounds: economic, cultural, social, and ethnic. Our ability to use and understand English varies widely and so does our ability to

use and understand ASL. We prefer direct communication in ASL, but most of the time we face indirect communication with the help of interpreters. More than often, we have to translate Bible texts from English to ASL, but it requires training. I was fortunate to receive such training without going to school for that. I gained the training by translating plays, becoming a narrator in the process of translating the Gospel of Mark as well as that of Luke and the Book of Revelation, and being a trainer of lectors and interpreters, and, most of all, acting as a deacon who lives to preach in ASL. Besides, I am delighted to work with an excellent team of four deaf experts in the field of ASL, a priest with a Sacred Theology license as well as expertise in liturgy, a canon lawyer who has a deaf daughter, and three certified interpreters to translate the congregation's responses in the Eucharistic offering from Latin to ASL. Our work is making slow but sure progress. The reason for this

work is that we need liturgies in ASL, religious education, sacramental preparation, marital and pre-marital counseling, retreats and other programs that the church provides. We long to provide and receive a catechesis in ASL, visit and talk with sick deaf people in our language, and receive sacraments in the same language.

In general, we deaf are professionals in many areas, including school administration, education, science, engineering, to name few. Why do we not have more of such professionalism in our church? It is hoped that this conference will lead to more deaf people in leadership roles. We are looking forward to have more deaf experts in pastoral care, catechesis, and translation. Who dares to dream of having at least the first deaf bishop or cardinal or Pope? Is it a far-fetched dream?

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MARYANN BARTH, CONSUELO MANERO SOTO

### 3. The Psychological World of Deaf People

To begin this paper we would like to point out that we have changed its title from “The Psychology of Deafness” to “The Psychological World of Deaf People”. The wording may seem insignificant or not important, but if you analyze the impact words and labels we use have for people, then the significance is great. If we talk about deafness, we are viewing it as an illness, something to be cured; if we talk about the psychology of deafness then we are looking at this from a pathological perspective, something that is wrong. However, seeing it as the psychological world of deaf people, we are viewing the person who is deaf and how the culture and world is defined, we look at the person not the decibels that person can hear.

The psychological world of deaf people... what is it? What type of world? A world of visual language, culture, education, psychology, sociology, biased testing, pathological perspectives, oppression, prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, linguistic centrism, audism, solidarity, customs, traditions, families, abuse, addiction, faith, amazing stories, authentic love, identity, a deaf identity, and simply stated: being deaf is a way of being.

In viewing the psychological world of deaf people, we will explore various perspectives in this world; deaf people’s perspectives on deaf people; deaf people’s perspectives on hearing people; and hearing people’s perspectives on deaf people. As we begin this exploration into the psychological world of deaf people, basic information needs to be outlined; i.e. deaf versus compared to Deaf, pathological/medical versus culture/cultural, and ethnocentrism and audism.

When speaking about hearing loss or deafness, the world is full of myths. One in particular is “deaf and dumb” or “deaf – mute”. Many believe that if a deaf person cannot hear, he or she cannot speak. What about a person who lost his or her hearing at the age of 40? Is she or he already able to speak? Through speech therapy, people deaf from birth may be able to speak, perhaps the tone of voice and volume are not exactly the same as with a hearing person’s, but sounds and speech are emitted. Language is not only the spoken word. It is a much broader concept that encompasses various channels through which we can communicate including the senses, body gestures, movement, eyes, artistic expression, writing, signals, signs, etc. Hearing individuals often reduce these other avenues of language thus reducing the full potential to produce language in various channels, not only via the spoken word.

For this paper, Deaf compared with deaf, Deaf will encompass people who identify themselves as Deaf, use their native sign language, and embrace their own Deaf culture. The lower case ‘d’ of deaf denotes the absence of hearing, the medical diagnosis of deaf. As diverse as our world, our societies and our people are, so, too, is the world of Deaf/deaf people diverse; thus the psychological world is just as diverse.

Deaf people, universally, comprise a complex, rich, and multifaceted society. Just as each hearing person has unique, intrinsic, qualities, so do deaf people, whether the person is deaf, hard-of-hearing, hearing-impaired, or deaf-blind – all “deaf” people bring some elements of homogeneity and heterogeneity to the arena of humanity.

#### Deaf/Deafness

The term ‘deaf’ seems to be a word that is easily understood and explained, but in reality, “deaf” people are some of the most misunderstood people in society. Deafness can be viewed from two perspectives: the pathological and the cultural. The pathological perspective views deafness as an audiological deficit that needs to be repaired, something is wrong, something is broken, and therefore “impaired.” The most intense and graphic example of deafness as a pathological condition was the eugenics and holocaust experiences of deaf people in 1933-1945. During this period, the passage of the Sterilization Law and the T4 Program were directly responsible for thousands of deaf people being forced to be sterilized or eradicated. The reason: they were deaf. Deafness in that place and time was seen as purely pathological and something that had to be erased.

In the twenty-first century, two constructs of deafness are dominant and compete in shaping deaf people’s destinies. The one construct sees deaf people as belonging to the category of disability; the other construct is deaf people as members of a linguistic minority. There is a practice of capitalizing Deaf when referring specifically to the second construct/category. In the disability construct, deafness is associated with the absence of hearing, silence, individual suffering, personal incapacities, and achievement in overcoming great obstacles. In the minority construct, deafness is associated with a unique language, history, culture, social group, and a set of social institutions. The first construct/category is governed by an audiologic criterion that decides which children will receive special

education, after consulting audiologists. In most countries of the world, audiology and special education are intimately related; the role of special education is to achieve as far as possible what audiology and otology could not do – minimize the child's disability.

The "labeling" of the deaf child as disabled is legitimized early on by the medical profession and later by the special education and welfare bureaucracy. When the child is sent to a special school and obliged to wear cumbersome hearing aids, his or her socialization into the role of a disabled person is promoted. In face-to-face encounters with therapists and teachers, the child learns to cooperate in endorsing a view of him or her as disabled. Teachers label large numbers of these deaf children as emotionally disturbed or learning disabled. The deaf child is then treated differently, placed in a less demanding academic program where he or she learns less, thus the label is self-validating. In the end, the "troubled person's industry" creates the disabled deaf person.

From the vantage point of the cultures of Deaf communities, deafness is not a disability. The British Deaf leader Dr. Paddy Ladd puts it this way: "We wish for the recognition of our right to exist as a linguistic minority group... Labeling us as disabled demonstrates a failure to understand that we are not disabled in any way within our own community" (Ladd, 2003).

The troubled persons industry associated with deafness, "the audist establishment", vigorously resists efforts to replace their construct of deafness. Audist policy is that sign language is a kind of primitive prosthesis, a way around the communication impasse caused by deaf people's disability.

What constitutes the psychological well-being of a person? How do we define normal? What is normal? We define abnormal, but until we realize that "normal" is largely connected with culture, language, societal norms, we tend to view people who do NOT fit into our culture, our language or our society as being "abnormal" and/or psychologically impaired. However, there are bona fide diag-

noses that do define abnormal behavior as measured using mental health standards. Does deafness adhere to these mental health measures? Do the psychological challenges/dilemmas that are within the D/deaf communities result from the pathological/medical issue of deafness or are the challenges/dilemmas within the D/deaf communities actually responses to years of frustration, prejudice, discrimination, and paternalism from an outside, hearing population, the majority? Does different equal pathology?



Dr. Sussman and Dr. Brauer (1999) observe that psychotherapists, and in turn, societies in general, still pathologize deafness and are hard put to describe healthy deaf personalities (Andrews, 2004). Our term 'normalcy' needs clarification. Where are D/deaf people on the standard bell-shaped curve that reflects our "average", "normal", "non-deviant"?

Exploring the psychological make-up of any individual, we have: parent/child relationships, attachment, physical characteristics, language and emotional development and sociological development. In parent/child relationships, approximately 90% of deaf children have hearing parents. Most hearing parents do not become fluent in sign language, the natural language of deaf people. Given the importance of communication for any relationship, the inability of a child to communicate

effectively with a parent will compromise the relationship. Attachment to deaf people, deaf children, deaf infants; what is done to stimulate, foster, support and embrace the deaf person? Language development and literacy competency are directly related to the early intervention techniques used with deaf infants and children. Listening devices, hearing aids, cochlear implants do not make a deaf person become a hearing person. The assistive listening devices may enhance the residual hearing, but the devices do not make the deaf person hearing. In addition, it is an erroneous assumption that those who learn speech reading or lip-reading are proficient in literacy skills. Almost 2/3 of the 42 sounds of English are either invisible or look like some other sounds formed on the lips (Hardy, 1970). Literacy competency for deaf individuals is directly related to early intervention using native sign language, proficient signers, and signing linguists that teach using native sign language. All of the above directly relate and affect the psychological 'make-up' of a D/deaf person.

Language and literacy; voicing and communication; linguistic centrism and audism; sign languages and speech reading are aspects of psychology and D/deaf people. We as a society value the spoken language; as people we want to hear voice; we as a society embrace linguistic centrism; we force the main language (a spoken language) onto a cultural group that uses visual language (sign language). A component of the linguistic centrism influence is audism.

Audism is a term used to describe discrimination or prejudice against deaf or hard of hearing people based on an auditory condition. We assume the culture of hearing people is superior to the culture of deaf or signing culture, or that deaf people are less capable (skilled, intelligent, etc.) than hearing people. Audism accepts, unquestioningly, the attitudes, conditions, or behaviors that promote the stereotyping of abilities based on auditory condition, a tendency to regard deaf persons as inferior, in need of medical intervention, unworthy of communication access, or unsuitable for employment.



## Language/Communication/Sign Language

Culture and language are intertwined, especially within the Deaf Community. One of the components of Deaf Communities is sign language. But do all deaf people sign? No. Each person has their unique skills and talents for production and reception of language—THEIR language! However, several things we DO know. From the perspective of American Sign Language, ASL, research has proven that ASL is a language with rules, grammar, syntax; a complete natural language, not like English. This research has been seen in many countries as well; Mexico, Spain, Cuba, Sweden, France, etc.

In this brief paper, one cannot present all the linguistic features of sign language, but a few that apply to the different languages in the world are: phonology, the simultaneous formation of a sign-hand shape, location, motion, and palm orientation; morphology. The study of the smallest meaningful unit in language and how units are used to build new signs and words. In ASL, examples of morphemes are: summer, ugly, dry...location of the sign changes the meaning. Other elements of ASL linguistics, but definitely NOT ALL of the linguistic structure are: temporal aspects (forms that are adjective and verbs, verb action is done TO time, i.e. 'study continually'), various types of classifiers, non-manual markers, eye gaze, facial expression, body shifts, and pauses. The linguistic features are numerous, and definitely sign language is a bona fide language!

Linguists know that the brain has the capacity to acquire language naturally and pass the language on to other people. This brain function happens whether it is a spoken language or a signed language. Many assumptions about sign languages have been debated, discussed, and researched.

– Sign languages are pantomime—false.

– Sign languages are highly pictorial or iconic – true.

– Many people feel, therefore, that sign languages can only express concrete ideas – false. Some

people also feel that sign languages are universal – false. Seeing all the interpreters working at this conference refutes that statement!

– Last, many people feel that sign language is a primitive language, a lesser language than a spoken type of communication system – false!

Sign languages are not the same as spoken languages. Sign languages are languages with grammar, syntax, sentence structure and discourse...visual languages that are not spoken languages on the hands. How do we apply this to the psychological world of D/deaf people? What are the measures/characteristics/standards for recognizing the well-adjusted



D/deaf person and removing the pathological view of psychology of D/deaf people?

## Identity

Self-awareness is an undeniable and inescapable attribute of all human beings. "Where did I come from?" "For what purpose do I exist?" So many of the unanswerable questions that come to mind even in young children center on a person's sense of identity and his/her search for it. A person with a healthy sense of self can confront such questions, even as a child; and though unable to find answers,

he or she can accept the unanswered questions without inner turmoil, specifically when family and friends are supportive.

There are many definitions of identity. "Oneness" and "unity and persistence of personality". At the heart of a healthy perception of self is the sense of being "all together". The expression "at one with one's self", which implies a healthy self-awareness, means "to be comfortable in one's skin".

If a deaf person, whether child to adult, is viewed with the construct of disability, as a person that cannot, he or she becomes very sensitive to the differences, to what they can do and what hearing people can do. They incorporate into their life the view of having limitations that exclude them.

They become aware of the behavior of hearing persons that identify a deaf person as different or inferior. All this takes a terrible toll on self-esteem and the sense of personal identity.

Is acceptance dependent on WHO the individual person is as opposed to WHAT label a particular institution may place on that person? The Church has been a strong supporter of the worth of every individual, no matter his or her status, class, ethnic identity or physical/intellectual capabilities. It is within that context that D/deaf people have the right to see themselves and celebrate themselves as fully human, fully capable of



achieving goals, and not to be restrained by artificial, oppressive, and ultimately false identities given to them by others.

Self-concept, self-esteem, and self-image are dependent on various factors. Bat-Chava (1993) has interpreted research findings and observed that the level of self-esteem is directly related to several variables: having deaf parents, communicating with one's family using sign language, and using sign language in school (Bat-Chava, 1993 1994, 2000; Desselle & Pearlmutter, 1997).

### **The Characteristics of a Well-Adjusted Deaf Person**

How do healthy, well-adjusted Deaf people handle the "differentness" of being Deaf? The simple answer is they do not. They do not have to, because they are not different. Deaf people today define themselves as a cultural and linguistic minority. Yes, they speak a different language to their neighbors, and they share a culture with each other, rich in poetry, art, social norms and every aspect of humanity that culture reflects. However, having your own language and culture does not make you more aware that you are different from people of other cultures. Language and culture are just aspects of existence. A fresh-water trout does not feel the water around its body and notice how it is not salty nor wonder what it is like to be a salt-water trout. Fresh water is that fish's environment, as our language and culture are part of our environment.

A Deaf person is like a member of any other linguistic minority dealing with life in the world. He or she socializes and lives with people who speak his or her language, and he or she deals with spoken language and the majority culture when he or she needs or wants to. No big deal.

We take the characteristics of a well-adjusted Deaf person (Dr. Allen E. Sussman) and apply them to our lives. We take the Hierarchy of Needs from Abraham Maslow and apply them to our lives and the lives of D/deaf people. From Dr.

Allen E. Sussman, Professor Emeritus Gallaudet University, Washington, D.C., the characteristics of a well-adjusted Deaf Person are:

- Positive self-concept and self-esteem.
- Positive psychological acceptance of deafness.
- Ability to effectively compensate for deafness.
- Ability to cope with negative and devaluative attitudes.
- Assertiveness.
- Ability to place speech ability in perspective.
- Ability to place residual hearing in perspective.
- Positive attitude towards sign language.
- Effective interpersonal relationship and social skills.
- Ability to be self-reliant.
- Ability to ask for and use assistance where and when appropriate.
- Ability to survive misguidance.
- Philosophical and unhostile sense of humor.
- Gemeinschaftsgefühl (self-actualization).

The Psychological World of Deaf People as perceived by Deaf people is often NOT the same as the one perceived by hearing people. Deaf people, generally, tend to see the cultural view, the linguistic richness of a signed language, the solidarity of a group of people sharing faith, sharing in the history of oppression, suppression, prejudice and discrimination.

Is there a Psychology of Deaf people... do Deaf people have a different psyche than hearing people... or is the Psychological World of Deaf People a world that strives to take the negativism, the pathological, "fix-me" mode and convert the negativism into the "I Can", "I Will", "I am OK being Deaf", World?

The Psychological World of Deaf People is a world filled with possibilities, hopes, dreams, humor, language, skills, education, relationships, struggles, and solidarity. It is a world that is open for others to explore and embrace. It is a world that welcomes people who accept Deaf people for WHO they are, not WHAT they are. It is a

world that is rich in culture. It is world that says: "We are here; we are of value; we are children of God; God makes no mistakes." Cherish us, accept us and let us all embrace each other as God's children.

### **Suggestions for Successful Service to the Deaf Community**

For individuals and agencies who wish to serve Deaf/deaf people and their families with a better approach, the following are suggestions based on these guiding principles. First, professionals should be sensitive to the cultural history of Deaf people; second, professionals should find ways to meet the variety of communication needs of all members of this population; and third, professionals should be aware of, and have a working relationship with, local and national resources that specialize in serving the needs of people with hearing impairments (Zieziula, 2001).

If we are hearing professionals, counselors, psychologists, teachers, pastoral workers, priests, etc., we need to recognize that being hearing tends to afford us a higher status than might have otherwise happened. What we need to do first and foremost is to examine our own attitudes intensively, be sensitive to hearing-deaf relations in any arena, work toward a status of mutual respect, and understand that hearing professionals do not always have all the answers. Deaf professionals do not, either.

This process requires mutual teaching. Hearing and deaf people must be open to understanding and working with each other's perspectives as part of an ongoing educational dialogue. Many examples of positive hearing-deaf working relationships can be found in research and in daily life: for example today, two women from different countries, with different languages, one deaf – one hearing, churches, groups and schools for the deaf throughout the world. Forging alliances, building projects together, working collaboratively, promotes healthy examples to all deaf and hearing, and ulti-

mately deaf and hearing are served in a more complete and unique way, training future generations to recognize this as a status quo.

A world that accepts differences is a world that grows and enriches itself. If we continue to separate ourselves because of our language, hearing status, color, race, then we make a bigger gap that will separate us instead of becoming one community united by our faith and love for God and each other.

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# Second Session

## Medical Aspects of Deafness

MARÍA ANTONIA CLAVERÍA PUIG

### 1. Medical Aspects of Deafness

#### 1. General Elements

Hypoacusia is that sensorial insufficiency which is most common in human beings. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), one newly born child in every thousand live births is affected by grave or profound hypoacusia and three in every thousand by moderate hypoacusia.

#### 2. The Anatomy of the Ear

The ear is made up of two parts, one peripheral and the other central. The peripheral part includes the outer ear, the middle ear, the inner ear and the vestibular-cochlear nerve VIII or acoustic-state or nerve VIII, made up of the central vestibular branch. The central part is made up of the central hearing pathway and the central vestibular system. The anatomical limit between the peripheral portion and the central portion of the ear is to be found in the entrance point of the eighth cranial nerve of the brain stem, the so-termed cerebral-bridge corner.

The outer ear is made up of the auricle and the external hearing conduit. The middle ear is a cavity full of air within the thickness of the temporal bone and is made up of the tympanic membrane, the tympanic box with three ligaments known as the hammer, the anvil, and the stirrup, the eustachian cartilage, and the mastoid apparatus of the tempo-

ral bone. The inner ear or labyrinth is the temporal bone and is made up of two systems: the posterior or vestibular labyrinth, which is responsible for balance, and the anterior or cochlear labyrinth, which is responsible for hearing.

#### 3. The Physiology of Hearing

*In the outer ear* the sound waves propagated by air give rise to variations in pressure which are picked up by the auricle and transported along the external hearing conduit to the tympanic membrane, producing its vibration.

*In the middle ear*, the vibrations of the tympanic membrane are transmitted by the chain of little bones to the oval window. These vibrations have different characteristics according to the sound that is received.

*In the inner ear*, the movement of the stirrup towards its inside provokes certain changes in pressure of the internal liquids and, with this, the stimulation of the nerve endings of the various sensorial cells localised in the cochlea, generating certain nerve impulses that are transmitted through complex pathways of central connections to the hearing area of the cerebral cortex.

The ability of a person to hear a sound depends on the intensity with which it is produced and the frequency field that he or she has and the hearing threshold he or she has. The field that establishes the limits

within which one can hear is identified within an area defined by two axes that correspond to the intensity of the sound and its frequency, and which is defined as an *audiogram*. The unit that measures the intensity of sound is called a decibel (DB) and the unit that measures its frequency is called hertz (Hz). In the vertical axis is located the intensity of sound in a rising way from 0 to 120 DB and in the horizontal axis is located frequencies from 125 to 8,000 Hz, that is to say from grave to acute.

An audiogram allows the measurement of hearing in every individual. An environment audiogram allows the measurement of the most frequent environmental sounds.

#### 4. The Concept of Hypoacusia

Hypoacusia is a reduction in that hearing threshold that is considered normal and this provokes a hearing deficit. A person has normal hearing when his or her hearing threshold is equal or less than 20 decibels in all the frequencies of the audiogram.

#### 5. The Classification of Hypoacusia

When we say that a person is affected by hypoacusia we say only that he or she has a hearing capacity beneath that hearing threshold that is considered normal, without specifying other very important charac-



teristics which enable us to understand how he or she receives hearing information from the environment and what his or her communicative, linguistic or social etc. capacities may be – essential requisites in understanding a person who has a hearing deficit.

Hypoacusia can be classified in many ways. They are described below according to those parameters that are held to be most relevant:

5.1. According to the *anatomical location of the damage*.

5.2. According to the *level of hypoacusia*.

5.3. According to the *age when hypoacusia appeared*.

5.4. According to the *cause of hypoacusia*

5.5. According to the *development of hypoacusia*

5.1. According to the anatomical location of the damage. Here there are four kinds of hypoacusia:

5.1.1. I. *Transmissive*, when the damage is located in the external and/or middle ear.

5.1.2.I. *Neurosensorial*, when the damage is limited to the inner ear, in the cochlea, and is thus called *cochlear*, or in the hearing canal, when it is called *retrocochlear*.

5.1.3. I. *Mixed*, if the external and/or the middle ear, and the inner ear, are affected.

5.1.4. *Disturbances of the central hearing system*, when the disturbance is to be found in the complex central hearing channels or in the cerebral cortex.

5.2. As regards the level of hypoacusia, here the Bureau International of Audiophonologies (BIAP) discerns four levels:

5.2.1. I. *Light*, when the loss is between 21 and 40 decibels.

5.2.2. I. *Moderate*, when the loss is between 41 and 70 decibels.

5.2.3. I. *Severe*, when the loss is between 71 and 90 decibels.

5.2.4. I. *Profound*, when the loss is greater than 91 decibels. This in turn is divided into four levels: Level 1: 91-100 DB; level 2: 101-110 DB; level 3: 111-119 DB; surditas: 120 DB.

5.3. As regards the age when the hypoacusia appeared, three types are identified:

5.3.1. I. *Prelingual*, when its

onset is from pregnancy to the age of 2.

5.3.2. I. *Perilingual*, when it is produced between the ages of 2 and 5.

5.3.3. I. *Postlingual*, when the onset takes place after the age of 5

5.4. As regards causes, three groups can be classified:

5.4.1.I. *Genetic or hereditary*:

5.4.1.1. A syndrome: about 400 syndromes associated with hypoacusia have been described. Amongst these one may list: Usher's syndrome, Pendred's syndrome, Waardenburg's syndrome, Jervell, Lange and Nielsen's syndrome, and Alport's syndrome.

5.4.1.2. Not a syndrome: recessive heredity, dominant or connected with gender.

5.4.2. I. *Acquired*: infective, orthotoxic, prematurity, traumas, metabolic alterations...

5.4.3. I. *Unknown origins*.

Usher's syndrome associates deafness with nocturnal blindness caused by pigment retinitis. Three types have been described which are genetically and phenotypically very heterogeneous.

Pendred's syndrome associates hypoacusia with a defect in the organisation of iodine and at times goitre.

Waardenburg's syndrome is characterised by neurosensorial hypoacusia of varying degrees, partial albinism, and dystopia cantorum. Other anomalies can exist such as heterochromia of the iris. Three types have been described,

Jervell-Lange-Nielsen's syndrome associates congenital deafness with a lengthening of the QT interval in the electrocardiogram which can cause ventricular arrhythmia and sudden death, above all during certain physical stresses.

Alport's syndrome associates neurosensorial hypoacusia with renal dysfunction.

5.5. According to the *development of hypoacusia*:

5.5.1. I. *Stable*: the loss remains the same without changing until adulthood.

5.5.2. I. *Progressive*: the loss increases with the passage of time.

5.5.3. I. *Fluctuating*: the loss is unstable, periodically it can return to the original level.

## 6. Therapeutic Help for Neurosensorial Hypoacusia

Neurosensorial hypoacusia does not have a curative treatment. Therapeutic help involves a hearing and (re)habilitation of hearing and/or language. The hearing aid can be an acoustic aid or a cochlear implant, an implant of the middle ear, both involving surgical adaptation, and in very complex cases an implant in the brain stem.

## 7. Profound Bilateral Deafness

This involves a hearing loss of an intensity greater than 90 DB (BI-AP) in the different frequencies of the audiogram and in both ears.

The most up-to-date and technologically advanced therapeutic help for people with profound/severe bilateral deafness is a cochlear implant. One has to carry out an interdisciplinary study of the person involved so as to assess whether or not he or she is suited to receiving a cochlear implant as treatment.

This interdisciplinary study involves a complete otolaryngological examination, a study of radio images with a CAT (computerised axial tomography) and NMR (nuclear magnetic resonance) of both the ears and the brain, in addition to psychological, logopaedic and neurological assessment by specialist professionals.

Once this study by a team of specialists has been completed, the otolaryngologist, the coordinator of the team, communicates to the person involved or to his or her family relatives that he or she could be a candidate for a cochlear implant or otherwise, in addition to explaining the motivations and the expectations involved.

## 8. The Cochlear Implant

### 8.1. The concept

This is an electronic device that is applied surgically and which converts acoustic signals into electric signals which stimulate the hearing nerve.

A cochlear implant has two components: an internal part that is positioned through a surgical opera-

tion, and an external part which is placed about a month after the surgical operation. The internal components are the receiver-stimulator and a number of electrodes. The external components are a microphone, an antenna, an integrated receiver, and the language processor which is behind the ear or in a box.

### 8.2 *How it works* (video with voice and subtitles)

A cochlear implant helps people with neurosensorial hearing loss or grave or profound deafness. A cochlear implant works with two parts: one on the inside which is the cochlear implant itself and one on the outside which is the so-called language processor. This language processor has a small microphone which collects sounds, transforms them into signals and sends them to the transmitter. The transmitter then sends the signals through the skin to the internal implant which converts the coded signals into electric energy and sends this to the electrodes. In this way the nerve fibres of the cochlea are stimulated and the brain recognises the signals as sound.

### 8.3 *Logopaedic (re)habilitation* (only video with sound, without voice)

A person treated with a cochlear implant must follow a hearing and/or specific logopaedic (re)habilitation. In the case of prelingual hypoacusia, the logopaedic (re)habilitation must be intensive and very specialised.

It involves the work of recognising sound and/or speech, hearing stimulation, and/or language learn-

ing. It has to be done by specialised logopaedists. The kind of (re)habilitation is different in people with postlingual deafness and children with pre- or perilingual deafness.

## 9. The Hearing Repercussions of Deafness

Deafness provokes a *quantitative* and a *qualitative* hearing loss. A cochlear implant, as a therapeutic aid for a person with profound deafness which is currently applied through medical surgery and is very advanced technologically, in addition to adequate logopaedic (re)habilitation, allows that person to hear sufficiently well to learn or remember and/or understand language. Despite this, one should not forget that a deaf person, albeit with the best and most suitable and recommended therapeutic help, receives from his or her environment incomplete information that is different and distorted. In order to shape and have a better understanding of these repercussions it is useful to compare hearing with a vision of an image from daily life. The same image can be visualised with greater or lesser information and thus be compared to different types of hearing loss (light, moderate, severe and profound). For example, a person with profound deafness who is therapeutically helped by a cochlear implant and with the best logopaedic (re)habilitation can achieve a hearing threshold that corresponds to light loss, but he or she will never receive information as a person without a hearing deficit does. In the same way, a person affected by moderate deafness who

wears the best hearing aid can reach a good hearing threshold but never a threshold achieved by a person with normal hearing.

Understanding how a person affected by deafness receives information from his or her environment helps us to identify what his or her needs are, and in this way one can offer him or her the right and precise help by which to obtain the respect and dignity specific to every human being.

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MARCEL BROESTERHUIZEN

## 2. Medical Aspects of Deafness: Psychology

First of all I would like to express my profound gratitude at receiving the honour of being able to make a modest contribution to this conference in this hall which is so important in the life of the Church. More than this, however, I would like to express my emotion and gratitude to the Lord at the fact that for the first time in the history of the Church deaf people and their friends find themselves so expressly in the heart of the Church. The Lord has called us to bring the Good News to the ends of the earth, but how often in history has it seemed that the deaf were beyond the ends of the earth!

In this paper of mine I would like to go into two psychological aspects of deafness. I will begin with a description of factors in the socio-emotional development and psycho-social development of deaf people and I will then speak about the ways in which deaf people experience various developments in the medical field such as cochlear implants and genetic research.

Various epidemiological studies of mental disturbances in deaf people have shown that as regards disturbances of a biological aetiology such as schizophrenia, autism and certain forms of psychosis there is no difference between the deaf population and the population as a whole. There is, however, in deaf people, as compared to the general population, a higher percentage of people with affective, psycho-social and behavioural problems. This phenomenon is not, as some people thought in the past,<sup>1</sup> a direct consequence of deafness. It is connected to a certain extent with certain aetiologies that are known to involve a high vulnerability in hearing children as well, such as prenatal viral infections, a lack of oxygen during childbirth, and

meningitis. In these cases as well, however, there is no direct relationship between aetiology and socio-emotional disturbance. As a result of research in the field of psycho-pathology in childhood we know that the greatest mediating factor in this process is an endangered interaction between children and parents which can lead in the child to an insecure attachment or even to a disturbance of attachment.

The English word 'attachment' is the term with which the psychiatrist of infancy Bowlby and the child psychologist Ainsworth<sup>2</sup> described the tie that is developed from the first day and possibly even beforehand between a growing child and the significant people in his or her environment – his or her mother, but not only her: also his or her father, siblings, grandparents, and later teachers, friends, and so forth. In two thirds of cases this attachment is secure and this means that for the child the person with whom there is an attachment is a secure base where physical proximity can be found if this is needed and from which the world can be explored feely and safely. In a third of cases this attachment is insecure and this insecurity can be expressed in two ways: exaggerated physical proximity with anxiety as regards exploration or too much exploration and the avoidance of physical proximity. These facts have been found in a large number of studies in various cultural contexts and the differences between the various contexts in, for example, Europe, Japan and rural East Africa are marginal.<sup>3</sup>

Limited studies in very young deaf children have shown that at the age of six to nine months, that is to say at an age when interaction

between parents and infants is still very visual, there is no clear difference between deaf children and hearing children at the level of attachment. However the situation changes when during normal development the need arises to regulate the behaviour of the child through oral communication.

Various studies have demonstrated that the quality of attachment is complementary to the pedagogic style of educators – not only the child's parents but also other people as well. The pedagogic style that leads to secure attachment is characterised by so-called sensitive responsiveness, that is to say the ability of the educator to understand well and in an empathetic way the needs, the feelings and the thoughts of the child and to react to them in such a way that the child grows as regards his or her capacities. The result is mutual trust between the child and the educator and trust of both of them in themselves. The infant but also the growing child knows that his or her educators are available if he or she needs them; there is a co-regulation of behaviour – the child can decide on his or her own if he or she can do something and the educators decide on whether this is necessary. The child receives clear and suitable instruction on what his or her educators want from him or her.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear that this sensitive responsiveness requires a very sophisticated mutual adaptation and a high level of communicative ability. A disturbance of communication has very grave consequences for this mutual adaptation. Indeed, as the American child psychiatrist Paul Brinich who has looked after many deaf children said: 'Where communication collapses, the strongest take control'.<sup>5</sup>



The consequences of this is that from the age when oral communication begins to be more decisive in interaction, the relationship between deaf children and hearing parents runs the risk of becoming increasingly insecure.<sup>6</sup> The pedagogic style of parents is forced by becoming increasingly directive and controlling; communication increasingly takes the form of commands. Deaf children and hearing parents, but this is also found in other educators such as teachers, do not learn to communicate about feelings, thoughts and other aspects of their inner selves. I have met many parents of deaf adolescents, capable educators as regards their hearing children, who did not now how to hold a personal conversation with their deaf children.



In a relationship of insecure attachment, children and young people do not learn to have trust in themselves or in each other. Parents become unpredictable for the child and vice versa. The child does not develop the certainty that his or her parents are always available and if they are available that they are ready to help. In gave cases this can even lead to a disturbance in attachment which, as described in DSM IV, can express itself in a variety of ways: an inability to enter into a relationship with other people, a constant and insatiable affective hunger, or a continuous attracting or rejecting of oth-

er people, as can be seen in borderline personalities.

This can be accompanied by a profound feeling of not been accepted and evaluated for what the child really is, which can lead to an authentic feeling of desolation.

I will give two examples of this. In a magnificent book on the deaf community of Nepal, the American writer Irene Taylor, the daughter of deaf parents, mentions what a deaf man who grew up as the only deaf person in his family and his village told her about his youth: "I have to sincerely admit that there were periods when I felt like a domestic pet rather than a member of the family. As sign language was not yet well developed when I was young, good communication was absent between me and the other members of the family. It is true, they fed me, they clothed me, and they looked after me, but I also knew that something was lacking in the relationship".<sup>7</sup>

Do not think that things are different in Western countries. A few years ago a young deaf Flemish woman provided the same description of her family: "In reality one can say that as a girl I was a member of my family in the same way as a domestic pet was. Perhaps this is something that it is harsh to say but I think the parallel is a good one. People who are affectionate towards a domestic pet look after it well but they do not have a real conversation with the animal and do not give it any information".<sup>8</sup> Later on she says: "I had difficulties from the age of ten to thirteen. I began to think about myself and to understand that I was different. I remember that I felt very alone and isolated. I asked myself why I was different, why I could not speak simply with my family relatives, as they did with each other. I asked myself why I felt I was not one of them. I wanted my sisters to speak and play with me, but this is something that they did not do. I was very angry but I could not speak about it...The only thing that I could do at that moment was to go away but I could not do that. At the age of thirteen I understood that I was deaf and I understood how similar I was to the other deaf girls at school. And then I became calmer, less difficult. My parents

were happy about this and I can well understand why. But in reality a wall had been constructed between us and I no longer wanted to have the problems of breaking down that wall. Not because I did not want to, certainly, I wanted to and I have always wanted to up to now – but I couldn't. I will never rebuke my parents for what happened because I am certain that they did not know how I felt as a girl and as a young woman. Only that sometimes I am sad and angry because of what happened. I believe that my parents did what they thought was good...And yet I think that my mother – if she had known then what she knows now – would have learnt sign language to use it with me".<sup>9</sup>

When these deaf girls and boys go to school and meet other deaf young people and in a short time undergo the experience of having on-going communication with other deaf children and young people, they find friendships and good contacts. The fact of sharing a world with other deaf children and young people certainly has very valuable aspects; it can even be a protection against the psychological consequences of a failed relationship with their own family relatives. Many parents recognise that their deaf children need to be with their own families as a safe haven from which to navigate in the sea of the hearing world.<sup>10</sup> This can be a compensation for what is absent in their families but there is also a risk: the group of deaf children to which they belong can also take the place of their own families and a deaf child can grow up in a world to which his or her own educators – parents, teachers and others – do not belong; they are like outsiders who do not have a valid contribution to make.

One day I had a conversation with a boy who came from a family with four deaf children and I said to him "Wow! That sounds great, four deaf brothers!" "No", he said, "it's terrible! We are always fighting, then our parents come and there are punishments handed round; they go away and everything starts over again. At school it's the same thing: we fight with out classmates, then the teacher comes and a logopaedist,

punishments are handed round, and then nothing changes. Hearing people do not understand anything about us, they are useless”.

Hearing people are no longer trusted. They are people who are enemies from another world. In this situation hearing people have the illusion that they are educating the deaf but in reality they are educating each other, and not always with the desired results. This process has a major influence in the religious development of these people. At a certain stage of development, the images that children have of God the Father, of Our Lady, of Jesus, are formed and they depend a great deal upon the images that they have of their own father, mother, siblings, and friends.<sup>11</sup> Research carried out by the National Catholic Office for the Deaf of the United States of America demonstrated that many deaf people have an image of God the Father as an important person but a person who is distant, who does not communicate with the deaf, and who does not understand sign language. So communicating with such a God has no sense. And when we speak about the Church as the family of the children of God and of the other faithful as our brethren, these are images that easily open up old wounds. At times it is better to avoid these images.

I do not want to paint a tragic picture of the development of deaf people. I do not want to pathologise the deaf. At the present time deaf children and young people receive an education that is very different from that received by the generations of deaf people before them. Most deaf people continue to live with their families rather than going to residential schools and colleges. There is an increasing number of families who use sign communication with their deaf children. There is more sensitivity towards the needs of deaf children. The deaf American psychologist Martha Sheridan<sup>12</sup> observes that most of the deaf children of hearing parents have experiences within their families which are much more positive than those reported by deaf adults about their youth. It is my belief as a psychologist and a believer that authentic participation of deaf people in the

Church begins in the family, the domestic Church. If deafness as a shared project takes place there with good results, it will also succeed outside the family.

One of the fundamental things that the hearing parents and other hearing family relatives of deaf people have to understand is that deaf people and hearing people live in different worlds. Deaf people and hearing people perceive the world in different ways, they perceive different aspects of the world. Logically, the hearing parents of very young deaf people make their choices and often these choices are based upon a vision in which deafness is a disability. Soon, however, they discover that for their deaf child deafness means something else. And they have to allow their growing child to become his or her owner of his or her deafness and derive from that deafness his or her own choices which may be different from their choices. It is logical that hearing parents want their child to be a part of their world, to become like them, to speak their language, and it can hurt if the child makes other choices. If from the outset they do not have an openness to this world of the deaf, in many cases parents see that young people make their own choices anyway, but in disagreement with them.

For hearing parents and experts, the advances that have been made in the medical-audiological field are spectacular. And it is a shock for them to see that these great discoveries are not assessed in the same way by all deaf people. When the cochlear implant was invented, the deaf community was very much opposed to implantations in deaf people because it appeared to them to be a capitulation to the medical-audiological vision of deafness in which deafness is seen only as a disability. For a good number of years allowing an implant was seen as a betrayal of the deaf community. Given that in the post-modern epoch deaf young people base their choices on pragmatic reasons, there is at least in Europe a growing number of deaf young people who have a cochlear implant and perhaps go to musical festivals with deaf friends, with whom they prefer to communicate in sign lan-

guage. In Flanders, a country where cochlear implants have developed greatly, I know a significant number of deaf young people who were educated in a purely oral way, integrated into hearing schools, and who perhaps have had a cochlear implant, but despite this fact decided to learn sign language and get into contact with the deaf community. I know a young deaf woman who was always in hearing schools – she and her sister who is also deaf are without contacts with other deaf people – who received a cochlear implant at the age of sixteen. During her university studies on cultural anthropology she had to do research in this field and decided to engage in a study of the culture of deaf people in Suriname, in Latin America. For her it was a shock which made her feel what she had always never had. She wrote a magnificent degree thesis for which the company MedEl, a manufacturer of cochlear implants, wanted to give her a prize because they saw it as an example of the success of the cochlear implant. She said that she would accept the prize only if an interpreter of sign language could be present at the awarding of the prize and if she could narrate how she had discovered the value of sign language. She is now taking part in a programme of studies on deafness at the University of Bristol, England.

Her deaf friend studied pedagogy at university and met the deaf community only at the age of sixteen. She learnt sign language, she was active on the Deaf Action Front which collected the number of signatures needed to comment during a session of parliament on a petition for the recognition of sign language. A parliamentary Bill along these lines was introduced by a deaf Member of Parliament who also had a history of oral education and integration in hearing schools. All these three deaf people relate that in looking backwards they feel that their educators were not able to grasp certain needs for contact and communication that they had.

In an interview with one of them in the newspaper of the Fleming Federation of Deaf People a famous medical expert in the field of cochlear implants said that he



thought that within a few decades therapies would be discovered that could treat deafness and other defects at the level of genes and that everybody would be very happy with these therapies. He said that he was not able to understand the doubts of the deaf community about genetic manipulation. In his vision what was of great importance was for deaf children to become hearing people, integrated into the world around them.<sup>13</sup>

A British researcher in the field of genetics, Anna Middleton, found that amongst deaf people there is more suspicion about genetic research than amongst hearing people with deaf children or parents. She asked the people taking part in her research to describe their feelings about genetic research with a choice of adjectives. The most used adjective amongst deaf people was 'worried' and the most used adjective amongst hearing people was 'hopeful'. Various deaf people made comments such as 'why do you interfere in the lives of deaf people – leave us in peace'. Less than a quarter of deaf people but a half of hearing people were interested in the prenatal diagnostics of deafness. The deaf people who were interested were almost all deaf people who did not identify with the deaf community and deaf culture.<sup>14</sup>

An observation that I have frequently made when in contact with deaf people is that many of them do not see deafness as a disability. Yes, as children they had a period when it was difficult to accept themselves as deaf people but now they see themselves differently. Life could be easier if they were hearing: a better job, better pay, less problems at the level of communication – this indeed is the case. In research on deaf adolescents some of them said that to call them disabled would be an insult to people who were really disabled such as the blind, people in wheelchairs, or mentally handicapped people. It hurts them and scandalises them when they have the impression that hearing people see a deaf life as having a lower quality of life than a hearing life, as a disabled life. For many of them deafness is not the loss of hearing but membership of a minority with its own language and culture. For

many years I thought that this idea, amazing for people with hearing, was typical of an ideology for individual, troubled Western countries, but I have also found it in other countries and cultures such as Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea and Ethiopia. This awareness of being normal people despised by hearing people I also found in them.

What lesson can be drawn from this? Unfortunately a section of deaf people grew up in a way which led them to learn to live in a frustrating mixture of submission and diffidence towards hearing people. This is a state of mind which goes back to the beginnings of their lives and which since then has been confirmed on a number of occasions by educators who did not know how to enter into a real dialogue with them and for whom the first question was how deaf people understand me and not how I understand deaf people. The solution lies in an improvement of the sensitive responsiveness and the communicative capacities of their educators.

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## 3. Round Table: Experiences from the World of Silence

MARCO RADICI

### 3.1 Congenital Deafness

Centuries ago, Aristotle wrote: 'the ear is the organ of education', and by this he meant that the ear is the basis for the development of language. If a child displays grave or very grave hearing problems, whether they are congenital or acquired prior to the development of language, he or she will not be able to correctly develop language in a spontaneous way. He or she will not have those sound stimuli which, when reproduced after being assimilated, constitute spoken language, and thus he or she will find himself or herself isolated amidst other people, like a person who watches a film that is a talking film for everyone but a silent film for him or her, with all the implications that this marginalisation involves, beginning with the deficit in his or her overall development of his or her personality, being frustrated and not gratified even by the comfort of his or her mother's voice. Still today infant deafness constitutes a frequent problem. Indeed 1,500-2000 children are born in Italy every year who have grave hypoacusia. Forms of infant hypoacusia are in the great majority of cases congenital in character (about 90%), connected, that is to say, to agents that act during the prenatal or perinatal period; *hereditary* causes are the most frequent, followed by *infectious*, *toxic* or *traumatic* causes. Of these, only a half are identified before the age of one and the others, even if they appear early on, are identified subsequently with an enormous impact

on the communicative and cognitive development of the child. Given the scale of the phenomenon (it is calculated that the risk is of the order of 1/1,000 new born children), it is easy to understand how important an early diagnosis is and this is even more important because it is during the very first stages of life that language is developed.

A failing at the level of the working of the hearing organ clearly obstructs this delicate and complex process and thus to be able to recognise during the first days of the child's life if the hearing organ has alterations has a fundamental importance because it provides us with the opportunity to act quickly so as to assure that the unfolding of the stages of development of linguistic communication and the use of the hearing organ itself follow the 'physiological' stages. The earlier one acts, the greater the external sound information is organised so that it can be used correctly. Late diagnosis makes everything much more difficult for the child. Approaching him or her after nine months of listening to his or her environment means that from then he or she must begin to understand what he or she hears in the great confusion of sound signals that come to him or her, suddenly, all together, in an amassed and indistinct form

The strategies of 'primary' prevention, that is to say removing the causes of deafness, are still today very much limited and they are es-

entially based upon education and sensitisation in the health-care field, on the prevention of the principal infectious diseases involved (vaccinations) and on advances in the field of audiological genetic research. Indeed, in recent years two genes have been identified (Connexine 26 e Connexine 30) which are responsible for congenital deafness and the test for their identification is today available in Italy as well.

Today it is brilliantly possible to carry out what is termed 'secondary' prevention, that is to say the removal of the clinical and social consequences that occur with early diagnosis and subsequent educational action. A diagnosis may be termed 'early' if it is carried out and confirmed during the first six months of life. With the advent of new technologies and with the beginning of a new culture of prevention, diagnosis is being brought back to 18-24 months but this date may be even further moved back in time: *neonatal screening* with otoacoustic emissions can already be carried out during the first hours of life of a child. It is not invasive, it is rapid, specific, sensitive and costs little. Hearing screening has been confirmed by numerous international scientific studies as being extremely useful in achieving the recovery of optimal hearing at a functional level. This good functional result is highly influenced, therefore, by early diagnosis, as long, however, as this early diagnosis is

immediately followed by the educational itinerary of the child in his or her family: the provision of hearing aids and specialised logopaedic intervention must be carried out by expert personnel who should, in addition, guide the child's family and all those (relatives, teachers, etc.) who will interact and be figures of reference during the various stages of the growth and development of the child. If these conditions take place a total social, school and occupational recovery of an optimal level will be assured, as well as a complete affective development in a serene family environment.

After a diagnosis of hypoacusia has been carried out and the location of the lesion has been established with reasonable precision, it is advisable to proceed swiftly with the organisation of the most suitable therapy. The instruments for the correction of the neurosensorial hearing deficit are still today entrusted in the majority of cases to an early acoustic hearing aid which, however, has been flanked in recent years by another technological resource in the form of a cochlear implant which has, without doubt, begun a new chapter in as much as it

constitutes the first real sense organ of an artificial kind which can be implanted in man.

For a number of years, the 'San Giovanni Calibita' Fatebenefratelli Hospital has offered the possibility of carrying out an audiological screening of all children who suffer from risk factors as regards congenital deafness (being premature, icterus, infections during pregnancy, admission to neonatal intensive care etc.). Since January 2008, we have subjected about 6,500 children to the EOE test in concomitance with the first paediatric examination about a week after birth. Of these children, about 95% had normal levels of EOE and 5% have mono- or bi-laterally altered levels. The test was repeated with these children two weeks later. Children who at the second test had altered parameters were subjected to a second-level test involving evoked hearing potentials which in four of them confirmed the diagnosis of congenital deafness. The causes of deafness were attributable in two of them to an alteration in the Connexine 26 gene and in the other two to an infection by the cytomegalovirus during the first three months of

pregnancy. The level of deafness at birth at our hospital has been 0.7/1000, a level that is lower than most of the latest statistics in the literature in the field. Children with severe and profound hypoacusia discovered by us have been directed to programmes involving rehabilitative hearing aids and the cochlear implant.

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FRANS CONINX

## 3.2. Medical and Technological Interventions Offer New Possibilities to Improve the Quality of Life of Persons with a Hearing Impairment

The diagnosis and treatment of hearing impairment has medical, technical-audiological, psychological and educational foundations. In all these professional fields, knowledge and practices have changed substantially over the past twenty years.

My main message today is: it is important and necessary to carefully compare the past and the present and conclude that it is not possible and not appropriate to transfer all experiences from the past into the future. For that reason I want to compare the conditions and circumstances of twenty years ago with those of today.

Twenty years ago hearing loss in children was identified quite late, often at the age of 2-4 years. Diagnostic options for infants and young children (age < 3-4) were limited. Hearing aids were simple amplifiers with many limitations and could not be adjusted very well to individual needs. A lack of effective high-frequency amplification was one of these limitations. Cochlear implants were just in a first phase of implementation and used only for older children and adults.

Today neonatal hearing screening has been installed in many countries; alternatives for early screening at 6-24 months are being implemented, such as *littEARS* (Coninx 2008, 2009). Good objective and subjective tools for early diagnosis are in place. Digital hearing aids can be fitted very early to provide infants with adequate amplification. When amplification is not effective, cochlear implants can be provided starting from the age of 8-12 months.

These differences between 1990 and 2010 have caused very substantial changes. Most children can hear and pick up sound quite well. Even more important...they benefit from already hearing in the first year of life.

The processing functions of the auditory nerve and perception process in the central brain (auditory cortex) can develop and mature in a time window where the neural plasticity is still optimal (first years of life). Speech and spoken language develop primarily by natural and incidental learning; children quite often speak the local 'dialect' (proving that they are picking up pronunciations by the ear and imitating it). The child can be included communicatively and socially in the family, with parents and sisters/brothers who in most cases use spoken language to communicate. When there is inclusion in the family then there is a solid basis for inclusion in widening social circles (neighborhood, kindergarten, school, work, church, etc).

With this foundation many children will be able to participate in society in a way that follows the UN convention on 'inclusion'. Later in life, these children will have the *real free* choice of how they want to live and participate in society like most other people: using speech, spoken and written language. It enables them to have a way of life that is dependent on hearing technology but independent of interpreter services; being really bilingual through the use of spoken language and sign language. An increasing number of deaf adults decide to go this way

themselves, but also make this decision for their deaf children.

Some of my deaf students in Cologne speak to me in one-to-one conversations, use signing but also speech when communicating with other deaf students, and use signing when interpreters are present at my lectures.

Deaf adults now (2009) were born before 1990. Most of these deaf adults could not yet benefit from the achievements of the medical and technological advances described above. They might have acquired spoken language, but with limitations and with a large amount of effort.

Often, sign language is, then, a better alternative. This has to be recognized, respected and supported.

The options for the individual deaf child growing up today are based on the individual choices of parents.

The traditional medical-audiological distinction between hard-of-hearing and deafness (90 dB) seems to be obsolete. With only a few exceptions, children will have the possibility to HEAR and when they can start hearing early enough also to UNDERSTAND, and use spoken language, identify sounds and enjoy music. And for that purpose they have a series of options: acoustical: advanced digital hearing aids. Also acoustical and relatively new are: frequency shifting hearing aids – inaudible high frequency sounds are shifted downwards into an audible range; electrical: cochlear implants – bilateral provision has proven to improve spatial hearing skills; electric and acoustical (EAS): the combination



of acoustical amplification in the lower frequencies and electrical stimulation in the higher frequencies (using a short electrode into the cochlea); and acoustical: implantable middle ear implants, for special cases such as children without an outer ear canal.

In children, deafness might go along with additional developmental problems such as learning disabilities, cognitive limitations and mental retardation, physical limitations (also affecting the motorics of speech as well as of signing), visual impairments, environmental deprivation etc.

This means that even the best and early provision of hearing instruments is not a guarantee for the good development of spoken language in a deaf child. However, it

might impair language acquisition, including sign language.

Some final words on the issue of acquired hearing loss and hearing loss in the elderly. When spoken language skills have been already acquired and a person becomes hard-of-hearing or deaf at a later age, the potential success of hearing instruments is very high. The brain has to be 're-wired' and learn to process the new signals entering through the auditory nerve, whether they come from an acoustical hearing aid or from a cochlear implant.

What is important is that the brain is still capable of 're-wiring'. This becomes less likely when the brain has been deprived for a long time. When the ear (cochlea) does not provide neural excitation to the

auditory nerve and the central brain, these neural structures will degenerate. When many years later the hearing loss in the cochlea is (successfully) compensated with a hearing aid or CI, the brain has lost its capability to process and recognize these signals. The older person will hear, but maybe not understand. The ear is just a gate to the brain. In order to keep the auditory part of the brain in good shape, the early identification and early provision of hearing technology is also important for elderly persons.

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ANTONIE ARDATIN

### 3.3 My Experiences as a Religious Education Teacher of the Deaf in Wonosobo, Indonesia

One day when I was teaching my deaf students aged twelve about the healing of the deaf man by Jesus according to the gospel of Mark 7:35, they were astonished and asked me “How can it be? If Jesus is still alive today, then we should be healed also”. I was challenged to make them understand abstract concepts such as: Jesus, miracle, spirit, heaven and Heavenly Father. I had to explain that “Jesus is still alive today! That he lives in the hearts of the students, teachers, parents and siblings”. “How can that be?” they answered. “I don’t understand”, Dita said. And I asked her “Do you remember when you were five years old and came to the school for the first time? How did you communicate?” “Oh, we were using body language and trying to sign”. And I tried to explain: “Through the love of your parents, your teachers, your siblings and your friends for you, you were able to learn to communicate. The Spirit of Jesus was and is still working in you and also in them!”

Our school ‘Dena Upakara’ is one of seventy schools for the deaf in Indonesia. It is a Catholic school and was founded by the Dutch Congregation of Sisters, ‘the Daughters of Mary and Joseph’, in co-operation with the Institute for the Deaf, St. Michielsgestel, the Netherlands, in 1938. Our Congregation has embraced ten Dutch deaf women with a vocation in its community in the Netherlands. Our school is the second school for the education of the deaf in Indonesia but the first school for deaf girls. Besides Catholic students, the majority of our pupils

are from different confessions. In Indonesia, 88% of the population is Muslim and 12% is Catholic, Hindu or Buddhist. The parents know very well that our school is a Catholic school. So besides the Catholic religion, we have also developed a curriculum for Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. It is a great challenge for students and our members of staff to learn to be tolerant to each other, to accept and to build interfaith relationships.



Since 1975, our government has paid special attention to the special needs of children with disabilities. Many government schools for special education have been founded. After the political reform of 1998, democracy started gradually to develop. In reality, this means that Muslims are in a majority and Christians in a minority. However, this does not mean that we have religious freedom. This is not always an easy situation for the Catholic Church. As far as I know, there are at this time very few or no voca-

tions of people who have been called to join the priesthood or the Congregations of sisters/brothers or who want to teach at a Catholic special school for the deaf. There is also a new law that forbids people to choose the partner that he/she loves to marry when they are not of the same religion. Thus Muslim people have to marry Muslims and Catholics have to marry Catholics. Many of our deaf alumni feel very insecure. This is difficult to explain, to understand and to accept.

Our school is a private school. We have to pay the salaries of our members of staff out of our own finances which is very difficult for our institute! So parents must pay the school fees but usually they are unable to do so or can pay just a fraction of the real costs. An additional problem with teachers sent by the central government is their lack of training. They are not trained or qualified to teach children with special needs, such as deaf children and youngsters. This means that we had to develop privately our own in-service training programme at our school despite the existing special education programmes at the state teacher-training colleges. We are inspired to fight for justice and the rights of deaf children of all confessions to have equal access to quality education.

Some of our alumni are able to attend professional training in regular training schools and a small number have graduated from university. They always see the company of their deaf friends and organise so-called Deaf Clubs where they can socialise and organise a

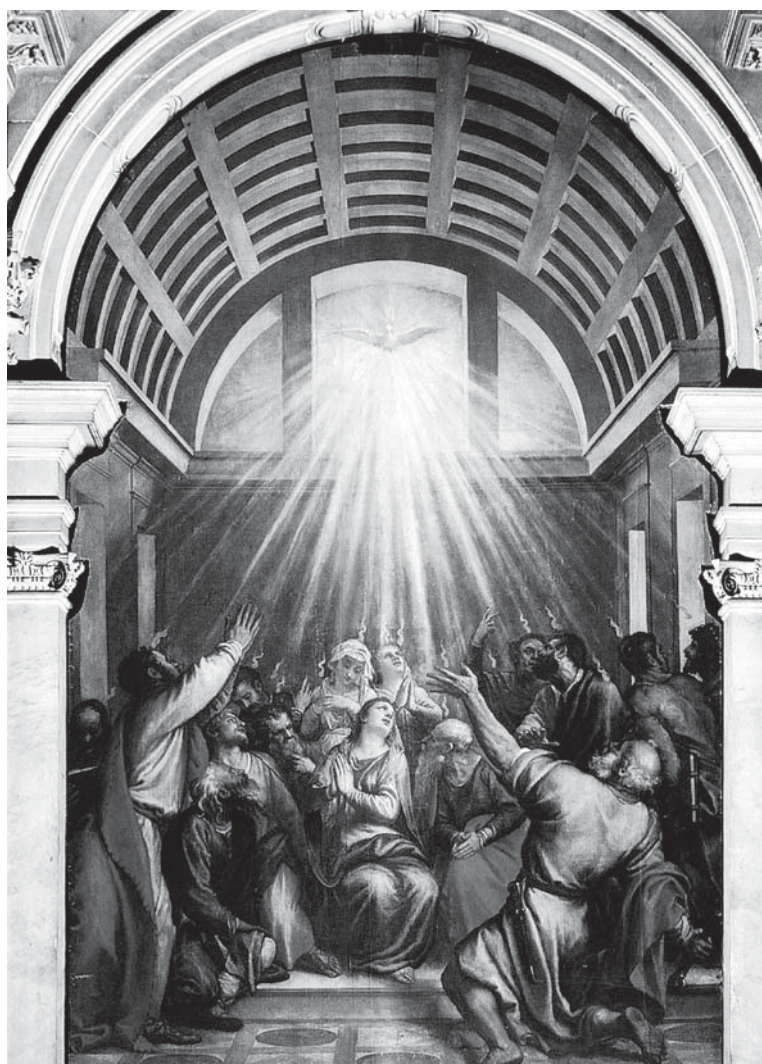
monthly special Holy Mass for deaf people administered by a priest. Also a group of Muslims pray at the same time in their mosque. After finishing Holy Mass and Muslim prayers, they have a social gathering: Catholics and Moslems together. That is a good example of good practice, of living together, of being tolerant and of being respectful of each other. *An interfaith relationship! And this is happening in the world of deaf people!* As far as I know, not a single deaf man or woman has entered a Catholic Congregation or is active in pastoral services

in the deaf clubs or communities. However, as a result of their interfaith relationships the deaf clubs started the Credit Union programme after Holy Mass to help deaf people who are poor. Our staff guides them on how to organise this Credit Union concept. They like it and have learned step by step to save money first together. Then, if they need financial help to in their businesses, they can borrow money from the Credit Union at a low rate, e.g. 1% a month, while other people pay 2.5% interest to the national bank. Usually, they borrow money from

the Credit Union to buy a sewing-machine to start a small tailor's shop or catering etc. So you see, little by little we are making progress in the education of children and youngsters who are deaf. We need your prayers and support and especially the Blessings of the Lord.

SR. ANTONIE ARDATIN

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Teacher of deaf people,  
Jawa Tengah  
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JAIME GUTIÉRREZ VILLANUEVA

## 3.4 My Personal Experience and my Pastoral Experience

### 1. My Personal Experience

I am a non-hearing Spanish priest. At the present time I exercise my ministry at the Parish of St. Mary of Silence which works in the pastoral field of care for the deaf and the deaf and dumb in the archdiocese of Madrid. Parallel with this activity, I am writing a doctoral thesis in theology on the subject of Christian identification. I also work as a diocesan councillor of an apostolic movement, the Christian Cultural Movement, whose objective is the formation of Christians. I am thirty-five years old and I was ordained a priest ten years ago. I became totally deaf seven years ago and at the present time I have a cochlear implant.

My hearing difficulties go back to twelve years ago and in the early years I did not want to accept this reality, that is to say that I was going deaf. These were years of isolation, of loneliness and of a lack of communication. I had few friends because I encountered difficulties in forming relationships with other people because of my deafness and because of the fact that I did not accept my condition. My first contact with deaf people took place roundabout nineteen years ago when I had been at the seminary for a number of years (I entered the Minor Seminary when I was fourteen years old).

One day I spoke to my bishop about the doubts that I had about the fact that I could be a priest despite my deafness, which for that matter was progressive and was causing me increasing difficulties and made me notice limitations as regards my studies and in relating to people with hearing. He advised me to work as a priest with deaf

people (up to that moment I had not had contact with such people) and he had me meet a religious from Valencia who worked at a pastoral level specifically with non-hearing people. I spent a period of time in the company of this priest and saw how he worked. Subsequently I began to learn sign language and to belong to the National Assemblies of Deaf People which are held in Spain twice a year. Thus I gradually began to know these people, their world, their special features characteristics, their different pastoral experiences, and I began to work in Santander with deaf people (catechesis, meetings, pilgrimages, etc.). All of this helped me to accept my condition as a deaf person and to discover that I could be useful to other people even with my handicap.

When I was ordained a priest my bishop appointed me the diocesan head for pastoral care for deaf people: I could dedicate myself totally to non-hearing people, as regards sacramental responsibilities as well.

I have never devoted myself exclusively to the deaf. Indeed, I have worked, and I work, with hearing people in parishes and in the apostolic movement to which I have already referred and whose national councillor I have been for five years. I see this experience as very positive and enriching because work with the hearing people and above all else with the adults who belong to this apostolic movement has given me a great deal as a priest and I have always felt integrated into this community, even though this has involved a great effort on both sides. As regards myself, the effort has been greater with respect to understand-

ing what is said at these meetings. I have to make a greater effort at confession and in my various activities. I have to ask people to speak more clearly and to repeat what they have said or I ask them to give me notes on what they have said. For them as well there has been greater work and involvement because on many occasions they have had to photocopy texts or papers given to the meetings so that I could follow these meetings better. They have had to speak to me standing in front of me, in a clear and slow way, etc.

All of this has helped me to feel totally integrated into the life of the Church and more specifically into the groups with whom I have worked in the field of pastoral care. This experience with hearing people has helped me a great deal as regards my work with the deaf. For this reason I have campaigned – and this is something that I continue to do – for a greater integration of deaf people into society and into the life of the Church. I believe that this is possible and this is something that is confirmed by my personal experience. We deaf people cannot represent an isolated community within the Church, and the same may be said about our relationship to society as whole, because this approach not only would isolate us but would also impoverish us. We need specific care, specific support, and also a certain involvement on our part, but I believe that the development and interaction of deaf people is possible if everyone works in this direction. My personal experience tells me that we can succeed and for this reason welfare and paternalistic attitudes, which do not help in the development of individuals but, instead, humiliate

them by telling them what they can and cannot do, cause me suffering.

## 2. My Pastoral Experience

In my pastoral experience with deaf people the greatest challenge that I have had to address is that of conjoining evangelisation with the integral promotion of the interests of non-hearing people. We cannot speak about Jesus Christ if we do not have the approach at the same time of a integral promotion of the interests of people, of every person, so that he or she experiences the salvation and the liberation that Christ came to bring us. This means that every human being should live in line with his or her dignity as a person, developing as a person to the full. When the Gospel speaks to us about Jesus healing the deaf and dumb man we see that not only did he heal him of a his deafness and unloosened his tongue so that he could speak, but he also, and above all else, restored to him his dignity as a person so that he could be reintegrated into society and the Church.

I would like, therefore, to begin this second part of my paper by observing how Pope Benedict XVI in his latest encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* places emphasis on the fact that 'the authentic development of the person concerns in a unitary way the totality of the person in every one of his dimensions'. Thus such development must be integral, it must promote the interests of all men and each man. This encyclical is an authentic pearl and a gift for the whole of the Church which will help us to understand better what I am about to say.

Almost nobody thinks that the promotion of the interests of deaf people is possible. Let us begin specifically with non-hearing people. We ourselves do not have, in general terms, an awareness of our capacities. Each deaf person suffers and accepts as he or she can his or her own situation of isolation, of lack of communication and of culture, as well as many other problems that come from deafness. We realise, in addition, the fact that there are very many deaf people who find themselves in our

situation but that many of them live it with resignation, without hoping that it will possible to change it. They see this situation as irremediable.

Deaf people must discover in an increasingly clear way and *become aware* of the fact that:

1. Our situation is not a fatal law laid down by God or by the forces that dictate history and it is possible to address the difficulties caused by deafness and overcome them through permanent action and struggle.

2. This action or struggle must overcome the difficulties that are caused by deafness, must be a collective action on the part of non-hearing people and must embrace all deaf people of the whole world in a movement of international solidarity. I have often asked myself what being deaf in Africa or in the Honduras or in so many other poor countries actually means. I hope that the speakers who come from these continents of the world, with whom we have had an opportunity to take part in this international conference, will illustrate to us their experiences.

3. This action must have as its objective the social, human and religious promotion by which deaf people can fulfil to the utmost their own personalities and enjoy the goods created for the progress of humanity which exist for all men. For this reason *cultural promotion* is necessary. We must achieve a professional, human, social and religious culture. As a yeast and an instrument for directing this action we should take as a model the integral promotion of the interests so many deaf people which can serve as an impulse and guidance for other people.

In this way one will manage, step after step, to form in non-hearing people a new awareness of their capacities, developing promotional action that is increasingly deep, vast and unequivocal.

Hitherto most of the social and pastoral action with deaf people, and in general the whole of the field of disabilities known by me, and which I myself have developed, is action of a paternalist and welfare kind, such as the fact of thinking that deaf people are not

able to read and to understand what they read, as if this disability was something that was natural and insuperable. We have come to the point of widely developing in these people an ideology that I call 'deaf nationalism' and which involves believing that deafness creates its own identity derived from its own language which is different from the identity of people with hearing – sign language. All of this isolates and separates deaf people from the rest of society and the Church, impeding and delaying their integral promotion. The point should be understood: one should not interpret what I say as a statement to the effect that sign language is not necessary or that we deaf people do not need specific care and support. We certainly need this, but this should not be used to justify closed groups and communities. We must journey towards greater real integration into social and ecclesial life and this will be possible only through a pathway involving the integral and collective promotion of the interests of these people.



In order to serve faithfully the good of the whole community of deaf people, I would like us to concentrate our attention on certain points that could direct us on this pathway of their integral promotion so that we ourselves can provide some answers to the problems that are caused by our disabilities.

1. Authentic *international solidarity* between deaf people and hearing people is required, from which will come authentic freedom and equality, a sharing of all social, economic, cultural, political and spiritual resources, in addition to the commitment of every-

one according, obviously enough, to their capacities, and always bearing in mind in particular non-hearing people who live in the poorest countries of the world where in many cases they are denied what is most basic and important – their dignity as persons. And in many cases they are not even treated as people.

2. Thus a collective *hope* will begin to develop and grow, a shared goal, an ideal with a great power of attraction which will have gradually to be completed and expressed in action and experiences, and which inevitably will give rise to the birth of promotional collective action.

3. This requires the discovery that this *collective promotion* is possible.



There have always been cases of individual promotion and there have always been people who because of their resources and attitudes, because of their spirit of struggle or because of the help that they have received from other people, have managed to engage in individual promotion. Now, however, the time has come to envisage collective action by deaf people on the part of all of us who work in this field of pastoral care. This promotion also needs collective action. Many of us, indeed, engage in such promotion at an individual level and look for the resources by which to do this. I believe that the best evangelising service that we can offer to non-hearing people is to organise joint action whose objective is their integral and collective promotion, in whatever part of the world they may be.

And to succeed we must be able to rely specifically on non-hearing people. We deaf people must be the protagonists and the first people re-

sponsible for our own promotion. We must accept that one can do nothing alone; it is absurd and contradictory to speak about our promotion when one does not begin with the recognition of our dignity and our right to organise and direct the matters that relate to us.

A few years ago an advertising billboard was produced in which two sets of hands were depicted: one belonged to a person with hearing and opened up from above whereas that of the deaf person seemed to come from below. I believe that it would be difficult to find a graphic design which more indicated the way in which the promotion of the interests of non-hearing people should not be promoted. It is certainly the case that we deaf people need other people, in addition to associations and pastoral workers who are ready to strengthen our collective and promotional action, but the first thing that they must do is to enter into the questions and issues of a deaf person. To enter into means to understand, to participate, to accept the inspirations and the actions that we deaf people engage in, or want to engage in, and join them. The promotion of the interests of non-hearing people should not be done beginning from the top, without changing anything, without improving the situation, but, instead, it should be done beginning from the bottom by joining us and our action.

The promotion of the interests of deaf people requires time and dedication, but the fundamental thing is *to want to engage in such promotion*. When one discovers the capacities and the limitations of oneself and of other people, one acquires confidence. We must be protagonists and not passive spectators as regards life.

To make this integral and collective promotion of the interests of non-hearing people possible, we need people who are prepared to struggle constantly and to make all the sacrifices that this promotional action requires, and this is possible only with *faith*. Whoever decides to engage in this promotional action will encounter many difficulties and few rewards. It follows from this that to go forward our energy must be much more powerful

than the obstacles that we find in front of us. And this energy can only be God and the experience of His love which leads us to struggle permanently without becoming discouraged. The experience of shared suffering, of exclusion and of struggle, to fight with hope. Suffering makes us more humble; it is a source of the wisdom of God. It is an opportunity to understand further, and in a better way, our brother who suffers in order to draw near to him, to develop a greater sensitivity when faced with the suffering of other people, in order to enter into communion with all our brothers and sisters in the world who suffer because of forms of injustice.

What is necessary, therefore, is a preliminary and radical promotion, a spiritual promotion. We Christians will not amount to much if we do not know to do – thanks to our faith – much more than other people who have ideas that cannot be compared to the Christian message as regards its potentialities for heroism and love for those who suffer. Christianity can develop a spiritual and religious promotion at the service of the whole of mankind. And thus, starting from this spiritual and religious promotion, God is making emerge in many places the action of deaf people so that our integral promotion will be effective and at the same time will be a magnificent instrument of evangelisation not only for us but also for the whole of the Church, of which we are active members with the same rights and duties as our brethren.

I will end this modest contribution by transmitting a message of courage and of hope to all non-hearing people, especially to young non-hearing people, telling them that they can obtain what they want in their lives if only they propose it. However, it is necessary to want and to fight for this, and to do this with other people, because alone we will not succeed.

Rev. JAIME GUTIÉRREZ  
VILLANUEVA

a deaf priest,  
the Parish of St. Mary of Silence,  
Madrid, Spain.



SANDER BLONDEEL

### 3.5 An artist

Sander Blondeel is a stained glass artist, born deaf to a family of people with hearing, from Ghent (Belgium). He grew up in a world of silence and beauty. A native of Ghent, Belgium, he was born the moment the International World Exposition of 1958 in Brussels opened. The son of a stained glass artist, Sander Blondeel started helping out in his father's atelier when he was four and completed his first piece of stained glass at the age of eight. Born deaf into a hearing family, he has three brothers. Two of his brothers are hearing and one is deaf and has serious mental problems.

At the Catholic school for the Deaf of the Brothers of Charity, the brothers taught him all that a healthy boy of his age and intelligence needed to know, including mathematics and reading. He learned lip-reading and speech, and acquired considerable lan-

guage skills. He assimilated there quite well and gained a sense of independence. At the school and his father's atelier, Sander Blondeel met and had contacts with many of the Catholic brothers and priests, because these persons were clients of his father, his teachers and also his scout leaders.

Later Sander Blondeel attended hearing schools in his native Belgium and earned two master's degrees from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent (one in painting and one in the restoration of art objects). He followed that up with two and one-half years of independent study in the US at the Rochester Institute of Technology Institute of Technology and Galaudet University, and now maintains his studio in Ghent.

Most of Sander Blondeel's commissioned works are done in the traditional style; these adorn churches, public buildings and pri-

vate houses on three continents. The subject of each window is different, with input from the client, of course. The decoration of a church building in former days would be used to teach the illiterate the stories from the Bible and lives of the saints. Thus Sander Blondeel was asked to design five windows for the St. Francis of Assisi Deaf Catholic Church, in Landover Hills, MD. in the United States. The subjects of these windows, using sign language, are in attitudes which represent faith and love. Also in Flanders, Sander Blondeel created figurative (non-classical style) windows, the one more contemporary than the other.

Mr. SANDER BLONDEEL  
*Stained-glass window artist,  
 born deaf to a family of people  
 with hearing,  
 Ghent, Belgium*



JENNIFER NG PAIK YENG

## 3.6 The Challenges of Deaf Catholics in the Life of the Church

I serve in a deaf ministry with the name REACH, a parish group in the Church of St. Francis Xavier, the only parish to engage in a deaf ministry out of thirty-three parishes in the Archdiocese of KL. There could be above 700 deaf Catholics out a population of 131,000 Catholics. We serve only about twenty deaf people.

Set up as a parish group, we have had many setbacks. Activities can be done within the parish only. People remain ignorant about the deaf ministry and pastoral care for the deaf. Other deaf people are not aware of the existence of the deaf ministry. There is no emphasis on the deaf ministry by the Church nor is pastoral support given. The ministry cannot grow/develop. The deaf remain un-empowered, marginalised, ignored by the Church.

Emphasis on BEC does not help minorities like the deaf because of its special needs. There would be no holistic pastoral care for the deaf in BECs. The segregation of the deaf into BEC drains resources.

Special gifted people serving the deaf are hard to come by. Yet the Church fails to draw their talents

for greater development of deaf Catholics and the Church.

The clergy is not exposed to the needs of deaf people. Many are uncomfortable or unable to minister to the deaf. The result is ignorance and insensitivity towards the deaf and their special needs. There is not much liturgical support for the deaf, especially when it is the only time when deaf people are present at the Eucharist. Often the deaf and an interpreter are seen as a distraction to the congregation at Mass or any session. Signing priests are sent far away from the deaf community; the priority is to serve the larger community. Education in pastoral care should be implemented in the seminary.

Lack of awareness about deaf people and their needs affects the recruitment of interpreters. With only a handful of interpreters, they are heavily depended on by deaf people. Having no support from the Church for formation and development or upgrading of interpreting skills causes interpreters to be weary of being depended on for other roles. Interpreters prefer to only perform the role of the interpreter and nothing more. Having

this perspective, they stay away from deaf people.

Staying away from the deaf causes interpreters' skills to flag or stagnate. They also lack exposure and understanding in relation to deaf culture and language, and to the development of the deaf. They thus serve only at their convenience and the needs of deaf people are not given priority. The formation and development of deaf people is being compromised because interpreters are not available. This rift has caused reluctance among the deaf to correct or criticise interpreters because they are afraid they will have no interpreting service at all.

Deaf ministries should be set up under the diocese/archdiocese, coupled with the appointment of a full-time pastoral worker who would make a greater contribution towards holistic pastoral care for deaf people as well as for those near to deaf people – the clergy, caregivers, interpreters and family members.

Miss JENNIFER NG PAIK YENG

*Catechist, born with hearing  
but became deaf  
Pealing Jaya, Malaysia.*



# Third Session

## The Family and Deaf People

MAURA BUCKLEY

### 1. The Family and Deaf People

#### Initial Remarks

It is a great honour to be here. Thank you for inviting me. I must admit that when I was first asked to talk to you today about 'The Family and Deaf People, I was intimidated by the idea. I wondered what made me qualified to speak to you today. I made a list in my head of my qualifications to convince myself. I hope it convinces you.

I suppose I know quite a bit about deaf people. After all, I have been a deaf person for all my life. On my long journey through life, I have experienced firsthand how the deaf person exists within the family. I have been the deaf child of hearing parents and, for over forty years, I have been a deaf mother. As a child, I attended a school for the deaf and, later, went on to third level at a Catholic University in USA where I got a degree in sociology and education.

After living in the USA for several years, I returned to Dublin in Ireland to marry Hugh, a deaf man, and to raise our family. We had three hearing children.

In Dublin, I trained further as a teacher of the deaf at University College Dublin and, later, I studied at Mater Dei theological college. I have spent over thirty years as a teacher of deaf girls at St. Mary's School. I finished my career there as Vice Principal. Now retired, I fill some of my time as a board member of the Catholic In-

stitute for Deaf People and I am very involved as a volunteer with the Deaf Blind community in Dublin.

Today, I would like to share my experiences as a deaf child, as a deaf parent and, more recently, as a deaf grandparent. I hope they give you an insight into how the Irish deaf family fits into the deaf community, the wider community and within the Church.

I would also like to describe the experiences of others to give you a clearer picture of the deaf family in Ireland. Some experiences may be familiar to you. Some may be uniquely Irish. I hope you find them useful.

#### The Deaf Child

As I mentioned, both of my parents were hearing. My mother and father had no previous exposure to deaf people and were intimidated by the challenge that I – their first child – presented. However, they were motivated to get what was best for me – and that meant being able to communicate with me. My mother was a school teacher and knew education was crucial to my success. She researched the education options available to me and discovered the oral method for educating deaf children.

The oral method was a popular philosophy at the time and my parents were convinced that this was the correct approach for me. Of

course, not all children did well with the oral method. Without sign language, their expressive and receptive language skills suffered. However, I was lucky. I adapted well to an oral education. My comprehension and language skills grew. Communication with my parents improved and I was able to understand the stories and information that they shared with me. Books had an important place in our home. My parents often bought religious books as a way to explain ideas to me. I could finally grasp the concept of God and the stories behind Christmas and Easter and other Bible stories.

As you can see the role of the parent is crucial. We, teachers, refer to them as the primary educators. It is the parents who determine how their child will develop. Their choice of school and method of education shape the education of the deaf child. And it is the parents who are the first people to pass on values and faith to their children.

The choices my parents made for me leave me in no doubt as to their values and their faith. And while times may have changed the objective remains the same: to achieve what is best for the child.

The choice available in Ireland today is between sending the deaf child to a specialist school for the deaf or 'mainstreaming', where the deaf child is integrated into the hearing classroom.

The failing numbers in schools



for the deaf make obvious which option the parents are choosing. They are choosing to integrate their children in increasing numbers and this is putting the futures of specialist schools for the deaf in doubt.

This policy is motivated by a desire to improve communication

adapted in a way that the child can understand. This complete approach ensures that the child gets the full 'classroom experience' with interaction between the child and the teacher as well as with other children.

The language issue is crucial here. For many deaf children,



between parent and child and by the desire to keep the deaf child within the family. Attending a specialist school often means sending the child out of the local area, perhaps even to boarding school. The advantages of sending the child to the same local school as its brothers and sisters are obvious.

However, the disadvantages are sometimes subtle. In a 'mainstream' school, the child may not have full access to the teacher. Special needs assistants (SNAs) or resource teachers act as intermediaries and may not have a specific training in handling deaf children. Without sign language, the child's ability to communicate can be limited. And while the child may perform well academically, outside the classroom things may not go quite as well. The child can often be isolated or lonely and, as a result, the development of social skills may suffer.

Within a school for the deaf, small class-sizes mean specialist teachers can give the child higher levels of attention. In smaller classes, the deaf child is encouraged to ask questions and to take part in discussions. Using sign language, the curriculum can be

English is their second language. Often, the language from the curriculum is beyond the child's current level of understanding. Some kind of translation is needed. For the deaf child, sign language – in our case, Irish Sign Language (ISL) – truly opens up the child's mind. The child spends less time struggling with language and more time grasping the concepts, the ideas and the message.

It is important to stress that both options have their strengths. Children have done very well in both systems. It seems to me that the key difference between the two options revolves around the access to language.

When I was at school, the options were much more limited. An oral education was imposed on all children, no matter what their abilities. Nowadays, the philosophy has changed and the approach focuses on the individual child. This is a change for the better.

Of course, Ireland is a much different place from when I was a child. It is changing fast and shifting from a predominantly Catholic country to embrace a variety of religious and secular perspectives. Most public schools are Catholic

schools yet they are seeing increased numbers of non-Catholic students. Within the classroom, this means children are often taught with children of other religions and cultures.

In this multi-faith environment, teachers deal with religious education differently. Parents are viewed as the primary source of religious instruction. In the case of parents of deaf children, this presents problems if they are unable to communicate effectively with the child.

This leaves religious education in a 'no man's land'. On the one hand, the parents may have limited ability to communicate their values and faith to their children. And, on the other, teachers are spending less and less time on religious education.

In deaf schools, we have chaplains for the deaf who visit the school on a regular basis. They perform signed masses and involved the children in discussion. Children are encouraged to participate more fully in masses and prayer services and religious festivals. They may not get the same opportunity in hearing schools.

### The Deaf Community

It was the children of the schools for the deaf who created the social networks that we refer to as the Deaf Community. In other words, the 'deaf community' began in the deaf schools.

Deaf people continue to meet after they finish school. They want to maintain the sense of belonging, the support structures and communication developed while at school. The deaf community offers lifelong friendships between people who share the same identity, culture and language.

The deaf community is different because it does not have a geographical nucleus. Deaf people are scattered throughout the hearing community. We do not work in large groups where we can use sign language. In fact, we spend most of our time in the hearing world, working with hearing colleagues. We do spend most of our social time in the company of other deaf and signing friends.

We also come together for birthday parties, anniversaries and funerals. It is a feature of the deaf community that funerals have unusually large turnouts.

Sport is also a major attraction for deaf people. The Irish Deaf Sport Association (IDSA) has a number of major sporting events during the year and it is not unusual for deaf people to travel long distances to attend them. However there are no dedicated sport facilities for the deaf in Ireland.

Because of this, and because of a compulsory purchase order on the site of the current Centre for the Deaf in Dublin, the Catholic Institute for Deaf People (CIDP), of which I am a Board member, has been motivated to create a new Deaf Community Village in Dublin.

### **The Deaf Community Village Project**

The objective of the Village Project is to create an environment where deaf people can relax, play, learn and worship. It will support the interaction of deaf people as a community and with wider Irish society.

The Village Project will provide educational and residential facilities for the elderly and for deaf-blind adults and children. It will also provide community, sports and social amenities – all in one location.

Representative and service organisations will have offices there. By delivering integrated resources, the Village Project is essentially about community development and the consolidation of services.

It will provide a place for the deaf community that encourages development, pride and mutual support. It will be a facility where ISL is the first language but in a bilingual context with written and oral English. At its core will be a chapel and the National Chaplaincy for the Deaf.

Of course, the Deaf Village will be open to the local community who will benefit from the facilities too. The plan is to employ hearing and deaf people and to operate within the local community in an

integrated and sustainable manner. *This will be no Deaf Ghetto!*

The Village Project reduces concerns that the deaf community may be smaller in the future as a consequence of 'mainstreaming' deaf children. Offering exciting facilities and an active community will encourage participation.

The deaf community in Ireland is thriving. There are lots of people doing great work in all parts of the community. It is a community that is tightly knit by the many friendship networks formed by its members. With this kind of social structure, it is obvious that many deaf people then go on to marry other deaf people. That is how I met my husband.

For the past thirty years, deaf people about to get married have participated in a popular Pre-Marriage Course. The course is organised by the Chaplains for the Deaf and is conducted in sign language. It takes place once a year in Dublin and deaf couples travel from all over the country to attend. The aim of the course is to prepare the deaf couple for married life and for raising their family within the Church.



### **The Deaf Parent**

For all parents, bringing up children is a complicated and tiring business! But it is also a task that brings with it tremendous pleasure, joy and sheer fun! As a mother, I was one of the few who did not know what I was letting myself in for when I had children. Of course, I was terrified and had to

read stacks of books about what I should do. No matter what the books told me, I found that, at the end of the day, I tended to follow my own instincts.

Twenty years ago, I was asked to address another conference – coincidentally, also here in Rome. I spoke there about the early stages of motherhood. At that time, I was still in the thick of it. Two of my boys had recently become teenagers!

At that conference, I spoke of the wonderful support from my husband, Hugh. Together, we found rearing children to be relatively straightforward. The fact that we were both deaf did not seem to make being a parent any more difficult. If anything, it was an exciting time to be a deaf parent. There were lots of new and fantastic gadgets for deaf parents that we found very helpful. Technology that was brand new back then is, of course, widespread now.

One thing we both noticed was that our problems and concerns were very similar to those of our hearing neighbours.

We tried to include God in our everyday lives and did this by introducing our faith in the very early lives of our children with daily prayers and also providing the children with a loving and happy environment.

When I read my talk from that conference twenty years ago, it reminded me that my boys had a very happy childhood. Of course, they were sometimes subject to bad moods but we, as parents, were happy to encourage, guide and reassure them as we went along. We had good times and bad times and we experienced them together as a family. The children experienced their own special days for their First Holy Communion and Confirmation. They also experienced their own sad days on the death of their grandparents and we spoke together of how their loved ones had gone to God.

As our own children developed into teenagers, the way we 'handled' them had to develop too. We tried to be open with our teenage sons. We tried to take them as they were and also tried to take their worries, anxieties, fears and ideas



seriously. We tried to enjoy their company, listen to what they said and praise their efforts. We reassured them – even after their bad patches – that they were still loved. We reminded ourselves that, at the end of the day, they are really only ‘on loan’ and when they have flown the nest, we would miss them greatly. We tried to encourage our sons to bring their friends home, even though it was hard on tea, coffee and biscuits. This way, we knew where they were and with whom they were friendly. I feel in my heart that we, as parents, did our best to lay foundations in them in order to build up their own faith.



Passing on our faith to teenagers and young people is even more difficult these days. Parents face major concerns such as alcohol and drugs. They also talk about more minor concerns such as the amount of time spent on the Internet, the kind of music teenagers listen to and the time spent on nights out.

Deaf parents complain, as I suspect hearing parents do, that their teenager's faces are always glued to an electronic box of some kind. With laptops, iPods and widescreen televisions absorbing all of their leisure time, they seem to forget about the outside world.

For deaf parents, there is the extra concern that they do not know – or understand – the music that their children are listening to.

One of my own sons went through a short phase of listening

to heavy metal music. When I saw some of the music posters he hung in his bedroom, I became worried. He laughed at my concerns that he was involved in a cult of some kind. Of course, my worries were groundless. Within a few weeks, he had a new favourite band and a new favourite kind of music. I learned quickly that if I had tried to ban the music that I did not approve of, he would have liked it for longer! That is what teenagers do!

My experiences are from some years ago. Ireland has changed much over those twenty years. When I was a young mother, the Church had great social and political power. Recent scandals have damaged the Church's reputation. And there have been far too many of them.

In 2009, the Irish Government's report into abuse in religious schools and institutions was released. It was not pleasant reading. The scale and the severity of the abuse have horrified the country. Another government report into clerical sex abuse in the Dublin Diocese is about to be published. It is expected to be equally horrifying and has serious implications for the Church. Because of these revelations, many Irish people have turned away from the Church.

In this context, I asked a number of younger deaf parents about their experiences bringing up young children in Ireland today. Some things never change... but some problems are new.

Teenagers are embarrassed by their parents. That is no big surprise! They do not want to go anywhere with their parents. They certainly do not want to go to Mass with their parents. In fact, many parents reported that their teenagers have negative views about religion. Yet, they also report that their young people are involved in volunteer work within the community.

Deaf parents wishing to pass on their faith face certain difficulties. Many feel that the religious education they received in Ireland was weak. They often feel unable to share their faith with their own children. A lot of them blame oral education. They feel it left them

with a poor understanding of the subject.

I recently heard a story about a baptism. A deaf couple were having their child baptised and were asked, “Why do you want to baptise your child?”. They replied, “Because this is what we are supposed to do. Everyone else is doing it.” When asked if they understood the meaning of baptism, their faces went blank. They had absolutely no idea! They were thrilled to have the rituals explained to them by the chaplain in sign language. At last, both parents understood that their baby was becoming a member of the Church.

This story demonstrates a lack of understanding that is all too common among deaf parents. It also shows that there is an opportunity to provide adult education classes in religious education. Perhaps this could constitute part of the pastoral work within our new Deaf Village Project.

It is the intention that the Deaf Church will be at centre of the community village. It is a well known fact that deaf people prefer to go to Deaf Church. It is the Deaf Church that addresses the needs of deaf people. Within the Deaf Church, deaf people have direct contact with the signing priest. There is no need for an interpreter distracting the eye from the priest and from the altar.

Using ISL to adapt the liturgy has improved comprehension of the liturgy itself. Also, there is increased participation by the deaf themselves. Participating as Eucharistic ministers, readers or in the deaf choir, we are involved in every aspect of the Mass.

Of course, it is not possible for all deaf families to attend Deaf Church because deaf churches are not everywhere. Therefore some families have to go to their local, hearing churches. This is not always a satisfactory and inclusive experience.

Deaf people often feel excluded when they attend a hearing church. We do not have access to the priest. And while many churches may provide a mass leaflet, the deaf person is unable to follow the homily and any announcements made during the ser-



vice. This effectively denies them access to the community aspects of the living church.

I have a recent personal story which highlights this all too well. I met a neighbour and enquired after her husband. I was upset to hear that he had died three weeks before. I was also hugely embarrassed. When I mentioned it to another neighbour, she said, "But it was announced at church. You were there!" Then it dawned on her. She forgot I had no access to the announcements. Maybe the announcements should be printed!

The deaf families I spoke to say they have limited contact with local community churches. Because they have no access, they feel excluded and therefore do not bother. Sometimes involvement with the local churches is unavoidable. In those cases, the experience is not always satisfactory.

Recently, the deaf parents of a hearing child approached their local church. Their daughter was about to make her First Holy Communion with her classmates in the local church. They asked for an interpreter, which they could not afford. They were told that it

care', which is the Social Care Agency of the Dublin Diocese, aims to contribute to the building of an inclusive society. It has done some great work in installing a loop system for hard of hearing in to many of the churches in Dublin. However, this does not help the profoundly deaf. Without improved accessibility to their local churches, deaf parents miss out on this important local support to their parenting.

Parenting is not always easy. I must admit that I have failed in some areas, like not giving my sons a chance to talk when I insist on giving my own views! When I spoke to younger parents, I was pleased to reassure them that most of their concerns are common. I know it will all turn out okay in the end!

My husband and I watched my children grow up with satisfaction. We watched as they finished school and went off to college. We were so proud as they graduated and began their first jobs. And we were sad when they moved away from home.

We, as deaf parents, have been very much involved in their lives

The wedding Masses were fully signed with Mum signing a reading at the church and Dad signing a speech at the meal. Hearing guests were very impressed by the sign language and realised that sign language really helps deaf people be included. Many said how it also made the experience more meaningful for them too.

As I continue my journey through life, the happy times inevitably mix with the sad. I suppose it is natural that I have experienced loss more frequently as time goes by. My parents have died, one of my brothers has died and sadly, three years ago, my youngest son died.

Ciarán was thirty-one when cancer took him away. He had been married for only one year when the diagnosis came. It was a shock. Even worse, the doctors informed him that his disease was terminal and that he had one year to live. Exactly twelve months later, he was gone.

Ciarán faced his journey with courage – but, at times, he was uncertain. He and his wife reacted to the cold, clinical diagnosis by reaching out to their families and to the Church.

My son was a social worker and his thoughts, even at this difficult time, were for other people. He was anxious about his parents and asked us to help him on his difficult journey. It was very important to Ciarán that his family were there to support him.

When Ciarán was told his chemotherapy did not work, he visited his priest and got great comfort from their conversations. He asked the priest whom he should pray to and laughed at the advice that he should "go straight to the top"!

Ciarán worked with deaf-blind adults in Bristol, England. Through his work, he met Fr. Cyril Axelrod who travelled to Bristol when he heard of Ciarán's illness. That meant a lot to us. Both Ciarán and his wife spoke of the calming influence that visit had on them.

Towards the end of his illness, Ciarán and his wife moved home to Ireland. During this stage, the Chaplains for the Deaf continued this wonderful support.

When Ciarán died, I felt numb. I



was not the church's responsibility to finance the interpreter. This left them frustrated and upset. It also reinforced their sense of exclusion from their local church. Who is responsible for this access?

In some areas, the Church in Ireland has made great efforts to improve accessibility. 'Cross-

since. All of my sons are fluent signers and so are their partners.

Two of our sons have been married. In both cases, the Chaplain for the Deaf travelled far to officiate at the wedding. Our sons made sure to provide access for their parents. We certainly felt we were at the centre of the ceremony.

was angry. I found it difficult to pray. I was grateful for the support of the deaf community who came in huge numbers to be with us. Ciarán's wife was shocked at how many deaf people came to the funeral. I explained, "That's the deaf way!"

The service was held in our local, hearing church but our parish priest welcomed Ciarán's priest from England and the chaplains for the deaf. There were several sign language interpreters for the mixed deaf-hearing crowd. The deaf people could follow everything while the hearing people were very moved by the experience.

I would like to think we succeeded as parents in sharing our values with our son. I take great comfort in knowing that he was a respected and loved person. After his death, his special qualities were recognised when a new residential centre for the deaf in Bristol was named after him.

The pain I feel from losing Ciarán has not lessened much but I do feel calmer. The continuous support from the Deaf Community and from the Chaplaincy for the Deaf made things easier. On the other hand, we have not received much attention from our local church since. Perhaps they feel they lack the skills to minister to us. Or perhaps, having witnessed the Chaplaincy for the Deaf in action, they feel we are in good hands.

### Deaf Grandparents

Of course, life goes on. I have had many happy moments – especially those spent with our three beautiful grandchildren. From a young age, they recognised that Grandma and Grandpa are different. They each have their own way of interacting with us and have already begun to learn sign language. They live in a hearing fam-

ily. But the interaction with the deaf is there. One of my grandchildren was baptised while Ciarán was ill. The chaplain for the deaf performed the rite in my home and through sign language.

My grandchildren give me great joy and, like most grandparents, I probably spend far too much talking about them. Often in the Centre for the Deaf, the grandparents sit around sharing photographs and boasting about our grandchildren's sign language skills.

I am excited for the time when their communication with me improves and I can share my stories, my values and my faith with them.

Mrs MAURA BUCKLEY B.A.  
H.DIP. (DEAF ED.)

*A deaf mother of a family,  
emeritus deputy headmaster  
of the St. Mary School for the Deaf,  
sociologist, teacher of deaf people  
and catechist,  
Dublin, Ireland*



## 2. Round Table

# The Family and Deaf People: the Experiences of Couples

FRANCO ALBIERO, RITA STESI

### 2.1 The Experience of the Albiero Family

My name is Franco Albiero and I am here with my wife Tesi Rita who like me is deaf, and with my son, Matteo, aged eleven, who can hear and who is present here with us to bear witness as a Christian family which has to deal with the difficulties that come from handicap at the level of hearing. We live in Valdagno, a small town in the province of Vicenza.

We took our first steps forward in the faith, we learnt our first prayers thanks to our parents who like us are deaf people but who are profoundly religious. Then we received the most complete of religious educations thanks to our teachers and then, after schooling, thanks to the priests that we met who enabled us to have experiences that strengthened us increasingly in our faith.

Unfortunately we have to leave our homes every time that we must, or we want to, take part in activities connected with the faith: the catechesis and pastoral care for deaf people and activities that are engaged in and organised specifically for we deaf people and which are offered in sign language, the language that enables us to participate to the full.

We in our local area, for example, have an opportunity to take part in the activities of the Teacher Sisters of St. Dorothy of Vicenza, activities which are organised by them for us every month.

The participation of our son

Matteo in the activities of the parish together with children with hearing has enabled us to help our son in the faith through our behaviour as parents together with the good examples which I and my wife Rita try to give by this route more than through words. Despite our disability, we can say that even though with great difficulty and hardship we have been able to help him to grow in faith. Certainly we cannot conceal the fact that it is the words of hearing people around him and those of the group that have more influence than ours.

We know that it is God with His love who sustains our lives and our Faith. For us, He is like oxygen that gives us the strength to overcome the obstacles of life. Our faith in God needs to be nourished and this is something that as a family we can do principally through participation in Holy Mass every Sunday. During the Mass the priest explains the words of God and encourages us to be Christians. But for us, who are deaf and who do not have people who are able to use sign language, the Mass on Sunday loses value and participation. We strive to do our best to make up for this but this is something that is not always easy.

However we are rather fortunate and we thank the Lord that we have Matteo, our hearing son whom we brought up in the Catholic faith since an early age, dedicating to him a great deal of

our time. In addition to helping us in the practical things of life thanks to the fact that he can speak and hear, he also acts as an interpreter for us when we find ourselves in situations where there are no priests or catechists to celebrate Mass and to preach in sign language. Unfortunately, at times having Matteo interpret for us what is taking place in church or what the priest is saying is seen as a distraction and an irritation by the intolerant people in the pews near to us.

As a couple we would like to deepen our faith by taking part in the preparation and refresher courses that are organised by our parishes and dioceses. But how can we take part in them if we do not have someone who can interpret for us?

This situation of ours and this expression of dismay of ours is common to the very large number of couples made up of deaf people that we know. By now there are very many of us who are leaving the Catholic Church because in the other religious sects (principally Jehovah's Witnesses) they always find trained interpreters and joyous religious meetings. They feel more welcome and appreciated. These departures, unfortunately, are now almost at a mass level.

Unfortunately, we deaf people have the impression that we are somewhat neglected. Our problem is not seen. We are still a part of the



Christian community but often we seem to understand that priests and the community are not aware of us and our difficulties in belonging to it. Certainly, the problems of blind, lame or paralysed people is perceived more easily than our deafness and receive greater attention.

This situation has made fragile many married couples who do not know where they should go to talk about their family problems and in the end one should not be surprised if they separate and their marriage hits the rocks.

During one of our personal moments when we read the Gospel we read the 'parable of the nets thrown into the sea' (Mt 13:47-53) and we came to make certain observations. This parable seeks to demonstrate the triumph of the love of a God who always requires the participation of men. The Father is the great fisherman. The nets, that is to say the Kingdom, are large and they are thrown out in order to gather every kind of person, without any distinction. The Father does not want to leave anyone at the mercy of the waves of evil and wickedness. Jesus suggests to his disciples that they broaden their hearts as much as possible in order to gather as many people as possible despite their limitations and their disabilities. To carry out this extraordinary gesture of mercy one has to have a large and generous heart.

The Church can still do a great deal for us, as it has done in past centuries in so many convent schools organised by priests and sisters, in which we, as well, were educated. Now that there are more special schools to educate deaf people and state schools no longer give the religious education that they once did, what is required is a commitment suited to the times.

But it is important to know that we deaf people as well, if we are given the opportunity, can give a great deal to deaf people in the name of then Church. We, too, can be evangelisers. Sign language is a language that enables us to reach deaf people in a way parallel to what happens with a spoken language. Our God of the Pentecost, amongst the many languages, certainly also knew sign language.

To give help, encouragement

and a little support to young deaf people and to we married couples of deaf people in particular, we ask that parishes and dioceses think seriously about how to help couples like us as well, couples of deaf people, by drawing up programmes and creating appropriate initiatives. There are many of us. In Italy there are many of us, even though we are invisible. We would like not to be treated as...the children of a lesser God.

In particular, I am thinking of how we deaf people as well, like hearing young people, enter into contact with the great reality of the

plete their studies of this language. If they are educated during their time in seminaries, subsequently we will not experience the embarrassing experience of priests who do not allow sign language to be used in church.

2. Every diocese should have at least one priest who attends to deaf people, even though not full time. He should learn sign language well and be ready to prepare young couples of deaf people for marriage and for when we celebrate the sacraments and especially for the sacrament of reconciliation. (It is always difficult to find someone



world and with each other. We spend a great deal of time in front of the computer in order to have contact, to communicate, to exchange news and to gain information.

For this reason, I believe that the Church as well, at a diocesan and parish level, must reach us through the huge network of information and communications technology.

As regards important and effective work for the lives of deaf people within the Church, we have a number of proposals to make:

1. My proposal is to train young seminarians in seminaries in the problems connected with the world of deaf people through special courses. To them it would be necessary to give short courses in sign language and to encourage those that display a wish to com-

who can listen to and understand our confession). We know that there are religious Congregations involved in pastoral care for deaf people who offer specific training courses for seminarians and priests.

3. At least one church in major cities should be identified where a priest who knows sign language celebrates Holy Mass at a specific time.

4. There should be short courses of theology, liturgy and on the Bible for deaf people who are interested in such courses at a diocesan level.

5. There should be a Catholic website that deals with the topical subjects of our faith. In this website it should also be possible to follow a Holy Mass and the homily and, when this occurs, to have a

better understanding of the questions of those referendums that are related to subjects connected with morality.

6. It would also be important to think about deaf people who do not now sign language, of those who become deaf, or about adult people who become afflicted by deafness. For them it would be important to have screens where there are the answers required during Holy Mass and subtitles for the sermons.

7. We would like special attention to be paid to deaf people in the planning of parish pastoral care. We believe that it is advisable to have the presence of one of us to

explain and assess any initiatives for the benefit of the world of deaf people.

8. Dioceses should have a register for interpreters who are certified to work in a church. It is not possible for a person who is not a Catholic, who does not know the rite and the meaning of Holy Mass, and who does not know the history of the Bible, to interpret for us into sign language in an exact way what takes place in church or what is preached.

When Jesus said to his Apostles that they should go out into the world, preach the Gospel to all

men and baptise them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, he who had healed the deaf and dumb man in a totally special way, he certainly said the same thing for all of us, the deaf people spread throughout the world. We believe that the task of our priests and our bishops, as St. Paul said, is to work to win everyone to Christ, and thus to us as well should be preached the gospel of Jesus, who made the deaf hear and the dumb speak.

Mr. FRANCO ALBIERO,  
Mrs. RITA STESI,  
*Italy*

LUCA LAMANO, CHIARA SIRONI

## 2.2 The Experience of the Lamano Family

Good morning. I would like to introduce myself. My name is Luca, I am twenty-seven years old and I am a deaf person, the son of deaf parents. I have been married for three years to Chiara who is a hearing person from a hearing family, and we have two children: Rachele, aged two, and Samuele, aged one, and a third child is on the way. Our children are hearing children.

I met Chiara at a sign language course. She was taking a degree in logopaedia and wanted to specialise in the education of deaf children and I was her teacher of Italian sign language (LIS).

I am truly happy that this conference which deals with the problem of the reality of deaf people in the Church has been organised because I hope that this will be an instrument that will make evident the difficulties that we deaf people have in feeling a part of this body and as a consequence in having an encounter with the Father.

I received a Catholic upbringing from my family to the extent that this was possible for my parents:

every Sunday my father took me to Holy Mass and even though I did not understand anything he taught me the importance of being there and receiving the Eucharist.

We read the handout with the Sunday readings but we missed the whole of the meaning of the liturgy and above of all the homily.

The fact that I did not understand anything generated in me a rejection to which I gave full expression during my adolescence, attracted as I was by having a good time and making new friends, a rejection that became a refusal of the Church and everything connected with it.

And then I met my wife...she comes from a Christian family that is very close to the Church. The whole of her family, her parents and her four siblings, followed an itinerary of Christian formation involving the rediscovery of baptism during their neo-catechumenal journey.

During the period of our engagement she insisted that I drew closer to the Church but my rejection of it had by now become

anger and this anger hindered me from listening. Often Chiara asked me to try to go to the initial catecheses of this itinerary but I refused until the evening when Chiara asked me how we were going to bring up our children if she was close to the Church and I was distant to it.

This sentence of hers reanimated in me that seed of faith that had been sown within me. Now Chiara and I are walking together along this itinerary; my wife and I today are one body, she is my hearing and my voice and in our community my brethren in the faith are steadily learning to communicate with me: with a great deal of difficulty but also with a great deal of patience and charity. Every day we feel that the Spirit gives the gift of languages...

This Christian journey has become essential in my life and my married and family life. Chiara and I come from two different cultures, from mentalities and upbringings that are different. In itself social life between a deaf person and a hearing person is already

difficult, but it is not impossible. However, it is a constant clash. Keeping a marriage solid is a fight every day against all those temptations that the Devil offers to destroy what is holy in Christian marriage. The Devil always tempts us about the impossibility of this marriage, the difficulties of my wife in being a support where I cannot go, about our children and the difficulties that we experience every day in bringing them up.

The Church is doing a great deal to help us to be open to life and to accept the children that God decided to give us, fighting against the temptations of economic precariousness, of weakness, and of physical tiredness.

The Church is educating us in the faith, entrusting us to God, and in the transmission of the faith to our children, a task that is very difficult for us and which on our own

we would never be able to perform, and also in our Christian marriage which every day involves giving our lives to each other, amidst the fights, the humiliations and the frustrations.

Our children learn from little signs that life and what has been given to us comes from God; our child aged one sits on his high stool at table and looks at us. He puts his hands together to remind us to bless God the Father for the food; the oldest often and willingly pretends that he is at Mass and prays...jokes but they are a sign that the seed has been sown in them...

However all of this is always accompanied by the difficulties that I experience in being able to be a part of this Church...I rely on my wife and if for certain reasons she cannot be present with me at the Eucharist we run the risk, both of

us, of missing it. I cannot be a full participant in the pastoral activities of the parish because I always need the figure of Chiara, and hitherto I have not encountered pastoral realities for deaf people, for young deaf people and for families of deaf people in any of the parishes outside the old colleges and institutes for the deaf. In this I would exhort the Church...we are limbs of the same body; certainly we could never be the ears of this body because we are defective, but we could be the eyes, or the hands, and we would like to feel that we are truly a part of it; we would like to feel that we are flesh of the Church that comes to us and loves us as we are in our physical and spiritual weaknesses.

Mr. LUCA LAMANO,  
Mrs. CHIARA SIRONI,  
Italy

ALESSANDRO COMAZZETTO, MANOLA SCIMIONATO

## 2.3 The Experience of the Comazzetto Family

In our experience as parents, one of the very first rocky shallows that we encountered – something that probably happens with many other so-called ‘normal’ families – was that of having to harmonise the many requirements of family life with being Catholics.

Through the sacrament of marriage, in fact, we took on the commitment of bringing up our children *responsibly and with love and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church*, but what at the level of intentions should take the form of a priority ends up, instead, by giving way to other needs that are more compelling.

If, indeed, it is already very onerous for many families today to survive with the rhythms of modern life, you can but only faintly imagine what the problems and

questions are, of those like ourselves who have deaf children, which have to be faced up to in the space of a week, with the many other commitments connected with therapies of rehabilitation of a logopaedic kind or of a kind based on mind/movement problems, constant medical visits for tests or controls, infinite and exhausting bureaucratic procedures for the recognition of health-care services and rights which should instead be automatically guaranteed, at the same time managing to reconcile everything with the usual organisation of a family, running the home, and employment activity that is indispensable to their maintenance.

In this scenario, where one also loses track of passing time and resting becomes almost an optional, observance of commitment to

faith is truly difficult. To manage to follow Holy Mass on Sundays, for example, is already complicated for any family with young children. One can well imagine what it is like for families who have deaf children, to whom no kind of oral information arrives and who for this reason are especially difficult to keep amused given that they are not involved in what goes on around them. For parents such as ourselves it thus becomes very tiring to make them behave in a suitable way that does not disturb the sensitivity of those who are at prayer during the celebration, and sometimes it is even embarrassing when an irritated faithful looks askance at one of your children.

In addition, a strong emotional and psychological impact weighs upon the equilibriums of couples who have to face up to a complete-



ly unknown reality such as deafness: knowing about its various aspects, breaking down the prejudices that exist, and adapting to the new rules of communication and of education as regards one's own children.

Not being supported in any way, not even from a spiritual point of view, couples run the risk of 'exploding' under the pressure of the numerous responsibilities that are connected with the daily decisions that have to be made as regards their children: a hearing aid or a cochlear implant, bilingualism or oralism, educational and rehabilitation methods, etc. etc.

We have been lucky because we have kept our faith and our union in the face of this crisis which emerged not once but twice for both our deaf children and for various reasons. But near to us many other families have, sadly, broken down.

And yet we, as well, have to address the consequences of an important decision – that of having introduced into the education of our children Italian sign language. This decision, indeed, on the one hand has loaded us with another commitment, that of attending a specific course to learn Italian sign language; on the other, it has directed us – as regards compulsory school – towards a specialised institute which is very far away from our home and which has distanced us from our local environment, including our parish, forcing us to move constantly.

It is no accident that going to our parish has become increasingly difficult and it has not been possible to entrust ourselves to our parish priest to request spiritual support for our family in the sense that we have not asked for this, but at the same time it has not even been offered.

In addition, we have not been able to give our first child a basic Catholic upbringing in the sense that at that time the linguistic level that we achieved in the LIS courses were not sufficient to transmit very abstract contents and before our meeting with Padre Savino, last year, we did not have any knowledge of sign language. The situation with Aurora is very different. She is my third child and

she, too, is deaf, but I manage to communicate better with her thanks to the attainment of a higher linguistic competence in sign language on my part.

The Catholic upbringing of Raul, our first deaf child, was postponed, despite our wishes, for this reason until catechesis. Having reached this point, in fact, the reality that we have before us has not been one of the most encouraging given that in Rome there are few places with a specialisation in cat-

of their catechesis as a traumatic event when only a half of what was taught to them was comprehensible.

Fortunately, in this sense, the group of the class of my older daughter, Virginia, who is a hearing child but belongs to the same school as Raul (a group made up of various children, both hearing and deaf), had already begun, the previous year, a course of integrated catechism to prepare children for their first communion specifi-



echesis for deaf people and anyway the trips and the distances would further aggravate the overall burden of our family if we allowed Raul to attend the course. In addition, just as in our decision about schooling we preferred to place our child in a bilingual context (Italian/sign language) with a view to achieving integration between deaf and hearing children, at the same time we would have preferred not to have isolated Raul from Catholic teaching. We were worried about leaving our deaf child alone in an parish catechesis course attended only by hearing children given the accounts of certain deaf adult friends of ours who still today remember the moment

cally in the church next to the children's school (the parish of St. Joseph's in Via Nomentana). This course – which was created thanks to an initiative launched by a number of parents and the support of the parish priest – was made possible in concrete terms because of the involvement of a deaf sign language catechist who helped the hearing catechist.

It would be interesting at this international conference to be able to hear about the experience of this catechist herself as well, and of the parish priest concerned, both of whom had to be open to this innovation, in order to understand the difficulties that they encountered in launching this project. Unfortu-

nately, they have not been able to come. I can, however, relate the testimony of a mother, a dear friend of mine, who is also the mother of a deaf child – Federico – who as the promoter of this initiative told me about the distrust and the fears that she encountered when expounding her project and the forms of resistance that she had to overcome.

Whatever the case, the project began, albeit with some difficulties, but the result was so encouraging that when it was proposed for the class to which my child belongs both the catechist and the parish priest were enthusiastic about proceeding with this innovative experiment and wanted to involve other catechists.

In addition, as I work as a communication assistant at the same school, but at its secondary level, I also pointed out this initiative to the Catholic mother of an eleven-year-old deaf girl who had not even received the sacrament of baptism. This girl was placed in the first group, that to which my first daughter also belongs, and I personally accompanied her along this pathway at the side of the cat-

echist, Daniela, who never stops thanking me.

This year in the group of my son Raul we have placed, in addition to two deaf children of his class, also two foreign deaf children aged twelve and fourteen respectively. Like the girl referred to above, they have no instrument for communication except sign language.

These have clearly been victories but there is still a great deal of road ahead of us. Despite the good will of the catechists, there is no basic training about deafness that could give them those instruments that are suitable to addressing this pathway.

Fortunately we have brought with us into this adventure two communication assistants and two deaf educators as well, my work colleagues and dear friends. *They are indispensable as regards real and concerted integration and they are worthy of praise.*

In the light of what we are achieving, my concerns today relate to all those families who, with less spirit of initiative, have remained isolated, not knowing whether for their children opportu-

nities existed and I wonder how many adults today have been left by the wayside.

I beseech with all my heart the Church to remedy as soon as possible the important failing which for many years has existed as regards deaf people and their families by providing suitable training to pastors of souls, actively involving deaf people in the catechesis and in Catholic life, and supporting families on this difficult journey. The subject of deafness and the various methods of communication, including sign language, must be well known about for this support to be concrete. With a small amount of commitment this is possible for everyone because, to finish with the words of the famous English neurologist and writer Oliver Sachs, this is a journey which can make what was previously familiar, strange, and what was previously strange, familiar, to everyone.

Mr. ALESSANDRO  
COMAZZETTO,  
Mrs. MANOLA SCIMIONATO,  
Italy



JOSÉ GUILLERMO GUTIÉRREZ FERNÁNDEZ

### 3. The Family and Deaf People: Reflections and Proposals

#### Greeting and Introduction

I would like to begin by congratulating first and foremost the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers for offering me the opportunity to speak at this international conference which has placed at the centre of our attention the reality of people who have hearing difficulties. In particular I would like to express my strong gratitude for the invitation – as a member of the Pontifical Council for the Family – that was extended to me to take part in this important session where an analysis has been engaged in of families with deaf people.

For me personally and for our Pontifical Council this has been an opportunity to draw near to a reality which hitherto has not been sufficiently known about and appreciated. I believe that there is a still a great deal to be done in the sphere of family pastoral care for deaf people. You are those who have the experience: we wish to gather it up and disseminate it so as to be able to offer certain guidelines that are the outcome of joint work. I will now try to share with you some reflections and proposals on the basis of the testimonies that we have listened to.

#### The Challenge of Pastoral Care for Deaf People

According to the statistics that have been presented during the course of this meeting, the number of people who live with hearing difficulties reaches the figure of 278 million, 59 million of whom are afflicted by total deafness, and it is calculated that 1,300,000 deaf people are members of the Catholic Church. Considering

these facts alone makes us become aware of the need to address the pastoral challenge of integral care for these people.

However from the rapid examination that I have been able to carry out in relation to this subject, and the testimonies that we have listened to, one can deduce that *pastoral care for deaf people is still at its initial stage*. In our communities there is a great ignorance about the number of people who suffer from these difficulties as well as about their specific condition and needs. Amongst other reasons, as I have just observed, given that one is dealing with a dysfunction that is not evident at first sight, one becomes aware of it only when one lives in greater proximity to those who suffer from it. As a consequence, *usually there is not a sufficient number of structures and pastoral workers who can take care of these people in line with their specific needs*. I would venture to say that this international conference will foster a growing awareness on the part of the Church which, I very much hope, will be translated into effective actions for joint work which will overcome the temptation of paternalism.

In this sense I believe that one of the first challenges to be addressed lies in ensuring that *our communities are welcoming and open to all people*, and in concrete terms to those who have hearing difficulties.

#### The Challenge of the Pastoral Accompanying of the Families of Deaf People

Every person is born and develops within a family. The family plays a fundamental role in the de-

velopment of each of its members and as Mrs Buckley has pointed out the families of deaf people are very similar to the majority of families with hearing people. However, deafness introduces unique circumstances and special requirements that we must know about if we want to address them properly.

A broad *gamut of typologies of families with deaf members* exists. Hearing parents with one or more deaf children; deaf parents with hearing children; and families whose members are all deaf. Each of these circumstances requires pastoral care that has its own specific characteristics.

However, prior to accompanying families who receive the gift of a diversely able child, our pastoral programmes, especially in developing countries where the subsidiary action of the Church in this field could be more necessary, should *provide information that helps parents to prevent deafness*. We know that in many cases the hearing deficit could have been avoided with suitable treatment and measures, as long, that is, as the necessary resources were actually available. On the one hand this is a matter of working for a culture of prevention, and, on the other, we are dealing with the challenge of calling on the various social actors in this field to achieve a better *distribution of resources in the health-care and educational sphere*.

The Christian community should be enabled to accompany those families which *find themselves faced with the arrival of a child who will require specific forms of care and treatment* ('*special specific needs*'). The arrival of a deaf child is usually accompanied by a feeling of frustration,



guilt and loneliness on the part of the parents. Hence *a first message of the community should be that of making them feel that 'they are not alone'*.

In addition, however, as is well known, there are *dysfunctional reactions* which if they are not addressed in time will involve major damage not only to a child with hearing difficulties but also to other members of the family or to the whole family unit.

Normally, families tend to reorganise themselves in the search for equilibrium. In this way one runs the risk of falling into the temptation of reorganising the group around the child who has the problem, placing him or her at the centre of the family relationships. This is not the healthiest thing for him or her or for the rest of the family. One can try to reorganise the family by ignoring the deficit and adopting an approach involving the segregation of the member of the family who has a disability. Another kind of dysfunctional response is the reorganisation of the group which delegates the responsibility for care for the deaf child to one of the members of the family, normally the mother. Where there are other children it may happen that they are relegated to a peripheral position and suffer a certain abandonment; or that they are excessively protected by because an attempt is made to keep them at the margins of the situation. The bond of the family as a group with the 'half-outsider' can undergo alterations. For example, the difficulties encountered in the relations with grandparents who feel unable to help their children bring up a deaf child and unable to comfort them and support them, are well known.

These observations are only an example of how necessary it is for the Christian community to be prepared to accept and accompany families who have deaf members, through the help of certain *support groups* as well.

It is important to make it known, as has already been observed, that although it is true that *deaf people need specific care, they also and above all else need to be integrated*. One should thus avoid the temptation of forming 'ghettoes'

or meeting requests for excessive special attention. As I have already observed, the integration of these brothers and sisters and their families into the communities also involves great enrichment for the communities themselves and for people with hearing. In this way, *two possible pathways of care* emerge. That of specific care and that of care for needs within programmes, groups and services that are offered to all people and their families. The pathway to be followed in each case depends on the circumstances and the capacities both of the families and of the communities, always bearing in mind the criteria of *subsidiarity and joint responsibility*.

Whatever the case, the testimonies that we have listened to have allowed us to become aware of the extent to which the family is fundamental for the development of deaf people, as for that matter it is in the case of everyone else. The family allows the acquisition of those capacities, virtues, traditions and values that give identity to individuals and allow them to be integrated in a positive way into society. The family, for example, is the key to communicative development and the acquisition of language on which depend the development of individuals and the achievement of a full and autonomous life. Thus one should be able to rely on certain *service and care groups* which offer their advice and in addition hold up strategies for action for the family and practical work instruments for the family, as well as helping the family in the management of its requests.

*Parents need support in the difficult task of bringing up their children*. In contemporary circumstances they often need additional help in following the school performance of their children and in some cases they also need advice in choosing the most suitable school for them. It would be advisable for associations of parents with children and schools for children to be placed in a condition to do this.

People with hearing difficulties, as has already been observed, also need to socialise with each other. In this sense of great interest are

the initiatives present in many places that involve *communities of deaf people* which should be encouraged and accompanied so that they are able to offer support services to families.

I find especially interesting the project which Mrs Buckley wanted to talk to us about, namely the 'Deaf Community Village'. It would be advisable to encourage this kind of structure so as to be able offer integral care to these people on the basis of their specific needs; it should as its characteristic hold up the prospect of openness and integration. In the same way one could think of areas and specific programmes for the accompanying of couples and of parents in their task of upbringing (schools for parents) as well as activities for families which foster friendship and from which could spring networks of solidarity and mutual support.

A subject that is especially held dear by the Pontifical Council for the Family is that of the impulse to evangelising subjectivity in the family: families should not only be the objects of pastoral care provided by the Church but also, and above all else, they themselves should be active subjects in the Church community and also in civil society. The families of deaf people as well must be active subjects. I believe that this morning we have been witnesses to this subjectivity in action: families that evangelise first and foremost through witness to their faith lived with joy in various circumstances, with education in, and the transmission of, faith, and which, when they can, work with the multiple services of the Christian community. Families where not only parents evangelise their children but where parents are also evangelised by their children. Families that radiate the Gospel to their neighbours, at school, in sports associations and lastly in that entire network of relationships that every family lives.

For this reason, families should be accompanied and should live an intense spiritual life, an understanding and continuous friendship with the Lord Jesus. Deaf people, and in order to grow spiritually they need the sacraments

and especially those of reconciliation and the Eucharist. Although it is not always possible for all parishes to have translation services during Holy Mass and special liturgical services for the deaf, and it cannot be envisaged that all priests will understand sign language in confession, it would appear, as has been suggested, that *in each diocese one could have a priest to help in this form of pastoral care*. Here I can cite certain examples that I know about from the many that certainly exist in the world. In the archdiocese that I come from as well, the primate's archdiocese of Mexico, there are at least two parishes where for a number of years specific care has been provided to deaf people. In addition, in the metropolitan cathedral, at the Holy Mass celebrated every Sunday and presided over by the Archbishop, a person is available who translates the celebration and the homily into sign language for non-hearing communicants. In part, as a result of an initiative taken by the deaf faithful, pastoral programmes are being enacted at the level of the Bishops' Conference and at a regional level as well.

As one can well see, one of the most urgent requirements is that of

having priests and pastoral workers who know and can communicate through sign language. We have just listened to the proposal to train seminarians in the questions and issues connected with the world of deafness and with a knowledge of sign language. I can tell you with joy that this, without any doubt, is the road that can be followed. In some seminaries optional courses are already being offered in sign language but also on the specific needs of deaf people. Allow me to share with you my experience in this field. During the six years that I worked as a teacher at the Major Seminary of the Archdiocese of Mexico I was a witness to how year after year a group of seminarians was trained in this field. They were always enthusiastic about the progress they were making and I believe that this training/knowledge enormously contributed to their priestly training as a whole.

Within the field of family pastoral care in general, and in that of pastoral care for families with deaf people in particular, we should take better advantage of the resources that are offered to us by information and communications technology through internet. It would appear that this is especially

urgent because deaf people are particularly active as regards this virtual means of communication. It has to be acknowledged, however, that many good Catholic web sites exist which offer many resources for formation.

I would like to end my paper by thanking the institutions, the religious communities and the people who are involved in pastoral care for families with deaf people. We would be very interested in learning about positive pastoral experiences where families have been the subjects of evangelisation, in the various fields of pre-marriage preparation, listening to the Word of God and family prayer, support for catechesis, Christian education, etc. Our Pontifical Council has a project involving the identification of best pastoral practices in order to place them in circulation as a service for the Church community so as to encourage the implementation of similar initiatives. It would be wonderful if we could *integrate the riches of the experiences of families with deaf people* into this project.

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# Fourth Session

## Pastoral Care for Deaf People

KAZIMIERA KRAKOWIAK

### 1. Care by Priests in Poland for People with Damage to their Hearing Faculties: the New Areas of Special Needs

The special care provided in Poland to the deaf by priests has ancient origins, given that it came into being with the first schools<sup>1</sup> and developed at the same time as the educational system for such people. We are thus talking about the first half of the nineteenth century. Its principal characteristics, from the point of view of the forms of activities of priests, were, first of all, a close connection with catechistic work and the teaching of religion in special schools, and, subsequently, care for the contexts in which deaf and dumb people who communicated through sign language met. The tradition of this pastoral service, the activity of individual priests, their self-denial, their worth and methodical experience, require an in-depth examination from a historical point of view and knowledge in this field deserves to be transmitted to subsequent generations. However, the elements that have just been cited will not be the subject of my analysis in this paper. The objective purpose of this conference is to illustrate contemporary needs in the field of care by priests for people with hearing problems from the point of view of special Catholic pedagogic and logopaedia, which are characterised by a concern to achieve the integral education of

those who encounter barriers which are of such a kind as to limit their own development as persons.

Damage to the hearing apparatus does not make an individual less worthy and does not limit his or her vocation to holiness. However, it can lead to an impoverishment of the contents of the faith that he or she has received, given that there are physical limits in the process of understanding Holy Scripture and oral forms of religious worship. The fundamental assumption of my analysis is the thesis according to which the support given to ensure the development of a person affected by hearing problems lies primarily in overcoming the barriers that limit that person's ability to communicate and to transmit the meaning and the value of what is said orally. The support given to his or her religious development lies, among other things, in facilitating access to the linguistic dimension of the message connected with the truth of faith and in allowing complete participation in the sacramental and devotional life of the Church. The special character of priestly service to an individual who has damage to his or her hearing apparatus derives from the need to adapt forms of communication to his or her sensorial limits and to prevent a poverty of his or

her mind through the development of religious ideas and language.

The task that the author of this paper has given herself is that of pointing out the areas of special needs that are correlated with the dynamic developments of civilisation which influence the destiny of people affected by hearing disability thereby offering new possibilities of growth but at the same time creating new risks. At the base of these reflections there are the observations and the analyses made by the author over the last thirty years with pupils, students and former alumni from various kinds of schools that are specialised in the education of individuals affected by hearing problems, as well as her personal experience which has arisen because of daily contact with her own deaf children and their friends.

The specialist care that was traditionally provided by priests to deaf and dumb people, which developed in the presence of an organisation of education that tended to isolate them and was based upon adaptation of the system of communication to their requirements and needs, had a rather uniform character from the point of view of method, given that the pupils and the former alumni of special schools were a group of people



characterised by a similarity as regards their mental resources and above all in terms of linguistic abilities and the capacity to communicate. When hearing aids did not exist, all those who were not able to hear vocal sounds from birth or early childhood lived as deaf and dumb people. This situation applied both to those who had very serious damage to their hearing systems and to those individuals who had significant damage, as well as to those who had only moderate problems with their hearing. Those few of them who managed to acquire the ability to use their own voices most of the time had a form of speech which outsiders were not able to understand because they could not control their own pronunciation through their own hearing. For this reason, both the individuals who were able to speak and those who did not have this capacity usually remained in the same environment, maintaining a contact which assured that they felt that they belonged to a community. Deaf people who were outside this group were condemned to social isolation and often to spiritual deterioration.

The principal characteristic of the present situation of deaf people in Poland is the dynamic character



of the changes that are underway which have never been so intense as they are now and by the differentiation of the individual conditions of individuals. The existence of these differences has led to the emergence of new contexts of special needs in the field of the activity of priests and should be taken into consideration at the moment of

the establishment of the tasks of priests and the search for forms of support for the religious development of people who are affected by hearing problems. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to engage in an attempt to recognise these principal needs and to transform them into a list of questions on which theologians, and particular specialists in the field of the theology of pastoral care, should reflect. These questions will be presented at the end of a brief description of the situation of individuals who suffer from damage to their hearing systems in their family environments and within society, as well as in relation to the characteristics of the changes which have taken place in this situation at the beginning of the twenty-first century.<sup>2</sup>

### **1. People with Damage to their Hearing Systems Amongst People who have Normal Hearing**

The pre-condition for the integral development of an individual is to have good relationships with other people. The best relationships, which are based upon mutual love and are rich from the point of view of contents, develop within the family, in a context in which all people communicate using a common language. In addition to air and food, all children, including deaf children, need for their correct development a language which assures that they can communicate freely with their parents and the whole of the environment to which they belong. A child is born with an innate capacity to assimilate his or her mother tongue. It is a divine gift which, like life itself, we receive through our parents. The drama of hearing parents who have a new born child with problems at the level of his or her hearing system lies in the inability to transmit to that child the gift of language in a natural and spontaneous way without the need for special forms of care. The child's brain, to tell the truth, has an innate ability to recognise the similarities and differences of the sounds of human speech, as well as to categorise perceptions. However, because of the damage that afflicts that child's hearing system,

he or she does not have access to the acoustic dimension of letters and thus cannot develop a mental procedure for the phonemic codification (through vowels and consonants) of meanings. For this reason, his or her mind cannot spontaneously develop a phonic language which is made up of a system of signs with a dual structure made up of phonemes and morphemes. His or her phonation organs are predisposed to speech but the limited working of the hearing system obstructs control of its correctness and its sound. Such a boy or girl runs the risk, therefore, of a painful form of distancing and a loss of roots; exclusion from the society in which he or she came into the world and the inability to accede to its cultural and religious values because of an insufficient level of communication with people who have normal hearing. The danger is even graver if we consider the fact that the inability to codify meanings from a phonemic point of view provokes difficulty in reading and writing, blocking the process of learning through written texts. In managing to recognise letters, a child learns to read and afterwards to write single words; however he or she does not learn to combine them correctly into authentic sentences because, as he or she cannot identify the grammatical morphemes, he or she does not perceive the rules of syntax. Alexander Graham Bell defined in an efficacious way the difficulties of children with hearing problems as the 'three infelicities': 'lack of speech, a lack of knowledge of written language, and a lack of progress in intellectual development because of an inability to enter into a relationship with and encounter other minds'.<sup>3</sup> The causes of all these difficulties is the absence of a language in the mind of an individual who is affected by deafness, a problem linked to that problem which, in the field of logopaedia, we define as the phonemic barrier<sup>4</sup> or aphonomia/dysphonemia.<sup>5</sup> The damage to hearing does not reduce the intellectual potential of the child but the reduced quantity of contacts with other people can mean that these qualities do not come out during the development of the individual.

Parents, therefore, find themselves faced with a fundamental problem: what should be done to enable the child to learn a language so that he or she can live and develop within his or her own family and amongst the people that love him or her? What should be done to impede the exclusion of the child from the family community? How can one strengthen and develop the mental tie with the child? Specialists, therefore, have a task that is connected with the problems that the parents have to address: they must help them to choose the system for the learning of language that is most suited to the development of the child and they must be assured support so they can follow the pathway that has been chosen with perseverance.

In the always living tradition of pedagogic thought, there are various approaches to the problem of the linguistic functioning of the deaf. Amongst these, it is possible to distinguish various philosophical-pedagogic currents and various methods of action.<sup>6</sup> From a linguistic and logopaedic point of view, two fundamental procedures are visible, namely:

a) The logopaedic procedure, which is based upon communication in a phonic language and upon the creation of linguistic, communicative and cultural competence<sup>7</sup> using methods for the education of hearing and the development of a phonemic perception of spoken language through which a deaf person learns to speak, read and write.

b) The procedure based upon communication by signs, within the framework of which gestures, mime and visual perception are used. This kind of approach involves the need to place the child within a community of people which, thanks to this method, has managed to obtain a high communicative ability and to transmit its rich inheritance of knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

The parents of children with hearing problems must answer difficult questions. First of all, indeed, they must decide on whether they should teach their child the language of the community of people with normal hearing by using special methods; and secondly they must decide upon which system to

apply.<sup>9</sup> At the same time they have to reflect upon the possibility of acting in an alternative way: is it more advisable to help the child in the search for a special social environment in which are used gestures that are accessible to the eyes and without phonemes? If the parents decide upon sign language then other questions arise: which kind of code of gestures or which variant of this language is it advisable to choose? Is a union of this kind of communication with spoken language, reading, and writing possible? If it is, then when and how should one act? Subsequently, the most important question of all has to be posed: can hearing parents, in learning sign language (most of the time insufficiently), 'speak the language of their hearts' and bring up their child in the culture and the religion of their family?

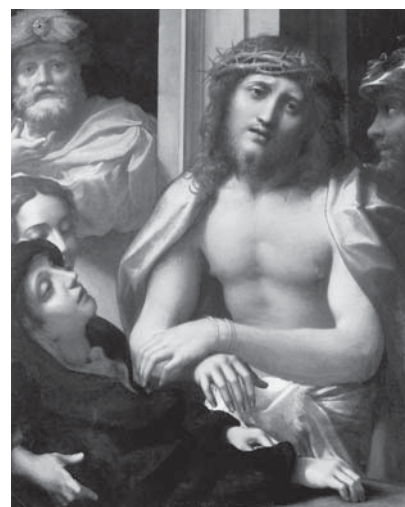
The choices that are made by the parents depend in large measure upon external factors and, first of all, upon the support and help that they receive from specialists and the social environment in which the family itself lives. In recent decades, the situation of family units that raise children with hearing problems has experienced a dynamic development. In this context, it is worthwhile reflecting on what kind of support and help a priest attentive to the spiritual development of the child and his or her family should offer to the parents.

## 2. Changes in the Situation of People with Hearing Problems in Poland

The factors of change can be divided into two groups. The first of these is connected with the development of medical sciences, to progress in the field of the technology for the production of hearing aids, and to the new possibilities of rehabilitation as regards hearing and speech. The second group of factors consists of the new currents of thought, of political-social movements, and of trends in customs which have changed the attitude of society towards excluded people and various minorities who have so far been marginalised.

The changes provoked by fac-

tors that belong to the first group concern above all else the early diagnosis of children with damage to their hearing organ (something that is already carried out with new born children), the implant of aids and medical treatment provided to children, as well as language therapy and education during all the stages of a person's life. Over the last twenty years, in Poland as for that matter in many other countries, care for children with hearing problems has advanced; the results of the implantation of a hearing aid, of rehabilitation and formation have achieved a much higher level,



thereby increasing the hopes of parents and young people. After these changes, an increasing number of people with hearing problems, having such aids from early childhood and taking advantage of the techniques of rehabilitation, profitably attend support schools and normal schools together with hearing children and then go on to study at university (something that was still rare at the end of the twentieth century).<sup>10</sup> The number of people who have attained this goal is, however, still unsatisfactory. However, there is an increasing number of deaf children who, despite serious linguistic deficits and deficits at the level of general culture, wish to follow an educational pathway of the highest possible levels. This requires great effort, discipline and concentration directed towards personal development. In addition, in these cases great help and support is required from the family and school environment.

The increasingly important goals achieved by young people whose hearing organ has been damaged lead us to believe that in the presence of suitably organised educational assistance they can be assured the natural learning of a language that is almost equal to that of their hearing contemporaries. It is clear that for this to be possible the three pre-conditions listed below must be met:

a) To have access to the linguistic meaning of the sounds of speech, a child must acquire the ability to distinguish with precision all the elementary units of a sentence (that is to say syllables and phonemes) within the flow of spoken speech (in the phonic sequence).

b) To have access to the contents of what is said and to the meaning attributed to the individual units of the linguistic system of society, a child must have continuous interaction with people who express themselves with words in the context of daily life.

c) The interaction with individuals who express themselves in phonic language should take place in an atmosphere of acceptance and love for the child, such as to stimulate his or her complete cognitive, emotional and social development, without obligations and violence, establishing clear and understandable requirements.

The problems and the difficulties derive from the fact that for many families who have children with hearing problems meeting these three pre-conditions in daily life is not something that is easy.

An improvement in the level of rehabilitation, however, does not assure for individuals with damage to their hearing systems either their unlimited functioning within society or the possibility of freely joining communities and being active within them. At the same time, it does not assure the possibility of coming to be a part of the parish community or participating in Holy Mass and other forms of common prayer. Deaf people encounter many limitations and difficulties in this context. The first barrier of the problems regards perception of speech because of their hearing impairment. Despite the

success achieved by medical science and logopaedia, in the presence of particularly grave damage to a person's hearing system it is not possible to eliminate the difficulties and the disturbances that obstruct linguistic communication. One can only reduce them. In some cases the result is more satisfactory; in others, less so. Electronic hearing aids, both in the case of aids that increase the sound stimuli and in the case of cochlear implants (which transform sound waves into electric impulses and transmit them directly to the nervous system), are very useful, above all in the control of the person's own speech and the learning of a language. However, they do not assure complete access to the sound of spoken speech during conversations held in natural languages, above all when many people take place. Acoustic aids have major advantages only for those people who have moderate and significant damage to their hearing systems. In the presence of profound damage, they allow a recognition of only a small percentage of phonemes, allowing the user to create replacement ideas as regards sounds but without assuring the possibility of distinguishing syllables in the rapid flow of spoken speech. In these cases, induction equipment and equipment for the transfer of sounds without wires at a distance do not obtain the results that are hoped for. In situations of this kind, cochlear implants are used. However the experience of therapists and the numerous data from the specialist literature in the field indicate that at least 30% of children who have had an implant of this kind, despite the known advantages, do not manage to distinguish the sounds of spoken speech and only a small part of young patients are able to recognise them with precision. In this situation, if the communication is made using a phonic language, the person with hearing problems has to make a greater effort. This requires constant and exhausting concentration as well the performance of actions designed to compensate the hearing insufficiency (above all lip reading). Deaf people, therefore, require constant help from the social environment in which they live

and develop. Those who have not limited themselves to learning the phonic language of their own country and speak foreign languages also need special conditions to facilitate communication with people with normal hearing. This help should involve above all else a significant and aware simplification of the form of communication and special attention being paid to mutual understanding.

A further difficulty lies in the fact that the needs of individuals are not always the same and it is not possible to meet them through the imposition of a single system of help, the diffusion of a single method for mutual understanding or a single auxiliary device (for example a sole version of sign language). There are various valid help strategies suitably adapted to various individual needs which allow a use of visual perception, of the capacity for figurative thought, and of mental images. These methods simplify the learning of a national language and in addition improve communicative ease and quality of life. It is also possible to use writing<sup>11</sup> and the manual alphabet. In addition, the visualisation of what is said can be used with the Cued speech method so as to facilitate the distinction of syllables and in this way assure a greater perception and understanding of speech.<sup>12</sup> The adoption of these auxiliary systems of communication requires skills, capacities and self-denial on the part of people with normal hearing. What impedes the obtaining of effective help is a lack of knowledge about the needs of individuals with hearing problems on the part of society, together with attitudes that generate disadvantages for them. One is not dealing here with negative approaches or expressions of bad will, which, indeed, are rather rare situations. The causes of the difficulties that are encountered should be looked for in an insufficient knowledge of the problems of hearing and their consequences, as well as the opinions, which are simplified and based on stereotypes, as regards the opportunities for individuals with these pathologies. Changes in social relationships do not take place as rapidly as those connected with the development of medical knowledge and technology. In opinions



about individuals with hearing problems and in attitudes towards them, it is possible to observe the presence of contradictions and confusion. There are still old stereotypes that amplify a distorted image of mental handicap linked to hearing disability and, at the same time, the tendency is to think, with an ingenuous and excessive optimism, that hearing aids are absolutely effective. The mass media propagate ideas that act to publicise hearing aids and similar devices discovered by technology and advertise courses of the most varied kinds of sign language, presenting each one as the best there is.

The greatest problems are those generated by the activity of those political-social movements that concentrate on the struggle for the rights and privileges of various minorities. The representatives of these movements, led by their own ideology, try to attract deaf people within their orbit. The real needs of such people are of no interest to them. They see them as a social group on a par with ethnic or sexual minorities and try to obtain their electoral support by offering them in exchange to fight for their rights. This makes people with hearing problems more active from a social point of view, stimulates their search for autonomy as a group, but nonetheless in some of them creates a false image of their own person and leads to an intensification of a negative attitude towards society which – in their view – has the obligation to provide them with help and support in their process of autonomisation, as well as to compensate the damage caused to them by destiny through the provision of special privileges. In this way not only does their sense of injustice grow but also their frustration and their enmity towards people who are not deaf and towards individuals who, despite their hearing problems, try to achieve integration with hearing people.

### 3. The Role of Signs and Gesture Languages in the New Situation of the Deaf

One of the manifestations of the changes that have taken place at the level of the awareness of soci-

ety is the increasing interest in sign language which is seen as an exceptional cultural phenomenon. Without doubt, this situation is the outcome of attention being paid to everything that is unusual, accidental and mysterious, and this is a phenomenon typical of the period between the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. The consequences of all of this are, however, the appearance of a multitude of myths about this language and the spread of unfounded opinions as regards the deaf people who use it. This superficial interest is still alive and involves a distortion of the image of problems typical to this group of people. Deaf people, in fact, communicate through the use of various codes and not through sign language alone. Not all groups of gestures can be called a language in the true sense of the term.

In Poland sign language is not characterised by uniformity and one may define it as a collection of idiolects (individual languages) and codes created by various groups in a process of progressive homologation. This process has not yet ended. However separate social communities that use sign language do not exist. The gestures of this language are, instead, used in various ways and in heterogeneous environments. The most important systems of communications by signs are the following:

a) Family gestures, that is to say those groups of signs in the form of gestures/miming that are created spontaneously within the family and small groups in which children with hearing problems from hearing families are concentrated: they are not phonemic, they belong to a single class and they do not form sentences.

b) Natural sign language, which is also called ancient or classic sign language and which is traditionally used in environments in which a large number of deaf people are concentrated; this is a non-phonemic system with two classes<sup>13</sup> which does not have its own grammar. It is possible to observe regional and environmental variants of this language. The conscious attention paid to this language and its unification is directed towards the

creation of a relatively homogeneous system which could be used by deaf Polish people with a high educational level (Polish Sign Language, PJM).<sup>14</sup>

c) The Polish gesture-linguistic system (SJM), that is to say an artificial union drawn up for teaching purposes of the Polish language and the manual alphabet.<sup>15</sup>

d) Mixed gesture systems, which are both linguistic and non-linguistic and are used spontaneously by the pupils of special schools.

The widespread belief that sign language is the first language of people with profound damage to their hearing wrongly simplifies the system. Indeed, it is assimilated as a mother language only by the deaf children of parents with the same problem in the family in which there are no hearing people (for example grandparents). Only 5-10% of deaf children have deaf parents. Over 90% of children who have damage to their hearing systems are born to hearing families. The percentage of married deaf couples with children with the same problem is not above 25%. The observations that have been made over many years lead the following theses to be formulated. Sign languages are first of all the result of a self-therapeutic group process. The principal factors which lead to their appearance are the system of education based upon segregation and its pedagogic failures. Deaf children learn sign language within special schools, most of the time from each other, creating innumerable neologisms neo-semanticisms, as well as taking advantage to a certain extent of the abilities of their classmates who come from hearing families. A deaf child who does not go to a special school will not create a language (understood as a productive system with two classes). Instead he or will create numerous signs of his or her own which he or she will employ to communicate with his or her near environment.

Gestures and sign languages are the product of human creativity which is worthy of admiration. The observation of this fact and respect for the fact that deaf people do not require an easy system of communication are not, however, ele-

ments that are sufficient for us to declare that the use of this language (and above all its exclusive use) is optimal in the case of children with hearing problems who are raised in hearing families. Deaf people, in fact, do not constitute an ethnic minority in the narrow sense. They are the children and heirs of hearing people. They have the right to inherit their national language and culture as well as to be brought up in the religion of their ancestors. The fact that they are treated as a linguistic minority is first of all dangerous for them. This approach, in fact, can lead to them being alienated and disinherited, to their being deprived of their ties with their families and to their access to education being made more difficult. Specifically for this reason, it is necessary to try to break down the barriers between hearing people and deaf people.



An important consequence of the current changes is a reduction in the number of deaf pupils in special schools entrusted to traditional care by priests. These children have been replaced by children and young people with various kinds of disability and multiple disabilities (first of all movement, intellectual and behavioural handicaps, often accompanied by light or moderate damage to their hearing). In this case, children do not only need other methods of rehabilitation and education but also a different methodological approach in catechesis and the teaching of religion, as well as other forms of pastoral

care. A lack of attention paid to the adaptation of methods of communication and teaching to the individual needs of various pupils, together with lessons where there is a rather uninformed use of sign language, provoke serious disturbances in communication and hinder the religious development of young people.

Reflection on the role and the possibility of using gestures and various choices in sign language in catechesis, in the teaching of religion, in priestly service and the organisation of religious life is indispensable. The belief according to which all individuals with hearing problems can be helped to understand reality through sign language belongs to the group of false and injurious ideas connected with this category of people. However, an incomplete knowledge of the variants of gestures and sign languages that are really used by young people is a serious barrier that acts to obstruct both actions directed towards education and catechesis and those connected with pastoral service.

#### **4. The Question of the Emancipation of Groups of Deaf People**

The difficulties experienced by those who have hearing problems when they try to belong to the community of people with normal abilities is demonstrated dramatically in the strong search for autonomy on the part of deaf young people. Movements for the emancipation of this category of people, stimulated externally, are connected with a process which indirectly has its origins in the changes that have taken place in medical and logopaedic care offered to children whose hearing systems are damaged. This process involves the appearance of two tendencies which are typical as regards the life choices of young people. We may define them as flight from, and flight towards, 'the world of silence', that is to say a search for their own place within society in environments where many people with the same kind of disability are concentrated or within societies open to hearing and speaking individuals.

On the one hand, in fact, progress in the field of medical and logopaedic care during the period of early infancy allows many people with hearing problems to achieve a high level of linguistic skills and ability. The result of this work, subsequently, should allow patients to communicate freely with individuals with normal abilities. The other side of the coin, however, is frustration connected with a feeling of unease in communication. This situation strengthens the attraction exercised by those environments that remains connected with the traditions of communities of deaf and dumb people and sign language. We thus encounter two phenomena:

1. Increasingly numerous groups of young people with hearing damage engage in an educational pathway involving secondary school, university and even PhDs. Some of them, therefore, come to belong to the community of speaking individuals, they form a part of it, but they continue to need special help.

2. A significant number of people with hearing problems, after finishing their educational pathway amongst people with normal abilities, return to the environment of deaf people who have chosen sign language, distance themselves from the world of people with normal abilities, manifest a negative attitude towards that world and seek to obtain forms of autonomy and special privileges for deaf people.

The dynamism of these two tendencies is so evident as to make the best effects of rehabilitation and the successes achieved by various people in the use of phonic language appear as a stimulus to research into links with the community that has remained attached to sign language and isolated from speaking society. This dynamism leads to a visible tension between specialists concerned with the rehabilitation and re-education of deaf people and people who are hard of hearing, promoting incomprehension, concealed conflicts, and above all a sense of powerlessness as regards those psycho-social and socio-linguistic processes which are so difficult to understand, from which these contrasting tendencies come. In all activity

in favour of deaf people – including pastoral activity – one should bear in mind the existence of this phenomenon.

Recapitulating these reflections, it is worthwhile to stress the heterogeneous character of the deaf and the hard of hearing who do not form a uniform group of disabled people and do not create, as might appear, a single community united as regards the specific problems and issues of their own condition. Damage to the hearing organ, in fact, varies a great deal and provokes different levels and types of functional disturbance in individuals who are afflicted by such damage.<sup>16</sup> Conditions of development during childhood change according to individual cases, and the same may be said of the objectives, the methods, and the system and the results of rehabilitation. However, there exists a dangerous tendency to generalisation in the opinions on this subject which all too often are based upon stereotypes and the search for single solutions as regards rehabilitation, education, social assistance and other initiatives designed to provide help. There are dangerous generalisations in the field of the various currents of modern thought concerning the pedagogy of deafness, as well as in the anti-pedagogic ideas that are currently in fashion. These forms of thought are based upon various ideologies which, in clashing and struggling with each other, introduce chaos into practical solutions and rather than normalising the conditions of life of those who have to address problems caused by sensorial disability end up by making them worse. Thus one must do what one can to ensure that these changes do not lead to extreme ideas and actions that do nothing else but aggravate these pathological phenomena. Amongst the most dangerous threats, we encounter isolation in relation to society of groups that are made up of purported linguistic minorities. These groups, which are often manipulated by people who act for their own exclusive advantage, are united by an illusory sense of disability, of group autonomy and by a limitation as regards their ability to assess on their own in a realistic way their own condi-

tion. Participation in the sub-culture of these societies influences the development of children and young people much as takes place with sect, leading to the appearance of pathological phenomena. Personalism, on the other hand, is based upon a coherent and multiply motivated idea of the freedom of human beings. Adherence to this philosophy implies the moral obligation to oppose illusory forms of simplification.



### **5. The Special Needs of People who have Damage to their Hearing Systems in the Field of Pastoral Care**

In trying to recognise and classify the needs of individuals with hearing problems in the field of pastoral care one should take into consideration all the aspects of their lives in which the presence of a priest as a spiritual adviser and assistant can stimulate spiritual growth and the attainment of full humanity. To begin these reflections, one has to understand the fact the hearing handicap in children is an existential drama that concerns the family and which the family itself has to address. In the presence of this situation, the actions involving help must be directed in the first place to families and not exclusively to deaf individuals.

A large number of parents who bring up children subject to this form of disability manifest the need for contact with the figure of

a priest.<sup>17</sup> Parents who have been interviewed emphasise their need to speak with priests who are able to understand the specific character of the difficulties that they have to face together with their children. They look for a clarification of the meaning of this experience in the light of faith, as well as for help in the religious upbringing of their children.

The needs of families can be divided into the three following categories:

1) The need for spiritual help for parents who experience the trauma and the suffering that are connected with the diagnosis of the hearing problem of their child (this help is needed above all in order to overcome negative emotions, to re-establish spiritual balance and to accept the difficult experience that has been imposed by destiny. Often, work is recommended that is directed towards the control of a feeling of injustice and guilt, regret, rebellion and even of hopelessness).

2. There is a need for prolonged support during the period of adaptation to the condition of parents who are desperate to perform their duties towards their disabled child.

3. There is a need for advice and assistance in the transmission of faith and in religious education (in the case of a deaf child with a retardation as regards development of speech, the religious education provided by the example of the parents is not enough – a special educational approach is required: facilitated communication, the teaching of religious language, the development of ideas, and introduction to an aware participation in the religious life of the family. All of this should take place with a method that is suited to individual conditions).

The second group of needs is connected with changes in the organisation and the improvement of the level of formation. Formation in the field of integration can in fact be seen as a special procedure implemented in varying social conditions. Thus, both catechesis and special pastoral care should be adapted to the new social situation. The needs derived from this postulate can be summarised in the following points:



1. The need for pastoral care for individuals with hearing problems who live and study together with people with normal abilities and above all the need to be placed within parish communities.

2. The need to complete the methodology of catechesis and the teaching of religion in the presence of various forms of education and various levels of linguistic competence. In particular, this applies to the method of work with children bought up an educated in a context of integration and that method to be adopted in the presence of children with children who have more than one disability (the traditional methods based upon the visualisation through images of the contents of a message and upon the use of sign language are not sufficient here).

3. The need to create conditions that favour the complete participation of deaf people in the liturgy of the Holy Mass and other forms of worship (this requires the use of means that are carefully chosen and are designed to help oral communication, the use of universal systems for the transmission of the contents, and the openness of the community of hearing people to the presence of deaf people and to working together with them).

4. The need to disseminate knowledge about the needs of people affected by hearing problems amongst the religious and lay members of parish communities.

Pastoral activity with deaf people – as with pedagogic activity – requires that predisposition of the spirit which John Paul II called ‘imagination of mercy’. Openness to their needs enables us to understand that hearing disability, by obstructing interpersonal communication and relationships, is not only a problem of individuals who have this handicap but also concerns every person that they enter into contact with. If my interlocutor cannot hear, I do not know how to speak. If my interlocutor does not manage to attribute meanings to words, what I say is empty and without contents. If my interlocutor is not able to express himself or herself correctly, I cannot understand his or her intentions, have access to his or her mind, or assess

his or her knowledge and his or her ability at the level of thought. Thus, in order to break down this barrier we must learn to speak. In learning to speak with them and in adapting to their needs, we do not confine ourselves to taking part in their difficulties and their suffering – we take part in the joy of discovering the wealth and the greatness of human life. Every mediated attempt to adapt ourselves to the conditions of an individual with damage to their hearing, in being an act of solidarity towards them, opens up new and hitherto unknown spaces for interpersonal relationships, creating new fields of development for disabled people and for those people who work with them. However, to take on this task is no easy thing. This is something that often requires a profound change in our attitude towards people who are deaf and towards ourselves. It involves abandoning our sense of linguistic abilities and superiority, as well as a change in our behaviour. In our work with deaf people we need able mouths and hands that are able to express love and to transmit truth.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The organiser of the first school for the deaf in Polish national territory – the Institute for the Deaf and Dumb of Warsaw (1817) – was Don Jakub Falkowski (1775-1848).

<sup>2</sup> Given the brevity of my paper, the bibliographical references are limited to the indispensable minimum.

<sup>3</sup> R.O. CORNETT AND M. E. DAISEY, *Czym jest uszkodzenie słuchu*, (w:) *Metoda fonogestów w Stanach Zjednoczonych i w Polsce. Wspomaganie rozwoju językowego dzieci i młodzieży z uszkodzonym słuchem* (red. E. Domańska-Zyśk. Lublin, Wyd. KUL, 2009), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> K. KRAKOWIAK, *Fonogesty jako narzędzie formowania języka dzieci z uszkodzonym słuchem* (Komunikacja językowa i jej zaburzenia. T. 9, Lublin, Wyd. UMCS, 1995), p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> B. OSTAPIUK, ‘Zaburzenia dźwiękowej realizacji fonemów języka polskiego – propozycja terminów i klasyfikacji’, *Audiofonologia* 1997, t. X, pp. 117-136. Reprinted in *Logopedia* 28, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> VEDI K. KRAKOWIAK, ‘W poszukiwaniu własnej drogi wychowania dziecka z uszkodzeniem słuchu (próba oceny współczesnych

metod wychowania językowego)’, *Audiofonologia* 2002, t. XXI, pp. 33-53. Reprinted in: *Studia i szkice o wychowaniu dzieci z uszkodzonymi słuchem* (Lublin, Wyd. KUL, 2006), pp. 135-155; ‘Antynomie poznawcze w surdopedagogice i sposoby radzenia sobie z ich dolegliwościami’ in *Filozofia a pedagogika. Studia i szkice*, (red. P. Dehnel i P. Gutowski. Wrocław, Wyd. Nauk. Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej Edukacji, TWP, 2005), pp. 151-170. Reprinted in: *Studia i szkice o wychowaniu dzieci z uszkodzonymi słuchem* (Lublin, Wyd. KUL, 2006), pp. 81-95.

<sup>7</sup> S. GRABIAS, ‘Mowa i jej zaburzenia’, *Audiofonologia* 1997, t. X, pp. 9-36.

<sup>8</sup> M. ŚWIDZIŃSKI, ‘Głusi uczniowie jako uczestnicy badań nad PJM’, *Audiofonologia*, 2000, t. XVII, pp. 67-68. Reprinted in *Studia nad kompetencją językową i komunikacją Niesłyszących* (red. M. Świdziński, T. Gałkowski. Warszawa, UW, PKA, Instytut Głuchoniemych im. ks. Jakuba Falkowskiego, 2003), pp. 19-29.

<sup>9</sup> K. KRAKOWIAK, ‘W poszukiwaniu własnej drogi wychowania dziecka z uszkodzeniem słuchu (próba oceny współczesnych metod wychowania językowego)’, *Audiofonologia* 2002, t. XXI, pp. 33-53. Reprinted in *Studia i szkice o wychowaniu dzieci z uszkodzonymi słuchem* (Lublin, Wyd. KUL, 2006), pp. 135-155.

<sup>10</sup> K. KRAKOWIAK, *O wsparcie studentów niesłyszących w społeczności akademickiej Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego* (Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> J. CIESZYŃSKA, *Od słowa przeczytanego do wypowiedzianego. Droga nabywania systemu językowego przez dzieci niesłyszące w wieku poniemowlęcym i przedszkolnym* (Wyd. AP, Kraków, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> K. KRAKOWIAK, *Fonogesty jako narzędzie formowania języka dzieci z uszkodzonym słuchem*, *Komunikacja językowa i jej zaburzenia* T. 9 (Lublin, Wyd. UMCS, 1995); *Studia i szkice o wychowaniu dzieci z uszkodzonymi słuchem* (Lublin, Wyd. KUL, 2006); K. Krakowiak and J. Sekowska, *Mówimy z fonogestami. Przewodnik dla rodziców i przyjaciół dzieci i młodzieży z uszkodzonym słuchem* (Warsaw, WsiP, 1996); E. Domańska-Zyśk (ed.), *Metoda fonogestów w Polsce i w Stanach Zjednoczonych. Wspomaganie rozwoju językowego dzieci i młodzieży z uszkodzonym słuchem* (Lublin, Wyd. KUL, 2009); see also: [www.fonogesty.org](http://www.fonogesty.org).

<sup>13</sup> W. Stokoe has isolated the configurations of these gestures and has attributed to them a value analogous to that of phonemes; he has defined them as ‘cheremes’ (B. Szczepankowski, *Niesłyszący – Głusi – Głuchoniemi. Wyrównanie szans*, Warsaw, WsiP, 1999, p. 134).

<sup>14</sup> M. ŚWIDZIŃSKI, ‘Głusi uczniowie jako uczestnicy badań nad PJM’, *Audiofonologia*, 2000, t. XVII, pp. 67-78. Reprinted in: *Studia nad kompetencją językową i komunikacją Niesłyszących* (edited by M. Świdziński and T. Gałkowski. Warsaw, UW, PKA, Instytut Głuchoniemych im. ks. Jakuba Falkowskiego, 2003), pp. 19-29.

<sup>15</sup> B. SZCZEPANKOWSKI, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> See K. KRAKOWIAK, *Pedagogiczna typologia uszkodzeń słuchu i osób nim dotkniętych*, [w:] ‘Nie głos, ale słowo...’ *Przekraczanie barier w wychowaniu osób z uszkodzonymi słuchem*, edited by K. Krakowiak and A. Dziurda-Multan (Lublin, Wyd. KUL, 2006), pp. 255-288.

<sup>17</sup> A. KUCHARCZYK, *Problemy rodzin wychowujących dzieci z uszkodzonymi słuchem*, doctoral thesis written under the supervision of the free lecturer Prof. K. Krakowiak (KUL, Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawła II, Institute of Pedagogy, Chair of Special Pedagogy, 2007).

## 2. Round Table Experiences of Pastoral Care

*PATRICK A. KELLY*

### 2.1 A Bishop

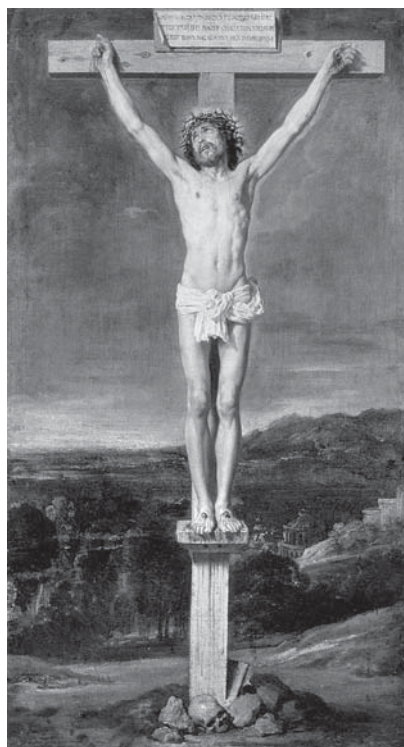
A bishop and our deaf sisters and brothers: a bishop and the eye people. Jesus chooses a bishop first, to continue the signing of the Apostles, and this is the most wonderful sign. Jesus is risen: like the apostles I rejoice and proclaim always and everywhere: "I hand on the same I received: that Christ died to take away our sins just as the Scriptures sign and that Jesus was buried and then Jesus rose on the third day just as the Scriptures proclaim in sign".

My deaf sisters and brothers who are deaf, my friends the eye people help me because they show me how to receive the four gospels when Mathew, Mark, Luke and John proclaim Jesus is risen: my deaf friends say: receive this with your eyes.

Watch; see: the women come to the tomb; see, they are carrying oils with beautiful smells. Look: the sun has risen. Now look: the big stone has been rolled away. Look: Jesus is not here. This bishop has learnt to receive the wonderful sign: Jesus is risen with his eyes.

Next: Jesus forgave the apostles: one had said three times: I do not know Jesus; all deserted him, they died, they chose not to know Jesus, love Jesus, follow Jesus. But as the sun is setting Jesus comes to them with his sign: peace be with you. Jesus shows them his hands, feet, side, he forgives them, he raises them from the dead. Thomas was not there. He says: he is not

risen: I do not believe. He is dead. Eight days later Jesus comes: he stands in the middle of the Eleven: Thomas, come, see my hands, my side, put your finger here, your hand here. Jesus forgives him. Jesus raises him up. Forgiveness: a sign, to see, mercy to touch. This bishop must show mercy, forgiveness: my friends the eye people show me, see, touch, mercy, forgiveness for us who hear, see, touch, taste, and the Church must shine with the glory of mercy, forgiveness, resurrection.



Thirdly: a bishop keeps together the followers of Jesus as one Church, one family, one Holy Spirit, one body; each one needs all the others, all the others need me.

Walking with deaf sisters and brothers taught me: show how we can all receive the signs of God, show how we can all with one heart sing, sign, praise, adore our one Father, through our one Lord who was an eye person: he saw, he watched, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, the fountain of true words, beautiful signs.

And now here again in Rome, sisters and brothers who became deaf were far away, isolated from us. Now Pope Benedict: Benedict: blessed by God, blessing us, strengthens us in one Church, one family, one fellowship. This bishop must today rejoice, give thanks and praise and proclaim: Jesus is risen. We are risen. Now new life in the Holy Spirit: one fellowship with Mary, Madonna of silence, Saint Peter and Saint Paul and all the Saints.

H.E. Msgr. PATRICK A. KELLY  
*Archbishop of Liverpool,  
Great Britain.*

PORFERIO GALON

## 2.2 Go and Preach the Gospel to all Humanity, Including Deaf People

### Introduction

Porferio Galon, a deaf person himself, works as an itinerant catechist for deaf students in eight elementary schools in Metropolitan Cebu, in the Philippines. He graduated in technical drafting in 1992. He is married to a deaf woman and they have two children who are hearing. He is employed by the Gualandi Mission for Deaf Persons in Cebu which is part of the work of the Congregation of the Little Mission for the Deaf, founded by Father Giuseppe Gualandi in Bologna, Italy, in 1872. This mission was opened in Cebu in 1988.

### Part One: Our Mission

In St. Mark's Gospel we find Jesus' words of instruction to his Apostles: "Go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Jesus sent the Apostles to continue his work of spreading God's message of love and salvation to all people in every generation.

Father Giuseppe Gualandi, who lived from 1826 to 1907, wished to bring this message to deaf people in particular. With this in view, he founded the Congregation of the Little Mission for the Deaf in Italy, which has now been extended to Brazil and the Philippines, working for the education and evangelisation of deaf persons.

I work with the Little Mission for the Deaf as a leader in the *Apostolic Movement for the Deaf (AMD)* and as a catechist for deaf children. As an AMD leader I help to organise prayer groups and retreats, along with other AMD members, for deaf children who

have left school but attend the mission house on Sundays. I have also been teaching the Catholic religion to deaf children in elementary schools in Metropolitan Cebu for the past fifteen years. Both these roles involve the great challenge intrinsic to communicating information to deaf children but at least I have the advantage of being deaf myself and thus being in a good position to understand how they think.

As the capacity to absorb the meaning of spoken or signed information varies from child to child, I always seek to present the facts and concepts in the simplest way so as to include all members of the class. For us Filipinos, English is a second language whose syntax and vocabulary are challenging and, thus, all the more so for the deaf children. So I use simplification and paraphrase in order to make the religious concepts interesting and understandable for deaf children.

These same challenges to effective communication which I meet in the classroom are also present in the signed interpretation during the Eucharistic celebration of the Mass. The following comments arise from the shared experiences of we deaf persons of signed interpretation during the celebration of the Mass.

1. A main challenge for the interpreter is to arrive at signs which can be expressed fluently and clearly by the interpreter and which deaf people can understand. Good professional competence and adequate preparation for each interpreting event are essential components of successful interpreting.

2. As has already been stated, the capacity to absorb the mean-

ing of signed information varies among the deaf people who come to Mass. It is thus important that the simpler, more readily understandable signs are used, wherever possible accompanied by appropriate, meaningful body language in terms of movement, pointing, facial expression and eye contact.

3. Careful preparation by the interpreter in familiarising him/herself with the prayers, readings and songs is essential for effective interpretation. Such preparation greatly helps the interpreter to cope with issues such as the fast tempo of certain songs and with words which are difficult to interpret spontaneously. Thus careful preparation assists in achieving concise, slow and comprehensible signing.

4. It is frequently useful to omit from the signed interpretation proper names and other words which require finger-spelling, or phrases which are not essential to the core message to be communicated. It is better to avoid as far as possible pauses in the signed interpretation so that the deaf people receive a continuous, coherent signed account of what is being spoken.

5. The aim of interpreting for deaf people during the Mass is their pastoral care. Thus, at appropriate times during the homily the interpreter may opt to insert some prayers or reflections which the priest has not spoken but which may be of assistance to deaf people in their spiritual life. In this sense pastoral interpreters are facilitators as well as standard interpreters.

6. We deaf people in the Philippines often wonder why more priests cannot find time to learn



sign language and spend some time with the deaf community. We are often faced with the worry of finding a priest to whom we can make our confession. We ask why there are not courses on the needs of deaf people in seminary studies, along with some exposure to sign language. We hope that with the help of God this situation may improve so that St. Paul's words (Rom 15:21), citing Isaiah (52:15), may bear fruit: "Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand." As I reflect on these prophetic words I realise the importance of our work with deaf persons in making Jesus' redemptory life and teachings known to them, who can so easily be left aside and devoid of Christian knowledge and understanding. Thus I find the work, whilst challenging, a great satisfaction and spiritual joy.

Along with me, hundreds of deaf people are grateful to the religious of the Congregation of the Little Mission for the Deaf, to the many benefactors in Italy and elsewhere, and to the volunteers with the Mission for the Deaf, for the educational, social and pastoral work which they carry out. We hope that more people in the

parishes will become involved in the work of the Mission to Help the Deaf people hidden away in their midst, thus breaking down the isolation of deaf people.

### **Part Two: Reflection on the Words of Jesus (Mark 7:24)**

Some 2,000 years ago, Jesus said the word "*Ephphatha*", that is, "Be opened", and thus healed the deaf-mute man of his disabilities of hearing and speech. In our days Jesus continues to ask us all to be opened or in other words to open ourselves to our neighbour. He continues to speak to our hearts and minds.

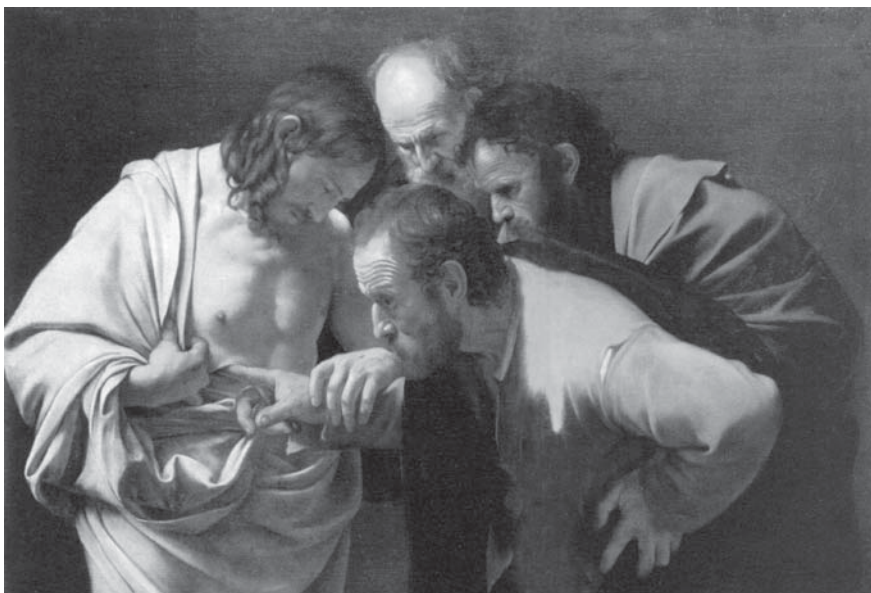
He continues to say "*Ephphatha*" to deaf people so that may be opened to the joys and hope precious to the Christian concept of daily living in a community united in love, in particular the Church community. He continues to say "*Ephphatha*" to the parents and relatives of deaf persons so that they may seek to bring love and acceptance to their deaf family members remembering the old adage "Charity begins at home". How can we say we wish to love others if we do not start with our own family mem-

bers? Where can deaf people look for love and acceptance if they cannot find these values in their own family? Jesus continues to say "*Ephphatha*" to us as a Church, as members of his living body, so that each of us may be open to welcome the deaf people in our midst as members of the same body of the Lord.

Jesus said that what we do for the hungry, the thirsty and the sick we also do for him (Mt 25:35-36). So we can be sure that whatever we can do to benefit deaf people, Christ will accept as being done for him. He speaks the word "*Ephphatha*" to us as a civic community so that we may be opened to the needs of deaf people among with regard to honouring their dignity and rights as fellow citizens.

My prayer is that Christ's word "*Ephphatha*" may bring healing into the lives of all, freeing us from the sterility of indifference to the needs of others and opening us all to the beautiful experience of solidarity with all, including our deaf brothers and sisters, in the Lord's name. May his word "*Ephphatha*" bring his good news of love and salvation to our deaf people.

Mr. PORFERIO GALON  
*Cebu City, the Philippines.*



CYRIL AXELROD

## 2.3 My Priestly Life and Experience in Pastoral Care with Deaf People

My Dear friends in Christ,

I am happy and honoured to give a paper at this conference. I am Father Cyril Axelrod, a man born deaf who became blind; a Redemptorist priest and an international preaching missionary to deaf people in the world. I engage in extensive travel in Africa, Asia, America and Europe, giving a retreat or a preaching mission to people. In every country, I have received the same statement from the deaf community which says: please tell the Church that you have learnt from us. In fact, I am not a professor of theology or a canon lawyer or a bishop but only a priest. I have one question in my mind. In my position what is the link between the Church and deaf people in the world?

I would like to make the five following points:

1. Deaf culture and sign language as a part of God's wisdom

serves as a bridge of communication of God's message of love and hope between the Church and deaf people.

2. Sign language needs recognition as one of the Church's languages. As the Church through the Pope speaks eight to fifteen spoken languages, sign language needs to be added to them for the Church to show respect and loving support for deaf people. This will help them to feel that there is a close relationship between the Church and themselves.

3. Vocation among deaf people to the priesthood or a religious Order has an importance to the Church as they serve the inclusive community. This needs encouragement on the part of bishops and the heads of religious Orders to accept and support them through inter-pastoral care with deaf people.

4 Most pastoral workers in the world depend on their personal ex-

perience and philosophy in developing pastoral care. This needs the build up of a network and the idea of developing an idea of international pastoral training and the spiritual formation of pastoral care for deaf people based on the Church, teaching, religious education, spiritual formation and basic theology which could lead to working together among pastoral workers in the world.

5. Canon law needs to include sign language as a language to be used in the administration of the sacraments and other activities.

Jesus said... Go and tell the people that you have learnt from ME.

Once again my question is...  
WHAT IS THE LINK BETWEEN  
THE CHURCH AND DEAF  
PEOPLE IN THE WORLD?

Rev. CYRIL AXELROD  
*South Africa*



NICOLE CLARK

## 2.4 Go and Make Disciples of all Nations...

Good afternoon everyone, I am so pleased to have the opportunity to speak with all of you, how wonderful it is for all of us to be here together. My name is Nicole Clark; I am from Sydney Australia and work for the Ephpheta Centre which is the catholic centre for the deaf.

My role at the Ephpheta centre is that of interpreter and assistant to the director. My duties include interpreting for our staff and our community, and liaising with the archdiocese. I also work on creating spiritual development opportunities for our deaf community, like sacramental preparation with individuals and groups, prayer days and retreats. It is important thing to let you know – I am not deaf, I have 100 percent of my hearing, I was not born into the deaf community but came to it as an adult.

Before I go on I am not sure how many of you are familiar with Australia. Recently WYD was held in Sydney so many people came to visit and saw one of the most beautiful cities in the world – Sydney! The first thing to know is that we are way down the bottom of the world – we are a very hot country. Our country is huge – just a little bit smaller than the US – but we only have 22 million people living in Australia – most people live close to the edges of our country almost no one lives inland – and no one lives in the very centre! We have more than ten thousand beaches!

Because our population is very small – our deaf community is also very small – about fifteen and a half thousand signing deaf live in Australia – and to break that down a little further: in the Archdiocese of Sydney, Parramatta and Broken Bay, where I work, there are about 2,000 deaf community members.

Today I wanted to speak to you about pastoral experience from an

Australian perspective, but in particular I will share some of the things that I have come to experience and learn myself. Largely the issues of leadership, access and empowerment.

As I said I work at the Ephpheta Centre with a team of five people – a mixture of deaf and hearing people. We have no religious on staff and have not had a full time chaplain for the deaf for some years now. When people ask what we do I find the easiest way to describe how we work is to say we are just like a local parish, but our parish borders are the size of the three dioceses we work in, a very large area; we do a lot of travelling. We provide all the sacramental services that any parish would provide but we also have a very big focus on visitation and pastoral care through advocacy and intervention. We help to run the only playgroup for deaf mothers in the state as well as many other social groups. We hold regular prayer groups and retreats as well as weekly Mass and other sacraments. At the moment we use supply priests and join parish Masses for our Sunday services. We rely on interpreters at every mass in our church year. The Ephpheta Centre is celebrating its thirtieth anniversary this year so we have had a wonderful year of celebrations.

Last year here in Rome I was lucky enough to attend the ICF's first international conference – there I heard many exceptional speakers and one in particular resounded with me: this presentation addressed the importance of self-determination and deaf leadership within the Catholic deaf community. This idea I could not agree with more.

About five years ago His Eminence George Cardinal Pell made the decision to place a deaf person in directorship of the Ephpheta

Centre. Previously the centre had been led by very capable and very good people – all of whom were people that could hear, and had a variety of understandings of deaf culture and sign language. We are one of the only organisations in Australia to be led by a deaf person. This change has had an incredible impact on our community and our work. While we have always had a very strong group of committed Catholic deaf community members, over recent years we have become more prominent in the deaf community and also in the archdiocese – I believe this to be because of the change in leadership. Deaf people and interpreters have become the norm around the offices of our archdiocese which has proven to be a powerful learning curve for all involved. Now I do not suggest that the Sydney archdiocese has become a utopia for deaf people – we are still working towards equality and access in many areas of church life but we have made much progress in the last five years.

At the end of the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus said “go and make disciples of all nations.... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”: go and do as I have taught you – I think he was speaking to each one of us! Having our centre and our community led from within is one of the most powerful changes we have made to our ministry and I am a firm believer in the strength of self-determination and I have seen the enormous effects of strong leadership on our community. Who else will fight harder, stand stronger than one who has a vested interest? Who will understand better than one who has walked the path of the people around?

A natural effect of having a deaf person in leadership was that im-



mediately the archdiocese had to recognise the need for a professional interpreter as a paid position – another first for us! This, too, we see as a huge step forward on the path of access and equality. When we think about access I believe that we have to think about the *quality of the access*, with the aim that the message received is as close as possible to the source message.

Now, I was born into the Catholic Church and have been surrounded by Catholic language all my life. I hold the highest interpreting qualification available in Australia for sign language interpreters. I started interpreting in the Mass about seven years ago.... again: remember the Church and the language of the Church is something that I am very comfortable and familiar with. Now I cannot tell you how shocked I was when I first started to attempt interpreting the Mass – I had not considered how complex the meaning of the words were that I had been rattling off for years! I think back to those early days and I wonder how clear the message was that the deaf people received... because to be honest I am not sure... Still now – after years interpreting the Mass – I am challenged by the complexity of Catholic text and constantly check and recheck myself over my choices when I interpret and go back to the same question – is the end message the same as source? This has caused me to consider: if it is hard for a practicing Catholic interpreter to interpret the Mass, imagine what it is like for an interpreter that is not familiar with Catholic language. Sometimes the task can be overwhelming – St. Jerome knew the importance of a correct translation. I am relieved that we have someone up there who understands and struggled over the perfect interpretation. In my experience I have come to realise just how critical the interpretation is to the pastoral experience of the people I serve. Ensuring that the beauty and eloquence of Catholic language is not lost in translation is vital! But, at the same time, we must be sure that the end message is clear and strong. I believe there is quite a lot

of work that can be done as regards interpreters from a pastoral perspective.

So from years of not quite understanding what the book of Leviticus is actually saying, and years of fumbling over many different versions of the Hail Mary because none of them seem quite right, I have come to realise that we who understand the workings of the Church as regards her lan-

ceived a huge blessing. The blessing for all involved was a wonderful feeling of experiencing what it feels like to be God's witnesses. So powerful was this experience that the community has decided to continue this every year; just recently we decided that 2010 this will be a special homeless centre in Sydney.

This decision is about the deaf community empowering themselves to say – it is not with our



guage need to support our interpreters as part of our pastoral care.

The last point I want to make is about a new project that has been established in our community that has brought many more fruits that we ever expected. During our Lenten Prayer Group we decided to try many different forms of prayer – formal prayer, group prayer, meditation, and active prayer. With a very strong social justice commitment we decided our prayer in action would be to help another community – this was a local Catholic indigenous community that owns a large property where traditional ceremonies are held. The property is run by an elderly woman and was in disrepair. Our community went to the property, trimmed trees, planted gardens, painted walls, cleared gutters and over all gave the whole property a huge overhaul.

After this, unexpectedly, we re-

hands out asking for help – we are here with our hands open offering help – very empowering – and a community-driven movement!

I hope that I have been able to give you a glimpse of an Australian pastoral perspective. Before I finish today I want to thank all of you for the opportunity to share my perspective; it is an honour and a blessing to do my job.

And to revisit my earlier comments as regards interpreters, I also ask you to all help me in congratulating and honouring all of the interpreters in the room: thank you for your efforts and your skill.

Mrs. NICOLE CLARK  
Interpreter for the Deaf/ Assistant to  
the Director of the Ephpheta Centre,  
the Catholic Ministry to the Deaf,  
Sydney, Australia

IAN ROBERTSON

## 2.5 “*Duc in altum*:” A Model for Education in Ministry

I come to this conference today aware that I am present as somewhat of an outsider. As you can see I am hearing, I come from a country with many resources and gifts. Therefore what I claim is not from within the experience of a deaf person, but from within the experience of one who has been tremendously gifted and called to journey with the deaf community.

“*Duc in altum*” (Lk 5:2-6), why begin with this particular passage of Scripture? Firstly I have learned that it is a metaphor for ministry within the deaf community. It is a call that may come after many years of seeming struggle and little gain, “put out into the deep.” It may come when something new seems possible in our area of service and ministry, but there are many doubts and uncertainties: “put out into the deep.” It may come at the end of a conference when the questions arise of “now what should we do?” Jesus response and call is again “put out into the deep.” In his life and the experience of his disciples it is at these times that the biggest catch is made!

It is precisely this sense of call that came some fourteen years ago through those who are deaf and hearing and minister with the deaf community in the United States. We have come this far, yet we see a real need for deaf people to receive the same education for ministry that their hearing counterparts have easy access to. Those involved with the School of Theology and Ministry at St. Thomas University in Miami, some of us involved in ministry with the deaf community were also to come together and “put out into the deep.” Many told us it would not be possible, there were many obstacles...

we “put out into the deep!” Over the intervening years we have developed a graduate degree in Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf. The first of its kind in the world that seeks to provide such a degree in pastoral ministry that has sign language (in this case American Sign language) as its first language option. One of the primary needs within the Deaf Church is for the education of leaders within pastoral ministry, who are then able to take up leadership roles within their communities. The majority of the students and graduates are deaf themselves. The partnership of St. Thomas University (Dr. Mercedes Iannone), local Deaf Ministry (Dr. Ian Robertson), in conjunction with a team of national experts in deaf ministry has proved a successful model for others to follow. This degree has enabled our graduates to seek leadership roles within their communities, possessing an educational experience equivalent to many others engages in full time ministry within the Church. Underpinning this experience is what we learn from both the field of theology and the social sciences.

From within the field of social sciences some important insights can be gleaned especially in understanding some core values of deaf culture that enable us to determine some best practices for both the university based experience and indeed for ministry within the deaf community in general. In the research I have conducted within the last few years, using first a methodology of in-depth qualitative interviews in a number of urban Catholic dioceses in the United States, and secondly a review of literature in a number of fields, I have been able to identify five core

values that pertain to this educational and pastoral issue.<sup>1</sup> These core values are: language, ability v. disability, education, family, and community. Language involves the importance and acceptance of ASL as a language and as the language of the deaf community here in the United States. Ability v. Disability refers to the importance placed by those who form the deaf community, that any discussions are seen in terms of language and culture, not in terms of disability. Though there are many who continue to insist that deaf people are disabled and in need of “fixing”, that is not the predominant reality within the deaf community. Third, the immediate need for equal opportunity and access to education at all levels. The history of the deaf community and education spans the range of almost no education, to mainstreaming efforts, to use of ASL in education. The fourth core value is the influence of family: deaf parents, the challenges of having hearing parents who have never experienced the world of the deaf before, those who celebrate deaf culture and those who resist it. The fifth core value is community, with all the multiplicity of relationships and commitments that the word implies.<sup>2</sup>

From within the field of theology one of the ways that cultural understanding of deaf people enables us to both educate and minister more effectively is to see deaf culture as a way to access theology from the margins. Many of the papers thus far have given us deep insights into the ways in which deaf people are in the world. It is a world that is predominately hearing and therefore different and at times experienced by those who are deaf as somewhat hostile or at

best uninformed. The question that arises is how best can the deaf community exist and thrive as a minority community within the hearing world and what in reality is a hearing church? The deaf narrative can stand alongside other narratives of communities and peoples who face similar challenges and share experiences of living and worshipping as minority communities living within a dominant "other" community. It has experienced the oppression of colonization, of misunderstanding and neglect similar to many other marginalized groups and peoples. One of the best comparative ways of understanding this is through the eyes of the Hispanic community within the United States. Virgilio Elizondo,<sup>3</sup> a Mexican-American priest/theologian, searches for a relationship with Christ, and an image of Christ that comes from within the experience of the people (Mexican). What had previously been given to the Mexican community was a relationship, an image that did not come from their own cultural experience; it was not true for them. Throughout the book Elizondo seeks ways to discover within the culture, context, language and religious expression of the people the relationship, image and presence of Christ. One of the areas that he focuses on is an understanding of marginalization both for the Mexican-American experience and also for Jesus himself. He recounts that Galilee was a place of cultural mix, *Mestizaje*. It was a sign of impurity in terms of culture, language, and religious expression. It was indeed distant from Jerusalem, the dominant force in these areas for the Jewish people. Yet for Elizondo it is precisely in and through this experience that the in-breaking of the grace of God comes in the person of Jesus. It is through this *Mestizaje* that Christ is able to transform the marginalized into inclusive members of God's family. It is this inside/outside experience that I also believe is true of the deaf community and the Church. The second point that directly impacts our discussion here is summed up by Miguel Diaz when he writes: "God's accompaniment of humanity, God's love of feeling for, and

reception of us as 'other,' is mediated by the face of the marginalized, especially the socio-culturally marginalized. Goizueta grounds this preferential understanding of grace, not in the marginalized and the poor, but rather in God's very self.... To be in the image of God is to overcome the exclusion of the marginalized."<sup>4</sup>

The above is indeed is the very underpinning of what we seek to do within the program at St. Thomas University. To provide quality theological and ministerial education that takes into account the culture, language and deep theological experience that abides within the deaf community. In so doing what we have seen is a model that is not only valid for the deaf community but one that finds resonance within the whole Church community as well. In ending I use the words of a deaf person in describing the experience of being church. It is such a description as this that continues to provide inspiration for all that we do: "But when the priest can sign, I am so much more connected than going through an interpreter. But if it's a full deaf church, like here at our church, it's everyone. It's 100% satisfactory. You know that Jesus is there. Jesus is signing, the readers are signing, the Eucharist is inside. Church, God, together... everybody is signing. I feel much more a part of the Church. The communication happens here. It's real."<sup>5</sup>

Dr. IAN ROBERTSON  
Penbroke Pines,  
Florida, USA

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I. ROBERTSON, "The Sacred Narratives of Deaf People with Implications for Renewed Pastoral Practice", Doctor of Ministry Thesis, Barry University, Miami Shores Fl. 2007.

<sup>2</sup> P. LADD, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2003. H. LANE, *A Journey into Deaf-World*, San Diego: Dawn Sign Press, 1996. H. LEWIS, "A Critical Examination of the Church and Deaf People: Toward a Deaf Liberation Theology", PhD Dissertation, University of Birmingham, England, 2002. P. McDONOUGH, "Collaborative Ministry in the Deaf Vineyard", Paper presented at ICF, International Conference, Mexico City, Mexico, 2003

<sup>3</sup> V. ELIZONDO, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican American Promise*, Orbis Books: Maryknoll, NY, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> M. DIAZ, *On Being Human: U.S. Hispanic and Rahnerian Perspectives*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001

<sup>5</sup> Interviews by author, 2007.

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VITTORINA CARLI

## 2.6 A Deaf Sister Involved in Catechesis

Since 2003, my Congregation, the 'Teaching Sisters of St. Dorothy Daughters of the Sacred Hearts in Vicenza', has created a small community dedicated solely to pastoral care for the deaf that has the same school buildings of the *Centro Effetà di Marola di Torri di Quartesolo* (VI). At the outset it was an educational structure specifically for deaf people. Today it is an integrated school.

This community is in line with the thinking of our Founder, Giovanni Antonio Farina,<sup>1</sup> who in 1840 said to his sisters: 'bring the deaf and dumb to the Lord so that they too, when the inviolable seal of their tongues has been broken, can learn to sing the song of praise and offer the incense of hearts'<sup>2</sup>

Personally I have been very happy because I have seen that this sign gave concrete form, and intensified my timid but burning desire, to dedicate my life to my deaf brethren. This dream was born in 1986.

Everything began with a clear, deep and suffered call which ended with my personal and decisive answer. Ever since I said to the Lord "Here I am, send me" (Is 6:8), my life has been totally changed. After my religious profession of 1986, led by the Holy Spirit but also helped by my catechistic sisters and by the diocesan ecclesiastical assistant of Vincenza, I planned with them the first catechistic meetings with all our deaf friends. The majority of them who began to attend, fortunately, I knew personally, because they had been my classmates and friends at my elementary, secondary and higher schools.

At the beginning of this pastoral activity I was fearful but the yearning of deaf people to be re-evangelised as regards the message of Jesus encouraged me and as each

year passed what was offered grew and grew because their requests increased, especially those of the most sensitive of them, who then gradually joined us at our side at the level of organisation. Indeed, to immediately begin a pathway of catechesis for adults could have appeared a risk and a utopia. But I threw myself into my new mission, reassured, as well, by what my Founder had written: 'God called you to a wonderful mission, go true apostles of the cross, I will accompany you!'.<sup>3</sup> I looked for and consulted books, handbooks on catechesis, and my sisters who were experts in pastoral care for the deaf, and in a serene way I began the re-evangelisation of my friends and brethren. The diocesan ecclesiastical assistant for deaf people stimulated me to make couples of engaged people aware that they should prepare themselves for the sacrament of marriage. Since then courses for engaged people and for couples have continued, and there has been a good attendance at these.

Now, my degree in religious sciences gave me a clearer and deeper vision of the *needs of man as regards God*. I feel that the Holy Spirit is guiding me in putting into practice the words of Jesus: 'Once there was a man who went out to sow corn' (Lk 8:5), 'he sleeps at night, is up and about during the day, and all the while the seeds are sprouting and growing. Yet he does not know how it happens' (Mk 4:27).

This mystery is constantly growing in me and comforts me because I understand that this pastoral activity '*corresponds to and implements*' the essential goal of the catechesis, namely *to make the Gospel known about in order to lead every Christian to celebrate, live and preach the Kingdom of Jesus*.

How? 1. I begin with news about current events and together we look at the world; 2. Then there is the kerugmatik moment: 'listen, look!', we discover the Bible; 3. a moment follows for internalisation with what is called the 'catequiz' moment; 4. a pause is taken, then there is the liturgical and celebratory moment: the 'thanks to the Lord!' with the Eucharist which at the end says: 'now it's up to me'. 'Go you as well to your deaf friends!';

In our pastoral mission we take advantage of the modern techniques of telecommunications in order to create a network between deaf people and to transmit with the velocity of e-mails a very large number of compact disk religious messages of Christian educational interest to the centres of the National Association for the Blind (ENS) or to parishes.

My first great satisfaction of an apostolic character took place when in the year 2005 I experienced with a very large number of Italian deaf people the 'World Youth Day' in Cologne in Germany. That crowd of young people gave enthusiasm to me and to my friends. We met deaf people from a very large number of countries! Then there was: Loreto, Rome, Poland, Lourdes, and the Holy Land.

The more the word of the Lord travels, the more one can attain the real purpose of pastoral care, namely having Christians live in an increasingly experiential way with Christ.<sup>4</sup>

The meetings of formation at the level of catechesis that we offer are planned in communion with the Apostolic Movement for Deaf People (MAS) and they take place once a month, normally on a Sunday, from October to June. The participants comes from Triveneto

and from other regions of Italy.

Many deaf young people still have a true religious sensitivity, even though some of them only take part in Holy Mass or participate out of a fellow feeling or because they want to spend time together. These meetings take place at the *Centro "Effetà" di Marola* in Vicenza and include: *in the morning*: welcoming, catechesis, group work or a catequiz; *in the afternoon*: cultural and recreational activity organised by *spazio MAS* with various techniques of formation together with the National Association for the Deaf (ENS) as well. This year, 2009/2010, on the occasion of the year for priests, we will address the subject 'John Mary Vianney, priest and catechist'. These meetings help people to reflect together on the word of God, to engage in dialogue about the difficulties connected with the experiences of the life of faith, which, indeed, is today charged with so many 'pros and cons'.

My reality as a 'deaf sister', an apostle among so many 'workers of the vineyard', generates wonder, amazement and joy in people with hearing as well. Every concept, in fact, passes by way of 'a language that can be well understood by the deaf', as a result of which the words of Jesus that are sown have a meaning of greater clarity, credibility and efficacy.

During the year the following are offered: a course on the Bible, a course for engaged couples, and days for couples.

At the national meeting of 2001 the following 'valuable challenge' of Don Gino Cortesi<sup>5</sup> was proposed: 'with all my heart I say to you: "Jesus, now, needs you! Jesus calls on you, Jesus calls you. Yes, you, you yourselves must be 'workers in the vineyard', which is wonderful but which today not greatly looked after. And yet there are thousands of deaf people who live in Italy (in the world they number millions...). Jesus loves you in particular and Jesus has confidence in you. I beseech you: do not be a disappointment for Jesus or for the Church, which is led today by the great heart and secure hand of Pope John Paul II."'"<sup>6</sup>

We now ask ourselves: how can a deaf person today prepare him-

self or herself so as to be an effective 'worker in the vineyard' of Jesus?

By attending diocesan and national courses for catechists or institutes of the 'religious sciences'.

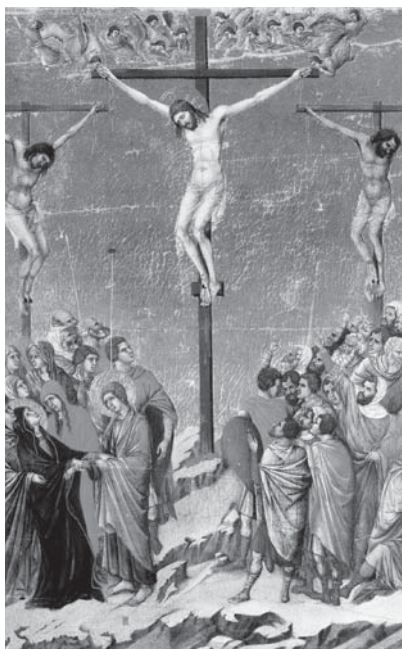
It is hoped that the Italian Bishops' Conferences will begin to make a 'contribution' for interpreters of sign language, at least as regards difficult subjects. There have already been various national meetings on the re-evangelisation of the deaf and progress has been made; small but comforting lights have already been lit in some Church communities.

Hope is always placed in the work of 'the few' who are active in the field of pastoral care for the deaf (priests, religious, members of the laity) but they are like those 'that remain of Israel', *convinced*, however, that God never forgets the 'least' and that He continues to intervene so that in the end Grace, *silent and invisible, will win*.

I will finish with an expression of great thanks to the Lord who this year gave me another deaf sister. I will now introduce her to you: she is Sister Tina Tarantino.

Sr. VITTORINA CARLI  
(a deaf person)

*The Teaching Sisters of St. Dorothy  
Daughters of the Sacred Hearts  
Vicenza, Italy.*



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Antonio Farina, a bishop first in Treviso and then Vicenza, the founder of the Teaching Sisters of St. Dorothy Daughters of the Sacred Hearts in Vicenza, was proclaimed Blessed on 4 November 2001 by Pope John Paul II because of his extraordinary spirituality and great apostolic generosity. He was born in Gambellara (VI) on 11 January 1803 to a profoundly Christian family and one that was well-off. On 14 January he received his priestly ordination. In 1883 he agreed to engage in the reorganisation of the School of Charity of the parish of St. Peter and thereby began the first school for working-class children in Vicenza. In 1836 he founded an institute for 'women teachers of proven vocation, consecrated to the Lord and dedicated entirely to the education of poor girls': the Teaching Sisters of St. Dorothy Daughters of the Sacred Hearts. Don Giovanni Antonio wanted his women religious to concern themselves with girls from good families as well, with the deaf and dumb and the blind, but also with care for the sick and the elderly in hospitals, in rest homes and at home. The last years of his life were marked by full recognitions of his apostolic activity and charity, but also by great suffering and unjust accusations to which he reacted with silence, inner calm and forgiveness. After his first illness of 1886 he lost his physical strength until he was struck by apoplexy which led to his death on 14 March 1888.

<sup>2</sup> FARINA, *Dentro l'ampiezza del suo cuore. Lezioni e discorsi del Fondatore Mons. G.A. Farina alle sue Suore* (Tip. Rumor, Vicenza, 1981), p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> FARINA, *Dentro l'ampiezza*, p. 273.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. BOLLIN, *L'annuncio del Vangelo ieri e oggi. Note di storia dell'evangelizzazione, della catechesi e dei catechismi*, lecture notes, Vicenza, academic year 2002-2003.

<sup>5</sup> Don Gino Cortesi, a diocesan priest and famous educator of the deaf and dumb, directed the *Pio Istituto di Bergamo* from 1964 to 1973. ZATINI, *Di tutto e di tutti circa il mondo della sordità* (Florence, 1994), p. 136.

<sup>6</sup> G. CORTESI, 'Effetà: piena comunione e valorizzazione delle persone sorde nella chiesa aperta al terzo millennio. Metodologia e linee operative', in *Per un salto di qualità*, pp. 18-29.

TERRY O'MEARA

### 3. The Deaf Person in the Life of the Church

The International Catholic Foundation for the Service of Deaf Persons (ICF) is a movement of communion among persons from various countries brought together by the Holy Spirit out of a common conviction that Deaf people are called to the fullness of a life in Christ's Body, which is the Church.

The mission of ICF is to support and promote the religious formation and pastoral care, of, with and by Deaf people within the Catholic Community. Support Chaplains, pastoral workers and catechists and seeks ways to bring the riches of their vocation with others in the Church and society so as to achieve a fuller expression of Eucharistic communion.

ICF supports deaf ministry. We wish to collaborate, share, as well as function as a clearing house for Deaf Ministry networking, support services and resources.

ICF collaborates with the St. Thomas University Institute of Pastoral Ministry, Master Program in Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf. Dr. Ian Robertson (a Board Member of ICF) is one of the Presenters at this Conference and teaches with the program.

ICF funds the Chair of Pastoral Ministry and Research with the Deaf at Leuven University, Belgium; the Chair is one of the Presenters at the Conference, Dr. Marcel Broesterhuizen.

ICF will move forward in our global Ministry efforts through our upcoming planned events of:

- July 2010- Encuentro Youth Conference; Valle de Bravo, México

- August 2011- World Youth Day/ Deaf Ministry Track; Madrid, Spain

- August 2012- Eucharistic Congress/Deaf Ministry Track; Dublin, Ireland

As the need for global collaboration of Deaf Ministry efforts expands, ICF stands at the ready to be the clearing house and central service entity facilitating this work. Since its inception in 1986, ICF has worked to:

- Raise awareness of Deaf peoples' presence in the Church and the gifts they have to offer;

- Serve as a resource for the development of religious formation and pastoral care, the formation of Chaplains, Pastoral Workers and Catechists, both Deaf and Hearing.

- Promote appropriate international gatherings

- Collaborate with other organizations having the same mission.



It is the desire and hope of the ICF to help the Pontifical Council in any future conscription of a Committee or other body to continue exploring the gifts, talents, as well as offer networking support services with and for Deaf Catholics. ICF stands ready to work in alliance with the Pontifical Council to identify Deaf persons to be a part of any future committee/body, as well as offer the services of ICF Staff and Board members.

It is through continued conjoined efforts that our Church will fulfill its longing to be truly OPEN (Ephphatha) to welcoming to the

Table all the people of God as full members in the Body of Christ.

As was stated by the American National Directory for Catechesis publish by the US Bishops' Conference:

"All persons... have the capacity to proclaim the Gospel and to be living witnesses to its truth within the community of faith and off valuable gifts... They are not just the recipients of catechesis – they are also its agents."

It is the Mission of the ICF, with the help, support and combined effort of the Pontifical Council to ensure this statement become a reality for all Deaf Catholics wishing to not only be welcomed into the Church, but be agents of their faith, allowing deaf persons leadership roles in the work of evangelization.

I would also like to take this opportunity to convey the profound thanks of the Board of the ICF for allowing the ICF to collaborate with the Pontifical Council in arranging this first ever Conference on Deafness in the Vatican. ICF wishes to thank Archbishop Zimowski and Bishop Redrado for their leadership and vision. May we also take this opportunity to thank Archbishop Kelly and Bishop Holley for their fervent and sustained support of the Foundation.

ICF was established to serve you. We look forward with great excitement to continuing the facilitation of global Deaf ministry efforts ensuring that indeed the Church is ALL the people of God.

Mr. TERRY O'MEARA  
Executive Director  
International Catholic Foundation  
for the Service of Deaf Persons  
USA.



ZYGMUNT ZIMOWSKI

## Ending of the Conference

### by H.E. Msgr. Zigmunt Zimowski

I would like at the end of this international conference on a subject of particular importance and interest, namely pastoral care for non-hearing people, to thank everyone and each individual. In a special way I thank His Eminence Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini who has honoured us today with his presence. Then I would like to thank all the speakers for their contributions, which have been appreciated by all of us, on the various questions and issues that go to make up the subject of our conference.

These three days of study have without doubt been illuminating both because of the scientific papers and contributions and because of the concrete comments and in-depth analyses at the level of pastoral care in the life of the Church.

The testimonies, in particular, have been truly moving and have demonstrated once again how the exclusion or marginalisation of people afflicted by disability, in this case the non-hearing, is first of all a loss for 'the others', that is to say for the community, both at a civil level and at a social and ecclesial level.

It has also emerged how the Church, on her centuries-old journey, has protected and supported non-hearing people and thus commenced a great and just ecclesial work of integration which has enriched her and has enriched all of us, and calls on us to continue in this direction looking for and finding new pathways and means for a pastoral care which is increasingly attentive in responding to the needs and requests of these children of the Church.

This conference, at its end, marks a new achievement which will be a point of departure. All of us, now, have the task of knocking

down this 'wall of silence' which is not produced by a hearing deficit but built around non-hearing people by the bricks of indifference and lack of interest.

Indeed, we have to ensure that deafness is not a reason for exclusion from the life of the community – whether ecclesial, civic or political – in any part of the globe. We must thus knock down all the obstacles that still hinder the progress of integration so that this disability receives all the attention that is

sion of the 2000 Jubilee for the disabled: "In the name of Christ, the Church commits herself to making herself for you increasingly a 'home of welcome'". And this is the message that we ask you to take, all of you who are present, to your respective countries at the end of this twenty-fourth international conference, which has seen us united and motivated to make our just contribution to the noble cause of our brothers and sisters who suffer from deafness.



needed, in all countries, from authorities and institutions.

In addition, from an ecclesial point of view, it is necessary to multiply our efforts so that in each bishops' conference, ecclesiastical province, diocese and parish there are reference points and referents for deaf people and so that these people themselves can become witnesses and bridges for other people with hearing deficits in the catechesis and ordinary pastoral care.

As John Paul II said on the occa-

This is an invitation that is also extended to you non-hearing people, remembering the words that were addressed to us yesterday by His Holiness Benedict XVI during the audience: 'You are not only the recipients of the proclaiming of the message of the Gospel, you are also, to the full, also its proclaimers, because of your baptism. Thus live every day as witnesses to the Lord in the contexts of your existence, making Christ and his Gospel known about. In this Year for Priests pray also for vocations so

that the Lord creates numerous and good ministers for the growth of ecclesial communities’.

I would like to outline the three levels of strategy that have emerged for the future development of recommendations:

1. The creation within the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers of a permanent study group on pastoral care for non-hearing people.

2. The organisation of a pilgrimage to Czestocova near the end of June in which volunteers can take part, above all else from Europe, as a continuation of this international conference.

3. Given that our Pontifical Council also has the task of following the policies of countries on subjects and issues connected with

health care, it is our intention to send these recommendations to the Minister of Health of Italy as well, thanking him for his paper and expressing our readiness to take part in the round table envisaged at his Ministry to study questions connected with the subject of hearing.

I would like here to already present the subject of the twenty-fifth international conference of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers which will take place next year in the Vatican on ‘Towards Fairer and More Human Health Care’ and which will centre around the inalienable dignity of the person, in the light of the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*.

Allow me to thank all those who have made possible the holding of

such a demanding event and in particular the Secretariat of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers which has worked with expertise and dedication for the success of this conference.

Let us now say the supplication and the act of praise to God and entrust deaf people in the world to the protection of Our Lady of Silence.

With these prayers I declare ended the proceedings of the twenty-fourth international conference and I invoke on all of you, with the help of Our Lady of Silence, the graces and blessings that you need in your ministries and your lives.

H.E. Msgr. ZYGMUNT ZIMOWSKI,  
President of the Pontifical Council for  
Health Care Workers,  
the Holy See.

