

**HOW CAN THE DEAF “HEAR” THE GOSPEL?:  
AN APPLICATION OF MARK 7:31-37**

**Submitted for BIBL 495.04 - Biblical Studies Senior Project  
Dr. Richard A. Pruitt  
North Central University  
Spring 2020**

by  
Tyler Sorenson  
NCU 0650  
763 (482)-0787  
[tmsorenson99@gmail.com](mailto:tmsorenson99@gmail.com)

Date Due: April 27th, 2020  
Date Submitted: April 25th, 2020

## INTRODUCTION

According to statistical data on the World Health Organization (WHO) website, there are currently 466 million people worldwide that has some form of hearing loss as of 2020, representing roughly 5% of the world population.<sup>1</sup> However, this number does not accurately reflect the number of people who are culturally Deaf. A large portion of the WHO hearing loss statistic data also include elderly people that had their hearing levels diminish as they grow older.

The estimation of Deaf population around the world tends to vary widely for several reasons. First among those is that most census agencies and governments view deafness as a disability, not as a language group or culture. Consequently, they don't distinguish between people with hearing disabilities and people who are culturally and linguistically Deaf.<sup>2</sup> Although they represent a small percentage of the worldwide population, the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) has narrowed the number of people who are culturally and linguistically Deaf to roughly around 70 million Deaf people worldwide.<sup>3</sup> It is a large people group that are scattered across the world.

---

<sup>1</sup> They are then classified as people with disabled hearing loss once their better ear exceeds a certain level of decibel loss: forty decibels for fifteen years or older, and thirty decibels for fourteen or younger. For more information on how the World Health Organization defines deafness. See "Deafness and Hearing Loss." No pages. 19 March 2020. Online: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/deafness-and-hearing-loss>

<sup>2</sup> "The Statistics: Deaf Around the World." No pages. 19 March 2020. Online: <https://doorinternational.org/statistics>. See also the criteria for disability on the U.S. Department of Labor webpage at <https://www.dol.gov/odep/faqs/general.htm#3>.

<sup>3</sup> See more information in the Humans Rights for the Deaf section on the World Federation of the Deaf webpage. No pages. 23 March 2020. Online: <https://wfdeaf.org/>

The distinction between deaf and Deaf is not a function necessarily of the degree of hearing loss nor even when the loss was incurred.<sup>4</sup> Rather, it may be a function of heritage and education—whether the individual’s parents were deaf or hearing and whether, if hearing, they encouraged their child to use sign language and associate with deaf or hard-of-hearing children, and so on.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, even those active in the deaf community disagree as to who exactly should be considered culturally deaf, and opinions can vary widely.<sup>6</sup>

As proven by the statistical data by the WHO and WFD, people who use their native sign language as their primary source of communication, and as well as being identified culturally with the Deaf community, only represent a small percentage of any and all community around the world. However, the unique aspect of the Deaf community is that they are found in all countries and all societies, regardless of the nation’s geographical location or tradition, their social class or religion, nor their age, gender, race, or ethnicity.<sup>7</sup> It is important to understand that the people who are deaf or use sign language as their primary form of communication are considered a *cultural* minority group. What has

---

<sup>4</sup> Traditionally and medically speaking, people that are called deaf with a lowercase “d” are typically received by audiences as people with some form of hearing loss. When referred to Deaf people with a capitalized “D,” it means that they do not solely have, or lack thereof, audible hearing but that they are also emotionally connected to the linguistic language of their native sign language and are fully ingrained in the cultural community of their Deaf community. “These communities have come to adopt Woodward’s formulation of ‘Deaf’ and to refer to themselves as ‘culturally Deaf.’” Taken from Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood* (Clevedon, U.K.: Multilingual Matters, 2003), 33; see also J. Woodward, *Implications for Sign Language Study among the Deaf*. Sign Language Studies (Silver Springs, MD: Linstok Press, 1972), for more information.

<sup>5</sup> G. Thomas Couser. *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 223.

<sup>6</sup> “The Statistics: Deaf Around the World.” No pages. 19 March 2020. Online: <https://doorinternational.org/statistics>.

<sup>7</sup> Irene W. Leigh, Jean F. Andrews, and Raychelle L. Harris. *Deaf Culture: Exploring Deaf Communities in the United States* (United States: Plural Publishing, Inc., 2016), 12-13.

been termed a communication disorder is entirely a matter of culture: deafness is a “disorder” only when the deaf are trying to communicate with the hearing, not when they communicate among themselves using sign language.<sup>8</sup> Since deaf people are considered a minority group, it is not surprising that they have been overlooked by the dominant majority group that Deaf people commonly refer to as “hearing people” in practically all areas of life, from education to social norms, from religious practices to cultural standards.

Due to a long history of inferior education and lack of a complete Bible in any sign language around the world, Deaf people are considered the largest unreached people group in the world.<sup>9</sup> The topic of this paper is to explore the theological implications for the Deaf people to understand the Gospel in their own sign language. Many people believe that the Deaf community around the world could be integrated into the modern, traditional churches that are dominated by the hearing community, however, they are two separate cultural communities with different ways in terms of how each community interprets Scripture. Although many hearing churches are more accessible than ever by offering the option of having their Sunday services interpreted by sign language interpreters, Deaf people still struggle to understand the theological meaning of the Bible because it is not the most effective way for them to learn in that kind of setting.

### *HISTORY OF OPPRESSION*

Throughout history, deaf people have long not been regarded by society in the same manner as their hearing counterparts. In the basest stereotype, speaking has been

---

<sup>8</sup> Couser, *Recovering Bodies*, 222. It should be noted that many Deaf people do not consider the *lack of hearing* causes them suffering. On the contrary, they frequently view those who do not use sign language as suffering because of their inability to appreciate the eloquence, beauty, and power of the Deaf sign language.

<sup>9</sup> “The Statistics: Deaf Around the World.” No pages. 19 March 2020. Online: <https://doorinternational.org/statistics>.

equated with the higher classes and higher intellect, signing with the lower. In the Ancient Greek and Roman time periods, in the case of deafness, physiological and cultural misunderstanding led to grim circumstances for some deaf people.<sup>10</sup> Deafness was perceived not as a physical handicap but as an impairment of reasoning and basic intelligence. In fact, deafness was indeed a curse, sometimes literally. The word “deaf” appears in the surviving Greek inscriptions almost exclusively as a curse, and a powerful one. The very concept of deafness was terrifying because it meant deprivation of verbal communication and perceived intelligence, and separation from the political and intellectual arena.<sup>11</sup> These were some of the earliest records of how society viewed deafness in the Greco-Roman world.

It continued through the next few hundred years where deaf people were considered unwanted. This was true during the Middle Ages when deaf people were not permitted to marry or participate in legal transactions.<sup>12</sup> The use of monasteries and nunneries as depositories for unwanted children was common. These unwanted children became oblates<sup>13</sup> and sometimes made up a large proportion of the monastery or convent community. Boswell records that 85 percent of the monks in one English monastery between 1030 and 1070 had come to the monastery as oblates.<sup>14</sup> Ulrich of Cluny said that in the eleventh century, parents “commit to monasteries any hump-backed, deformed, dull or

---

<sup>10</sup> Martha L. Rose. *The Staff of Oedipus: Transforming Disability in Ancient Greece* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 66.

<sup>11</sup> Rose, *The Staff of Oedipus*, 77.

<sup>12</sup> Leigh, Andrews, and Harris. *Deaf Culture*, 14.

<sup>13</sup> The term *oblate* comes from the Latin *oblatio*, meaning offering. Oblates were children who lived in the monastery and were cared for by the monks. They became part of the monastic community, serving the monks and in some cases becoming monks themselves.

<sup>14</sup> John Boswell. *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 297.

unpromising children they have.”<sup>15</sup> Despite the fact that a number of deaf people served as helpers to the monks and nuns, the Church barred deaf people from Holy Communion simply because they could not confess aloud.<sup>16</sup> It was harder for deaf people in the upper class and royal families where there was more education or higher communication but there were some deaf people that were lucky enough to work in fields or a craft that they learned from their family where there is not as much verbal conversation.

In 1880, one hundred and sixty-four delegates met at the Second International Congress of Teachers of the Deaf in Milan, where, “considering the incontestable superiority of speech over signs in restoring the deaf-mute to society,” they passed a declaration that “the oral method ought to be preferred to that of signs in the education of the deaf and dumb.”<sup>17</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, virtually all schools for the deaf in the United States had switched to pure oralism.<sup>18</sup> Oralism’s very inception was, in fact, a by-product of socio-economic motives. Father Abbé Giulio Tarra, the man who presided over the Milan Conference, was once known as a “master of the sign” and had an institute dedicated to the deaf-mute in Milan. However, he abandoned sign language and transformed the school into a “pure oral” school. He went as far as to say:

“Speech is addressed to the intellect, while gestures speak coarsely to the senses. I used signs for many years in my religious teaching, but decided definitely to give them up and adopt the pure oral system, because I became convinced that my pupils, instead of understanding the abstract ideas I intended to convey to them, were only placed in possession of grossly material images.”<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers*, 298. This included many deaf children that were abandoned at these monasteries because they were viewed as dull or unpromising.

<sup>16</sup> Leah Hager Cohen. *Train Go Sorry: Inside a Deaf World* (Bridgewater, NJ: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1994), 118.

<sup>17</sup> Cohen, *Train Go Sorry*, 120.

<sup>18</sup> Oralism. “The system of teaching deaf people to communicate by the use of speech and lip-reading rather than sign language.” *New Oxford American Dictionary*. 24 April, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Allen Fay, ed. *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb*, Vol. 26. (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1881), pp. 1-16.

Father Tarra was a huge advocate for oralism and played a part in swaying the delegates to ban sign language in the education field. The rising oralist ideology of the European mainland and the United States had varying effects elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> The Catholic Church maintained its influence in Ireland, and girls and boys were educated in sign language by silent orders until after World War II. The result was a highly literate but not particularly organized Deaf community.<sup>21</sup> The repercussions of mandating oralism in deaf schools did not successfully implement itself into every school but it certainly hindered the acceptance of sign language worldwide.

## DEAF CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

Deaf people value the cultural identity of the Deaf community. When a deaf person approaches another person for the first time, they judge primarily on whether or not the other person is deaf. Of lesser concern is the other person's religion, ethnicity, gender, social status, or nationality of the person. These aspects are of secondary concern. According to Kyle and Woll:

... there are severe difficulties in adequately characterizing the deaf community. It involves a shared language; it involves hearing loss; it involves social interaction and political relations; but all of these interrelate and interact with attitudes towards other deaf people. The choice to communicate and share information with other people must be seen as a primary feature, and because of the language used by members of the community, this communication will generally be restricted to other deaf people.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Leila Frances Monaghan. "A World's Eye View: Deaf Cultures in Global Perspective." Essay. Leila Frances Monaghan, et al, eds. Pages 1-24 in *Many Ways to Be Deaf: International Variation in Deaf Communities* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2003), 9.

<sup>21</sup> Monaghan, *Many Ways to Be Deaf*, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Jim G. Kyle and Bencie Woll. *Sign Language: the Study of Deaf People and Their Language* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 22.

This value is true even for those who hear. Take for example one who travels to a foreign country. The visitor seeks out those with whom they might converse, especially when needing direction, instruction, ordering food, or finding the restroom. Other aspects are secondary, a shared language is a paramount human need, and language—more than anything else—is what makes us human: the unique power of language to represent and share unbounded thoughts is critical to all human societies.<sup>23</sup> Language is critical to hearing and deaf people alike because their common language enables them to relate to each other.

Dr. Ila Parasnis takes the view that Deaf people should be regarded primarily as a cultural and language minority group rather than as individuals with an audiological disability.<sup>24</sup> Their experiences often overlap with the experiences of hearing minority group members but at other times are unique. This socio-linguistic view of Deaf people is not yet universally accepted, but it is gathering support among educators, linguists, and researchers involved in the education of deaf people.<sup>25</sup> Yet, it still falls short of governmental recognition of American Sign Language.

Most hearing people in society view deafness simply as a disability.<sup>26</sup> For many Deaf people, however, the main issue is one of language just as it is for those who hear. Others prefer to leave aside the language issue and concentrate on the view that Deaf

---

<sup>23</sup> W. Tecumseh Fitch. *The Evolution of Language* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ila Parasnis. *Cultural and Language Diversity and the Deaf Experience* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xi.

<sup>25</sup> Parasnis, *Cultural and Language Diversity and the Deaf Experience*, xi.

<sup>26</sup> Roger Hitching. *The Church and Deaf People: a Study of Identity, Communication and Relationships with Special Reference to the Ecclesiology of Jürgen Moltmann*. (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2003), 5. The U.S. Department of Labor also sees deafness or hearing impairment a form of disability.



people are a “cultural” minority group and use this as the primary defining characteristic.<sup>27</sup> Woodward, for example, states we should “attempt to describe Deaf people from the point of view of Deaf cultural values. Thus differences between Deaf and Hearing people can be seen as cultural differences not as deviations from a Hearing norm.”<sup>28</sup> Kyle and Woll stress that culture itself depends on language. They state, “Culture is distinct from community in that it includes the knowledge, belief, art, morals, and laws as well as the practices of members of the community. These are mainly mediated by language, so deaf culture, like all cultures, is carried through the language.”<sup>29</sup> This is why language cannot be deprived from people of any background, regardless if they are deaf or hearing, as the implications are often very harmful to the development of the brain.

A child’s experiences in the early years of life are pivotal for how the genes that govern various aspects of neurobiological development are expressed. Recent findings in developmental neuroscience are revealing just why and how these early experiences promote the development of a child’s core capabilities.<sup>30</sup> This research also tells us why it can be so difficult to alter a child’s developmental trajectory.<sup>31</sup> For once formed, the neural connections that underpin a child’s competencies can be difficult to modify. In other words, the child’s capacity to learn when they enter school is strongly influenced by the neural wiring that takes place in the early years of their life.

---

<sup>27</sup> Hitching, *The Church and Deaf People*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> James Woodward. “How You Gonna Get to Heaven If You Can't Talk With Jesus: The Educational Establishment vs. The Deaf Community.” Essay. In *How You Gonna Get to Heaven If You Can't Talk with Jesus: on Depathologizing Deafness* (Silver Spring, MD: T.J. Publishers, 1982), 11.

<sup>29</sup> Kyle and Woll, *Sign Language*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> M.N. McCain, J.F. Mustard, and Dr. S. Shanker. *Early Years Study 2: Putting Science into Action* (Toronto, ON: Council for Early Child Development; 2007), 13.

<sup>31</sup> McCain, Mustard, and Shanker. *Early Years Study 2*, 13.

The connections that are formed between neurons and between neural networks affect a child's ability to attend to a lesson; the speed at which they can process and retain information; the ability to recognize patterns; to absorb new information; to understand what others are thinking or feeling; or simply, to grasp and conform to the norms of classroom behavior.<sup>32</sup> The greater the synchrony between the subcortical and prefrontal systems in the child's brain, the more they will thrive in a school environment. But when a child enters school with constrictions in these local and long-range interconnections, this can significantly impair their ability to rise to the challenges to which they are exposed in school.<sup>33</sup> Highly verbal and attentive children go on to become successful students. Children with poor language or social skills find school a stressful experience and in many cases go on to develop behavioral, psychological and health problems.<sup>34</sup> It can be extremely difficult for them to be successful later in life.

National dictionaries of sign languages have been developed, sign languages have been included in school and university curricula, departments of sign language studies and deaf studies have been set up in universities, and the activities of the World Federation of the Deaf have caught the attention and imagination of governments and the wider public.<sup>35</sup> In spite of all these improvements, it is sad to note that the potential of Deaf children is still not being realized. Although they normally have the capacity to reach the same levels of achievement as hearing children, the average reading age of a Deaf person

---

<sup>32</sup> McCain, Mustard, and Shanker. *Early Years Study 2*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> McCain, Mustard, and Shanker. *Early Years Study 2*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> McCain, Mustard, and Shanker. *Early Years Study 2*, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Jan Branson and Don Miller. *Damned for Their Difference: the Cultural Construction of Deaf People as "Disabled": a Sociological History* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2002), ix.

leaving full-time education at 18 is approximately that of an 8-year-old hearing child.<sup>36</sup>

Many advocates for the Deaf hope to make changes to the current education system and improve the literacy of the Deaf community in the near future.<sup>37</sup>

### *IMPACT ON FAITH*

It has only been in the last few decades that churches all across North America and Europe are slowly becoming aware of the fact that they have Deaf people in their community. Moreover, it is widely recognized that Deaf people need a non-traditional form of communicating the Gospel.<sup>38</sup> The most common solution that they offer to bridge the gap between a hearing pastor and a few Deaf participants in the congregation is to hire a sign language interpreter. Their typical job is to stand off to the side of the stage and interpret the pastor's sermon. Hard-of-hearing people tend to be interested in assistive devices and corrective procedures that restore hearing and enable oral/aural communication, whereas profoundly deaf people are more interested in modifying the environment to accommodate their manual mode of communication—providing closed captions for TV, signers for speakers, and so on.<sup>39</sup> Thus hard-of-hearing people tend to locate, and seek to correct, the problem in the individual's lack of normal hearing, whereas Deaf people tend to locate, and seek to correct, the problem in society's lack of understanding and accommodation of their distinctive culture.

---

<sup>36</sup> Kyle and Woll, *Sign Language*, 235.

<sup>37</sup> See Elizabeth S. Mathews, *Language, Power, and Resistance: Mainstreaming Deaf Education* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2017), 132-141; and Danielle Bouvet, *The Path to Language: Bilingual Education for Deaf Children* (Multilingual Matters, 1990) for more information on improvements to the education system for deaf children.

<sup>38</sup> Ji-Houn Cho. "How Do We Interpret the Discourse of Jesus' Healing of the Deaf-Mute (Mark 7:31-37) From a Postmodern Perspective? A Discussion on the Necessity of a Korean Sign Language Translation." *BT* Vol. 63, No. 3 (2012): 148-149, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026009351206300304>

<sup>39</sup> Couser, *Recovering Bodies*, 223.

Since language and education had been limited for so many Deaf people for a long time, this had a terrible effect on the general knowledge of religion among the Deaf community. In 1975, Russo described that 37.5% of the Deaf adolescents in Catholic Schools for the Deaf did not know the three persons of Trinity, and the majority of those who went to Mass regularly, did not know the Church doctrine about the Eucharist, 8% thought that God could die just like a person, and the majority were of the opinion that God was in heaven and in the Church, but not outside of it.<sup>40</sup> There are serious gaps in religious knowledge and religious socialization. The situation has not improved. In the 90s a study conducted found that three quarters of the Deaf adolescents in their study did not have any relationship with a Church and were not interested in religion: only 15% believed in God, half of them went to Church at least once a year.<sup>41</sup> Another study also found that only 2% of all deaf people in California practice religion.<sup>42</sup> It is heartbreaking to know that there are still people, especially right here in America, that has never heard of Jesus Christ.

From a hearing perspective, this lack of religious involvement of the Deaf can be seen as a result of deafness. St. Augustine of Hippo stated: “This defect (deafness) is a serious obstacle for reception of the truths of faith, since, as the Apostle said, ‘*Fides est ex auditu*’ (literally: Faith comes from hearing).”<sup>43</sup> In the past the lack of religious involve-

---

<sup>40</sup> Anthony Russo. *The God of the Deaf Adolescent: An Inside View* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 156-60.

<sup>41</sup> Marcel Broesterhuizen, “Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf: From Care for the Hearing Impaired to Deaf Ministry,” Pages 1-11 in *The Gospel Preached by the Deaf: Proceedings of a Conference on Deaf Liberation Theology, held at the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium), May 19th, 2003*, ed. Marcel Broesterhuizen (Belgium: Isd, 2007), 3.

<sup>42</sup> Broesterhuizen, “Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf,” 4.

<sup>43</sup> St. Augustine. *Contra Julianum Pelagianum* III, 10.

ment was seen as a consequence of Deaf people's problems with spoken and written language acquisition and verbal abstraction. Most Deaf people using ASL "appear to use a completely different form of coding" to hearing people.<sup>44</sup> The way in which the brain deals with sign language, because it is spatial and visual, is different from the way in which the brain deals with spoken and written language.<sup>45</sup> They often had a difficult time understanding the Bible, whether by reading it or listening to someone else talk about it.

Because of their problems with spoken and written language, Deaf people were seen as too concrete and too perceptually bound to be able to understand the highly symbolic language of religion. The religious problem of the Deaf was seen and treated as a linguistic problem.<sup>46</sup> The problem goes deeper, however. In a research study of the National Catholic Office of the Deaf in the USA, Key and his coworkers report that many Deaf persons have difficulty in correlating their own life experiences with the stories of Scripture and Christian tradition.<sup>47</sup> The lack of correlation made it impossible for the Deaf people to absorb the deep lucrative theological meaning of Scripture and symbols of the Christian faith to their lives that they are not touched in their hearts.

Whilst there are some Deaf people who really know their sign language linguistically, there are not enough Deaf people who have a good understanding of theology, liturgy and Scriptures.<sup>48</sup> Not enough people, both Deaf and hearing, have the understanding or the skills necessary to translate the liturgical readings into indigenous sign language.

---

<sup>44</sup> Kyle and Woll, *Sign Language*, 261.

<sup>45</sup> Hitching, *The Church and Deaf People*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Broesterhuizen, "Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf," 4.

<sup>47</sup> William Key, Sr. A. Albrecht, and T. Coughlin. *Eye Centered: A Study on Spirituality of Deaf People with Implications for Pastoral Ministry* (Silver Spring, MD: National Catholic Office of the Deaf, 1992), 15.

<sup>48</sup> Peter McDonough, "Ministry Amongst Deaf People." Pages 53-77 in *The Gospel Preached by the Deaf*, ed. Marcel Broesterhuizen (Belgium: Isd, 2007), 59.

There is still a strong tendency among the readers/signers to use signs according to the grammatical structure of the spoken language which unfortunately fails to transmit clearly the full meaning embodied in the texts in a way that is natural and meaningful to Deaf people.<sup>49</sup> Normally, if they do not understand the message or a certain element of a sermon, the sermon was not designed to offer opportunities for clarification or questions. It is hard for any person to “connect the dots” between things they do not understand. In a conversation between two sign language users, one would normally ask for clarification or relevant/irrelevant questions in their dialogue, but a typical church sermon does not allow this opportunity. A deaf woman once said,

"For several years, I went to a church that provided an interpreter who was fairly skilled. I learned a lot but felt very uncomfortable during all those long, boring songs which hearing people love so much. The interpreter did her best to sign them clearly - but all that archaic language with ideas fitted together because they rhyme just didn't do anything for me! Also, the worship services were so "verbal", so many words without visual images and or any drama."<sup>50</sup>

This is just a result of two cultures mixed together in one congregation, things will make sense to one group but not the other, i.e. use of metaphors, allusions, high context versus low context.

The next two sections will demonstrate that a sermon can be communicated differently to accommodate Deaf people in a way that is different than the common traditional form of preaching and how the biblical passage of Mark 7:31-37 supports the evidence that to know Jesus Christ is through effective communication.

## DIALOGICAL PREACHING — A MODEL TEST-CASE 1

---

<sup>49</sup> McDonough, “Ministry Amongst Deaf People,” 59.

<sup>50</sup> Personal testimony taken from the Second Reading By the National Convention of Churches General Assembly. Policy: No Barriers for Deaf People in Churches. Adopted Nov. 12, 1997. <http://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/common-witness/1997/deaf-barriers.php>

Chinua Achebe relates a story about a white missionary who was visiting the Igbo town of Mbanta and he was preaching the Gospel through an interpreter and he “told them they worshipped false gods, gods of wood and stone. A deep murmur went through the crowd when he said this.”<sup>51</sup> The missionary continued his preaching and spoke about God as one who lived above and that everyone would meet Him at death for judgment. Achebe states,

At this point, an old man in the crowd said he had a question. “Which is this god of yours,” he asked. “The goddess of the earth, the god of the sky, Amadiora of the thunderbolt, or what?” The interpreter spoke to the white man and he immediately gave his answer. “All the gods you have named are not gods at all. They are gods of deceit who tell you to kill your fellows and destroy innocent children. There is only one true God and He has the earth, the sky, you and me and all of us.” “If we leave our gods and follow your god,” asked another man, “who will protect us from the anger of our neglected gods and ancestors?”

“Your gods are not alive and cannot do you any harm,” replied the white man. “They are pieces of wood and stone.”<sup>52</sup>

Many foreign preachers still present the gospel the same way today.<sup>53</sup> In many instances, these preachers do not really answer the people’s questions. Rather, they become condemning and judgmental. They find it easier to condemn the people’s religion and religious expressions than to explain to them who God truly is and how he desires that they worship Him.<sup>54</sup> This attitude makes dialogue difficult, if not impossible. This poor attempt of a dialogue is a typical example of how the early missionaries shared the gospel with the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria in the mid-nineteenth century.

---

<sup>51</sup> Chinua Achebe. *Things Fall Apart* (London, U.K.: Heinemann Educational Books, 1958), 102.

<sup>52</sup> Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 102-103.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Nleamadim DomNwachukwu. *Authentic African Christianity: An Inculturation Model for the Igbo* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 138.

<sup>54</sup> DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity*, 138.

Dialogue is an important aspect of Igbo life. They love to talk and they enjoy dialogue as a group.<sup>55</sup> “Dialogue” is a word derived from the Greek noun *dialogos*. Its verb form, *dialegomai*, means “to converse, reason, talk with ... to discourse, argue.”<sup>56</sup> Village squares and town halls are common sights in every Igbo community. Males and females, both young and old, constitute themselves into groups. These groups, which can be religious or social, provide avenues for people to interact with one another. When they meet, they talk and even solve difficult problems through conversation and dialogue because “*nwayo nwayo ka eji aracha ofe di oku* (it takes little sips to consume hot soup).”<sup>57</sup> Dialogue paves the way to “bridge-building” between the Igbo religion and Christianity.

Many of the early missionaries did not allow dialogue to take place between the preacher and the congregation which had a long-term negative impact on the general acceptance of Christianity among the Igbo. Communication was typically monological and Western cultural imposition on the Igbo culture was strongly implemented and involvement in the process of communication was minimal if not totally absent on the part of the Igbo inquirer.<sup>58</sup> This cultural imposition by both the British colonial government who had a presence in the area by business of trade, and some of the early missionaries, coupled with the lack of dialogical involvement by the Igbo Christian convert, resulted in surface level Christianity and lack of commitment to the Christian faith.

---

<sup>55</sup> DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity*, 136.

<sup>56</sup> Henry George Liddell. *Greek-English Lexicon*, abridged from *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 163.

<sup>57</sup> DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity*, 136.

<sup>58</sup> DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity*, 136.



Since the method of the delivery was monological, the people simply listened and responded to the preacher's invitation to either join the Church or get baptized. The process of sermon delivery did not give room for questions, and in many cases, the preacher did not necessarily have to clarify the points he raised during the sermon delivery.<sup>59</sup> Many who heard the missionaries preach did what the missionaries told them to do, joining the Church; many joined the Church, but not all who joined the Church understood who Christ was. One of the reasons for this lack of knowledge of the person of Christ appears to be the absence of questions in sermons.<sup>60</sup>

“To the Igbo, monological witness implies superiority and imperialism. Dialogue is between equals. It is good to share the universal Gospel and to hope that in total human freedom the other acknowledges Christ as Lord and Savior. In monological witness, we are sometimes tempted to identify our victory in logical argumentation or presentation with the victory of Christ. In dialogical witness, the concern is that the truth of God may appear, and any victory may be his alone.”<sup>61</sup>

Unlike the West, the Igbo and most other African peoples do not think in a vacuum. They do not rationalize from the known to the unknown. Therefore, it appears that the early missionaries did not provide adequate and culturally understandable philosophical and even theological concepts, symbols and metaphors for the new convert from Igbo religion to Christianity.<sup>62</sup>

When there is dialogue, parties are more likely to understand one another better, appropriate beliefs better, and commit more deeply to the new faith.<sup>63</sup> This dialogue is a

---

<sup>59</sup> DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity*, 163.

<sup>60</sup> DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity*, 163.

<sup>61</sup> Sriganda E. M. Arulampalam. *Toward an Exclusivistic Model of Dialogue in a Religiously Pluralistic World* (Louisville, KY: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994), 208-209.

<sup>62</sup> DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity*, 204.

<sup>63</sup> DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity*, 153.

process, but it is one which is different from “the bilateral ... instance of Christian theologizing in general and of ecumenical theologizing in particular.”<sup>64</sup> Rather, it is the type of dialogue which necessitates the Christian witness to truly and genuinely aspire “to have as much knowledge and experience about [for example] African heritage before a real dialogue of understanding can ensue.”<sup>65</sup> Its goal is genuine salvation of the individual and a culturally authentic Christianity.

In summary, the early Christian evangelists attempted to inculcate Christianity into the Igbo people through the traditional preaching methods that are widely accepted in the Western Culture without taking in consideration the local communication methods of how information were typically relayed among the Igbo. As a result, the Igbo did not respond to the call to change their lives by following Jesus with excitement and favor but disdain and unflattering because it did not connect with them on a personal level through effective communication. In the context of gospel communication to the Igbo, “dialogue” between preachers, teachers, evangelists and their church members or audiences is the principal road to attaining this status: re-evangelization of Igboland demands dialogical interactions.<sup>66</sup> The dialogical method of evangelism among the Igbo tribe proves that there are other ways to communicate or teach the Gospel to a group of people in a non-traditional monological way of preaching.

In summary, the non-traditional way of dialogical preaching was proven to be the most effective way of teaching the Bible to the Igbo, and the same thing could be done

---

<sup>64</sup> Nills Ehrenstrom and Gunther Gassman. *Confessions in Dialogue: A Survey of Bilateral Conversations among World Confessional Families 1959-1974* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1975), 130.

<sup>65</sup> Constantine D. Jathanna. *Dialogue in Community: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. Samartha* (Balmatta, India: Karnataka Theological Research Institute, 1982), 154.

<sup>66</sup> DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity*, 205.

for the Deaf people. The deep lucrative theological message of the Bible must be communicated through means that is convenient for Deaf people. The best example of effective communication that people can look to is the interaction between Jesus and the deaf man in Mark 7.

#### EXEGESIS OF MARK 7:31-37 — A MODEL TEST-CASE 2

The story of Jesus and the deaf man will be read from the perspective of the deaf man whom most biblical commentaries have marginalized. This is, however, not to say that this paper may not be a faithful member of the religious communities, it is the role of biblical exegetes and Bible translators to influence the flow of traditions in the direction of justice.<sup>67</sup> In terms of the postmodern perspective, once the core message of Mark 7:31-37 has been fully understood, it will show the necessity of translation of the Bible into sign languages.

**31** “Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. **32** There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.

**33** After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. **34** He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!” (which means “Be opened!”). **35** At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

**36** Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. **37** People were overwhelmed with amazement. “He has done everything well,” they said. “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak” (Mark 7:31-37).

When the people saw Jesus, they brought to Him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him (Mark 7:32). Imagine what

---

<sup>67</sup> Cho, “Jesus’ Healing of the Deaf-Mute,” 145.

could have been going through the mind of the deaf man, he had no idea what was going on, yet these people were dragging him somewhere. Although the text does not explicitly say so, they obviously wanted Jesus to heal him. “They begged” or *parakaleō*, showed their concern for him, and Jesus responded; the deaf man could make no intelligible request for himself.<sup>68</sup> Jesus took the man aside from the crowd so they were alone, it was also a sign to the deaf man that Jesus wanted to do something for him.

Many biblical commentaries say that Jesus took the man aside to preserve secrecy as He commanded this to the crowd in verse 36.<sup>69</sup> However, this does not seem likely when taken in consideration of what could be going through the deaf man’s mind. This must have been an uncomfortable situation for him considering that deaf people were often looked down upon during this time period. As one deaf person put it, in regards to being around other people, “It’s lonely ... I always want another person who knows sign language, who understands deaf people. Then I would be fine. But I hate [being] alone, even though there’s a lot of hearing people around.”<sup>70</sup> Deaf people do not like to be around people during a commotion if they have no idea what was going on, much less being at the center of one. Jesus could have easily healed him by simply laying a hand on him or even speaking a word from a distance, but instead, He does this amazing thing: He separates him from the crowd and communicates with him on a level that he could understand.

---

<sup>68</sup> Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss. *Mark. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2017), EBC edition, section IV.

<sup>69</sup> Wessel and Strauss. *Mark*, section IV. See also Robert H. Stein. *Mark. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 359.

<sup>70</sup> Susan B. Foster. *Employment Experiences of Deaf College Graduates: An Interview Study* (Rochester, NY: National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology, 1987), 7.

In Mark's Gospel, this is the first occurrence of the healing of a deaf person. Mark says that the man brought to Jesus was κωφόν καὶ μογιλάλον, "deaf and speaking with difficulty" (Mark 7:32). The lexical meaning of κωφός is described in the lexicons as follows:

1. *unable to articulate or speak, mute* Matt. 15:30-31; of Zechariah, Luke 1:22; with special reference to demonic interference, Matt. 9:32-33; 12:22; Luke 11:14;
2. *deaf* Matt. 11:5; Mark 7:32, 37; 9:25; Luke 7:22.<sup>71</sup>

strictly *blunt, dull*, as a weapon; (1) as incapable of speaking *mute* (Matt. 9:32); substantively (Matt. 15:31); (2) as incapable of hearing *deaf* (Mark 9:25); substantively (Matt. 11:5).<sup>72</sup>

Radical sense, blunt, dull, obtuse ...

1. *dumb, mute, ...*
2. after Hom., of men, *dumb*, Orac. ap. Hdt.: *deaf and dumb*, Id.
3. *deaf*, Lat. *surdus*, h. Hom., Aesch., etc.
4. of the mind, *dull, stupid ...*<sup>73</sup>

Κωφός occurs twelve times in the synoptic gospels. In four of those passages,<sup>74</sup> κωφός is related to a demon or unclean spirit.<sup>75</sup> However, it does not mean that all those

---

<sup>71</sup> Wilbur F. Gringrich. *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

<sup>72</sup> Timothy Friberg and Barbara Friberg. *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000.

<sup>73</sup> Henry George Liddell. *A Lexicon: Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996.

<sup>74</sup> Matt. 9:32; 12:22; Mark 9:25; Luke 11:14.

<sup>75</sup> The four passages related to a demon or unclean spirit are as follows: (1) ἄνθρωπον κωφόν δαιμονιζόμενον (a mute man possessed with a demon, Matt. 9:32); (2) δαιμονιζόμενος τυφλὸς καὶ κωφός (one possessed with a demon, blind and mute, Matt. 12:22); (3) τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ λέγων αὐτῷ, Τὸ ἄλαλον καὶ κωφόν πνεῦμα (the unclean spirit, the mute and deaf spirit, Mark 9:25); and (4) δαιμόνιον [καὶ αὐτὸ ἦν] κωφόν (a demon [that was] mute, Luke 11:14).

described as κωφός are possessed with a demon. Rather, someone possessed with a demon can be described as incapable of speaking and hearing.<sup>76</sup> Κωφός is used more specifically in our passage as “deaf,”<sup>77</sup> and implies someone with severely impaired hearing.<sup>78</sup> The traditional interpretation has been, however, influenced by the prejudice that the deaf person of Mark 7:31-37 may be possessed with a demon.<sup>79</sup> New Testament scholars like William L. Lane,<sup>80</sup> Robert A. Guelich,<sup>81</sup> and Morna D. Hooker<sup>82</sup> have said that the healing description “[his] ears were opened, his tongue was loosened” (Mark 7:35a) is exorcism language. However, we must recognize that Jesus communicates with him in his own way, different from exorcism; all the other exorcisms that Jesus performed took place in public, in front of people. Mark 7:35, “his ears were opened, and the bond of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly,” only gives the results of Jesus’ healing based on the condition described in verse 32.<sup>83</sup> In fact, the κωφός can be seen to become the main character, bringing the blessing associated with the time of God’s promises in Old Testament prophecies such as Isaiah 35:5-6. The rare word μογιλάλος occurs only here in the entire New Testament (Mark 7:35a), and only in Isaiah 35:5 in the LXX.<sup>84</sup> Mark’s use

---

<sup>76</sup> Cho, “Jesus’ Healing of the Deaf-Mute,” 146.

<sup>77</sup> Robert A. Guelich. *Mark 1-8:26*. Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 34A (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 392.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. 7:37; 9:25; C. S. Mann. *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible Vol. 27. (New York: Doubleday, 1986), 323.

<sup>79</sup> Cho, “Jesus’ Healing of the Deaf-Mute,” 146.

<sup>80</sup> William L. Lane. *The Gospel According to Mark*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 267.

<sup>81</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 394.

<sup>82</sup> Morna D. Hooker. *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark*. (London: A&C Black, 1991), 186.

<sup>83</sup> Cho, “Jesus’ Healing of the Deaf-Mute,” 146.

<sup>84</sup> Hooker, *A Commentary*, 186; Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 392; Mann, *A New Translation*, 323.

of an extremely rare word to describe the man's speech defect is almost certainly an allusion to Isaiah. 35:5b:

“Behold, your God will come *with* vengeance; the recompense of God will come, but He will save you.’ Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy” (Isaiah 35:4b-6a; NASB, 1977).

If the blind can see, the deaf can hear and the mute can speak, then God is surely among the people at that very moment.

Most of Jesus' actual healings take place through his authoritative word, but this time he uses special gestures for the healing of the deaf man. The gestures, in which Jesus “put His fingers into the man's ears, and He spat and touched his tongue” (Mark 7:33b), are related to the deaf-mute's condition.<sup>85</sup> His compassionate touch, calming and instructive words, and acknowledgement of His Father as the source of all restoration are the hallmarks of Jesus' way of caring for the person as a whole human being. This story recalls the intimacy of the scene in which God creates Adam by working the earth with His bare hands (Gen. 2:7).<sup>86</sup>

He put his fingers into his ears, as if he would syringe them, and fetch out that which stopped them up. He spit upon his own finger, and then touched his tongue, as if he would moisten his mouth, and so loosen that with which his tongue was tied; these were no causes that could in the least contribute to his cure, but only signs of the exerting of that power which Christ had in himself to cure him, for the encouraging of his faith, and theirs that brought him. The application was all from himself, it was his own fingers that he put into his ears, and his own spittle that he put upon his tongue; for he alone heals.”<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Cho, “Jesus' Healing of the Deaf-Mute,” 147.

<sup>86</sup> Kenneth (Lance) Tyler. “Principles of Jesus 'Healing Ministry.” *JACL* Vol. 7, No. 3 (2013): 9. <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1142&context=jacl>

<sup>87</sup> Matthew Henry. *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament. In Six Volumes ... By Matthew Henry ... Volume 5. containing Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John* (Edinburgh, UK: Bell and Bradfute, J. Dickson, and J. McCliesh, 1791), 415.

To the deaf man, it may not necessarily have been easy to understand the unusual intimate gesture. However, he must have been somewhat aware of the significance of all of Jesus' gestures. According to sign linguists, gesture is one of several elements of sign language; there are sign words, finger spelling, gesture, and sign markers.<sup>88</sup> Touching the man's ears and tongue might mean that Jesus intended to deal with these needs and the man had faith by allowing Jesus to pray for him.

Jesus' interactions with other people reveal that He truly understood them. A great example would be in Matthew 4, when Jesus called Simon Peter and Andrew to follow Him on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He used a metaphor that was meant only for fishermen to understand for He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19; NASB, 1977). There was also the story in Matthew 8, where a leper came to Jesus and asked Him to be healed. This was a man who everyone looked upon in horror and ran from his presence but Jesus did the opposite. Jesus did not turn away but He came to the leper, "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy" (Matt. 8:3a). In the case of Jesus and the deaf man, Jesus took him aside and communicated to him using symbolic signs, i.e. the pointing to his ears, the touching of his mouth, looking up to the heaven, and sighing. He did those things solely for the deaf man to understand what Jesus was doing, and Jesus was able to do this because He fully understood the pain and the ostracism the deaf man had gone through.

The calling of Simon Peter and Andrew, the healing of the leper and the deaf man shows that Jesus fully understands the people and their unique situations without Jesus

---

<sup>88</sup> Dong-il Suk. *A Linguistic Analysis of Korean Sign Language* [in Korean]. Daegu: Daegu University, 1989.



experiencing it Himself. He was not a fisherman, yet He used a fishing metaphor that they would understand; He was never a leper, yet He touched the leper because He knew they longed to be touched by another human being; and Jesus was not deaf, yet He knew that the deaf man longed to understand the world around him. These instances served as a testimony to who Jesus was as the Messiah, the power of the Holy Spirit working through Him for the glory of the Father. Unlike Foster's statement on how deaf people are always the "last to know,"<sup>89</sup> Jesus communicated with the deaf man alone so he would be the first to know. This reverses the role of being the last to know, specifically referring to the chatter among the country folk about the wondrous things that Jesus had done in the past, and instead was directly impacted by Jesus Himself.

The man can only see and touch and so Jesus does not speak with him, but rather simply looks up towards heaven in a physical act. Many Deaf people have explained that this story exemplifies someone who communicates with the Deaf man in a way he would have understood. The act of healing itself was accomplished with the word of liberation addressed not to the defective auditory organs but to the man as a whole person: *ephphatha* ("be opened").<sup>90</sup> Deaf people have noted that the word "*Ephphatha*" can easily be lip-read in a way that the Greek "*Dianoichtheti*" cannot (because the noises and sounds are created inside the mouth).<sup>91</sup> The most widely shared view is that *ephphatha* is Aramaic,

---

<sup>89</sup> Foster, *Employment Experiences*, 3.

<sup>90</sup> Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 267.

<sup>91</sup> Wayne Morris, "Christian Salvation in a Multi-Faith World: Challenging the Cult of Normalcy," Pages 121-131 in *Alternative Salvations: Engaging the Sacred and the Secular*, eds. Hannah Bacon, Wendy Dossett, and Steve Knowles. (Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 129.

although some scholars disagree, suggesting it is Hebrew.<sup>92</sup> Whether or not it was Aramaic or Hebrew, Jesus' choice of words was deliberate and only adds to the list of heartfelt elements that can be seen in this story.

When the crowd saw what Jesus had done for the deaf man, they were in awe and saw that it was good. The parallelism between the words of the crowd and Genesis 1:31 may have been unnoticed by the original speakers, but can hardly have escaped unseen by the Early Church.<sup>93</sup> This may be why the Church believed that deaf people were not a part of God's holy people because it was not good that the man was deaf, and then it was good that he was healed. They looked upon the man and thought it good as God had looked upon His creation in Genesis.<sup>94</sup> All God's creative works are perfect, and so is the manifestation of his Son's power. For the Lord said to Moses in Exodus 4, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord?" (Ex. 4:11). This is a comforting thought and a blessing for every man and woman, young and old, no matter what condition they might be in, to know that the Lord is God.

Likewise, through sign language, members of the Deaf community would be able to understand what Jesus says to them in the Bible. As Jesus was well aware, sign language is language that differs from any spoken language.<sup>95</sup> In order to participate in the

---

<sup>92</sup> Larry W. Hurtado. *Mark*. New International Biblical Commentary Vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983), 120. See also Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 267.

<sup>93</sup> R. A. Cole. *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary* (Nottingham: IVP, 2008), 195.

<sup>94</sup> The good work that God saw is referenced to Gen. 1:4.

<sup>95</sup> Cho, "Jesus' Healing of the Deaf-Mute," 148.

ministry of Jesus, we have to understand Jesus' healing method toward the deaf: sign language.<sup>96</sup> The first miracle in this story is not that the Deaf man can suddenly hear, but rather that for once there is someone who understands the life of a Deaf person and is able to communicate with him in a meaningful way.

It is proposed that this approach offers more possibilities for faithfully bringing the Bible into the present era, characterized as it is by postmodern features. It is an imaginative approach. The biblical reading from a postmodern perspective re-examines the identity of the marginalized deaf man, and puts his new role in Jesus' healing ministry at the center of the interpretation. The deaf man has been overshadowed and marginalized by the traditional interpretation, but ought to be important and central as a co-worker in Jesus' ministry as shown in the new interpretation.<sup>97</sup> The traditional interpretation has been influenced by the prejudice that the deaf man of Mark 7:31-37 is possessed by a demon and is "a fallen creation." However, from the perspective of post modernism, the role of the κωφός is completely subverted in Jesus' ministry. The κωφός becomes the sign that is to bring the blessing associated with the time of God's promise in Isaiah 35:5-6.<sup>98</sup> Jesus reassures us that no one's physical or mental hinderance can prevent them from bringing glory to God for when Jesus' disciples asked if it was the person's sin or his parents' sin that had rendered the man blind in John 9, Jesus said, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (Jn. 9:4).

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

---

<sup>96</sup> Cho, "Jesus' Healing of the Deaf-Mute," 148.

<sup>97</sup> Cho, "Jesus' Healing of the Deaf-Mute," 149.

<sup>98</sup> Cho, "Jesus' Healing of the Deaf-Mute," 150.

There are roughly 70 million people worldwide that are culturally and linguistically Deaf, yet less than 2% know Jesus Christ. This is a matter that can no longer be ignored and there is a huge need for more workers in His harvest field (Matt. 9:37). This includes educating people and churches who have no knowledge of Deaf people and their fascinating yet complicated community. It is only when the Bible is relayed to the Deaf community as a whole through the most effective means of communication will the world see God working within the people. The Spirit's evidential work is known through the community's testimony.<sup>99</sup> Through the printed Bible, they have trouble understanding the basics of the Christian faith. Therefore, the best way to communicate the Bible to the Deaf community is through their native sign language because the nature of sign language is properly understood by the Deaf community and it resonates with them on a level that only they can understand.

The dialogical preaching of the Igbo proved that preaching the gospels to a cultural group needs flexibility in order to achieve the highest level of understanding among the community and does not have to be solely restricted to the traditional style of preaching. This fits the criteria of the inculturation theory perfectly.

“It is ... an approach in mission/evangelization, and involves evangelizing a culture from within, that is to say, proclaiming the Good News to people from within the perspective of their culture.”<sup>100</sup>

In the famous *Ephphatha* passage of Mark 7 where Jesus healed the deaf man, Christ modeled what people need to do: He worked closely with the Deaf man aside from the crowd, He used visual and tactile means, and He restored the man to his community.

---

<sup>99</sup> Richard A. Pruitt, *Theology Through Community: Luke's Portrayal of the Role of the First-Century Community of Believers in Theological Creativity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 115.

<sup>100</sup> Justin S. Ukpong, “Christology and Inculturation: A New Testament Perspective,” Pages 40-41 in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellin (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 40-41.

Christ opened his world and challenged the rest of the world to work together to open the world of others, with honest dialogue, efficient training, financial backing, support of the ordination of Deaf persons, translation of the Bible into native sign languages, support and advocacy for the inclusion of the Deaf community on the governing bodies of church groups, and celebrating the gifts the Deaf community can offer as full members of the Body of Christ.<sup>101</sup>

A contributing factor to the reason why the Deaf community is largely unreached is due to the Church's approach to evangelism to Deaf people. The purpose of this paper is to offer a solution to the great divide between Deaf people and the Church. The body of Christ is not confined to one culture, but rather transcends all cultures and is made available to all people who want to join. The Church needs to reach Deaf people on their turf instead of making them come to the Church, just as Jesus had said to His disciples, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15).

The next step would be to train Christian leaders to teach the Gospel in a non-Western way of thinking to the vast majority of Deaf people around the world who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ. Since the number of Deaf people who are followers of Christ is extremely low combined with a lack of awareness in the Church of the desperate need for more workers in God's fields among the Deaf community, there are not enough resources in place for the Church to train more leaders or evangelists to the Deaf community. The goal is to encourage the Church to no longer look upon Deaf people as a

---

<sup>101</sup> Beth Lockard, "Biblical Foundations for Deaf Ministry from a Liberation Theology Viewpoint," Pages 69-77 in *The Gospel Preached by the Deaf*, ed. Marcel Broesterhuizen (Belgium: Isd, 2007), 76.

disability/benevolence ministry but to educate them and view that ministry as cross-cultural evangelism, and the best place to start is to understand the culture of the Deaf people.

## Bibliography

- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. London, U.K.: Heinemann Educational Books, 1958.
- Arulampalam, Srigananda E. M.. *Toward an Exclusivistic Model of Dialogue in a Religiously Pluralistic World*. Louisville, KY: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994.
- Branson, Jan, and Don Miller. *Damned for Their Difference: the Cultural Construction of Deaf People as "Disabled": a Sociological History*. Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2002.
- Bouvet, Danielle. *The Path to Language: Bilingual Education for Deaf Children*. Clevedon, U.K.: Multilingual Matters, 1990.
- Broesterhuizen, Marcel. "Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf: From Care for the Hearing Impaired to Deaf Ministry." Pages 1-11 in *The Gospel Preached by the Deaf: Proceedings of a Conference on Deaf Liberation Theology, held at the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium), May 19th, 2003*. Edited by Marcel Broesterhuizen. Belgium: Isd, 2007.
- McDonough, Peter. "Ministry Amongst Deaf People." Pages 53-77 in *The Gospel Preached by the Deaf: Proceedings of a Conference on Deaf Liberation Theology, held at the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium), May 19th, 2003*. Edited by Marcel Broesterhuizen. Belgium: Isd, 2007.
- Boswell, John. *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- Cho, Ji-Houn. "How Do We Interpret the Discourse of Jesus' Healing of the Deaf-Mute (Mark 7:31-37) From a Postmodern Perspective? A Discussion on the Necessity of a Korean Sign Language Translation." *BT* Vol. 63, No. 3 (2012): 143-151, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026009351206300304>
- Cohen, Leah Hager. *Train Go Sorry: inside a Deaf World*. Bridgewater, NJ: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1994.
- Cole, R. A.. *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*. Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2008.
- Couser, G. Thomas. *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997.
- DomNwachukwu, Peter Nlemadim. *Authentic African Christianity: An Inculturation Model for the Igbo*. New York: Peter Lang, 2000.

- Ehrenstrom, Nills, and Gunther Gassman. *Confessions in Dialogue: A Survey of Bilateral Conversations among World Confessional Families 1959-1974*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1975.
- Fay, Edward Allen, editor. *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb*. Vol. 26. (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1881), pp. 1-16.
- Fitch, W. Tecumseh. *The Evolution of Language*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Foster, Susan B.. *Employment Experiences of Deaf College Graduates: An Interview Study*. Rochester, NY: National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology, 1987.
- Friberg, Timothy, and Barbara Friberg. *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000.
- Gingrich, Wilbur F.. *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Guelich, Robert A.. *Mark 1-8:26*. Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 34A. Dallas: Word Books, 1989.
- Henry, Matthew. *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament. In Six Volumes ... By Matthew Henry ... Volume 5. containing Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*. Vol. 5. Edinburgh, UK: Bell and Bradfute, J. Dickson, and J. McCliesh, 1791.
- Hitching, Roger. *The Church and Deaf People: A Study of Identity, Communication and Relationships with Special Reference to the Ecclesiology of Jürgen Moltmann*. Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2003.
- Hooker, Morna D.. *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark*. London: A&C Black, 1991.
- Hurtado, Larry W. *Mark*. New International Biblical Commentary Vol. 2. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983.
- Jathanna, Constantine D.. *Dialogue in Community: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. Samartha*. Balmatta, India: Karnataka Theological Research Institute, 1982.
- Key, William, Sr. A. Albrecht, and T. Coughlin. *Eye Centered: A Study on Spirituality of Deaf People with Implications for Pastoral Ministry*. Silver Spring, MD: National Catholic Office of the Deaf, 1992.
- Kyle, Jim G., and Bencie Woll. *Sign Language: the Study of Deaf People and Their Language*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1988.



- Ladd, Paddy. *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*. Clevedon, U.K.: Multilingual Matters, 2003.
- Lane, William L.. *The Gospel According to Mark*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974.
- Leigh, Irene W., Jean F. Andrews, and Raychelle L. Harris. *Deaf Culture: Exploring Deaf Communities in the United States*. United States: Plural Publishing, Inc., 2016.
- Liddell, Henry George. *A Lexicon: Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996.
- Liddell, Henry George. *Greek-English Lexicon*, abridged from *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.
- Lockard, Beth. "Biblical Foundations for Deaf Ministry from a Liberation Theology Viewpoint," Pages 69-77 in *The Gospel Preached by the Deaf: Proceedings of a Conference on Deaf Liberation Theology, held at the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium), May 19th, 2003*. Edited by Marcel Broesterhuizen. Belgium: Isd, 2007.
- Mann, C. S.. *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible Vol. 27. New York: Doubleday, 1986.
- Mathews, Elizabeth S.. *Language, Power, and Resistance: Mainstreaming Deaf Education*. Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2017.
- McCain, M.N., J.F. Mustard, and Dr. S. Shanker. *Early Years Study 2: Putting Science into Action*. Toronto, ON: Council for Early Child Development; 2007.
- McDonough, Peter. "Ministry Amongst Deaf People." Pages 53-77 in *The Gospel Preached by the Deaf: Proceedings of a Conference on Deaf Liberation Theology, held at the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium), May 19th, 2003*. Edited by Marcel Broesterhuizen. Belgium: Isd, 2007.
- Monaghan, Leila Frances, Graham H. Turner, Constanze Schmaling, and Karen Nakamura, editors. *Many Ways to Be Deaf: International Variation in Deaf Communities*. Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2003.
- Morris, Wayne. "Christian Salvation in a Multi-Faith World: Challenging the Cult of Normalcy." Pages 121-131 in *Alternative Salvations: Engaging the Sacred and the Secular*. Edited by Hannah Bacon, Wendy Dossett, and Steve Knowles. Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.
- Parasnis, Ila. *Cultural and Language Diversity and the Deaf Experience*. Cambridge, U.K.: University Press, 1996.

- Pruitt, Richard A.. *Theology Through Community: Luke's Portrayal of the Role of the First-Century Community of Believers in Theological Creativity*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019.
- Rose, Martha L. *The Staff of Oedipus: Transforming Disability in Ancient Greece*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003.
- Russo, Anthony. *The God of the Deaf Adolescent: An Inside View*. New York: Paulist Press, 1975.
- St. Augustine. *Contra Julianum Pelagianum III*.
- Stein, Robert H.. *Mark*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Suk, Dong-il. *A Linguistic Analysis of Korean Sign Language* [in Korean]. Daegu: Daegu University, 1989.
- Tyler, Kenneth (Lance). "Principles of Jesus 'Healing Ministry.'" *JACL* Vol. 7, No. 3 (2013): 8-20. <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1142&context=jacl>
- Ukpong, Justin S.. "Christology and Inculturation: A New Testament Perspective." Pages 40-41 in *Paths of African Theology*. Edited by Rosino Gibellin. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994.
- Wessel, Walter W., and Mark L. Strauss. *Mark*. EBC. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2017.
- Woodward, James. *How You Gonna Get to Heaven If You Can't Talk with Jesus: on De-pathologizing Deafness*. Silver Spring, MD: T.J. Publishers, 1982.
- Woodward, James. *Implications for Sign Language Study among the Deaf*. Sign Language Studies. Silver Springs, MD: Linstok Press, 1972.