

Saturday 11 AM

Anne Vandenhoeck starts her lecture, saying how much she was inspired by the stories yesterday evening evoked by the question in small groups: “What was the last encounter as a chaplain that touched or involved your spirituality?” For Anne, it reminded her of the moment – at that time she was only 24 – in the hospital a father asked her “Where is your God now?”, just after he lost his son in surgery.

She refers to **Marie De Hennesel** and her interpretation of the experience of powerlessness as a means of connecting. Recently Anne was especially struck by **Marion Muller-Colard’s** wonderful book “L’autre Dieu. La Plainte, la Menace, la Grâce” and her understanding of suffering through the eyes of the Biblical Job. What Job really loses is not just material things, it is his “deal” with God that He assures that life will eventually turn out well for him. Job understands that God can no longer be seen as an “accountant” that rewards good with good, and bad with bad. At the bedside of her critically ill infant, she experiences a moment of deep gratefulness, a moment of grace, because of the gift of the life of her son – beyond grief and anxiety. God appears to her as the God of Life and Creation.

Regarding spirituality and research, there is this difficult question: can you measure spirituality? Anne starts stressing that certain things can indeed never really be measured, but that’s also the case for other disciplines and areas in life.

The first question remains: what is spirituality? The definition of this will depend on the perspective from which it is answered. A psychologist or a representative of another culture will define it differently from a theologian.

Anne refers to **the Salzburg 2014 Statement** on the link between spirituality and outcomes, and to three of these statements in particular:

1. “Chaplains are rooted in, and practise from, their own faith, beliefs and values.”

In other words: they use their spirituality as an instrument. They are “a beggar between the beggars”, offering a door to others to view their own spirituality. Research among American Veterans Health Administration who have suffered severe moral injuries, shows that the outcome in 37% was positive (an increase in empathy, a raised self-understanding and a deeper faith) and that in 30% these experience did not make either negative or positive changes, but they experienced resilience to live through these experience and combat trauma.

Anne refers to **Henri Nouwen’s** book “The Wounded Healer”: the core of spirituality is like a rock in the water. The water runs passed it and shapes it, but the core remains.

Growth-resilience and spiritual struggles have an impact on professional quality of life. Chaplains who experience these positively, also experience an increase in compassion satisfaction. Others who don’t, experience compassion-fatigue. Therefore it is really important to be very much aware of what nurtures the spirituality of the chaplain (also from the point of view of management!).

Anne states that the identity of spiritual care is placed in the lap of the chaplain (see Swinton, Liégeois): whatever you talk about with the patient, it is spiritual care because you are a spiritual caregiver.

2. “Chaplains must continually update their professional skills.”

For instance: research shows that it is important for patients to be able to talk about what is on their mind. So it turns out to be better to ask “what’s on your mind” or “what’s in your heart” instead of “how are you?” when entering a patient’s room, as a way of discernment for both chaplain and patient.

3. "Chaplains must reflect theologically and spiritually on their activities, cultural and social context."

This raises questions like: What is common in spiritual care? What are the changes in the landscape of spirituality? What kind of outcomes do our interventions produce? Is a translation of our spirituality needed? (How) do we meet the spiritual needs and resources of others? What kind of chaplains do we really need? What are spiritual requirements for chaplains?

All these questions point to another crucial question: Who will be the chaplain of the future, as the number of students is increasing? Questions like these are not reassuring, but they are like "the ants in the pants that keep you moving". Systems have to evolve, no doubt. But spirituality will always remain fundamental! The whole person of the chaplain is involved, including his/her spirituality.

11.30AM – discussion in small groups and panel discussion

The following questions from the small groups open a vivid, profound panel discussion:

- What should be in the job description of a chaplain?
- Is it okay that we all have our own definition of spirituality?
- What are the tools to measure the outcomes of spirituality to share with medical teams?
- How to learn the "language" of the other?
- What is the impact of non-verbal elements for you and for the outcome measures?
- What is the fine line between the psychological approach and strengths versus the spiritual approach?
- In light of the decline in religious practice and growth in spirituality, to what extent has church tradition impeded the work of chaplaincy and what might be done by way of reformation of spiritual caregivers in order to deal with this?
- Do you believe that everybody has spirituality and where is the border between feelings and spirituality?