

Laudatio Jean Jacques Delaey

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Prof. De Laey is born in Bruges in 1940. He graduated in medicine at the University of Ghent in 1966. He completed his residency in the department of ophthalmology under Professor Jules Francois and became an ophthalmologist in 1970. He joined the department in 1971 as a junior staff member. Professor Francois encouraged his young co-worker to explore the potential of a new technique: fluorescein angiography and introduced him to Pierre Amalric from Alby, France, not only a pioneer in the field of fluorescein angiography, but also the proud owner of a magnificent collection of historical ophthalmology books, which must have given added value to a training in Alby. He successfully introduced the new technique in our department and the rest is history: in 1976 Prof. De Laey was secretary of the organizing committee of the International Symposium on Fluorescein Angiography held in Ghent that same year. He became an active member of the FAN Club, the European Fluorescein angiography club and the founding father of the FAB Club, The Belgian Fluorescein Angiography Club. The explosion of knowledge gained from the new technique led to the creation of a new and distinct subspecialty in ophthalmology: medical retina. Prof. De Laey would become the indisputed leader of this field in Belgium

He defended his thesis successfully in 1978 and it was published in book form in 1979 with as title: "Fluoroangiographic study of the choroid in men"

Two years later, in 1979, he became professor in Ophthalmology, in 1987 full professor and in 1988 senior full professor at our university. In 1980 he succeeded to Professor Francois as director and chairman of the department of ophthalmology. It was, as he states himself, a prestigious but difficult heritage.

It is well known that administrative skills are one of his many talents and therefore he became a welcome board member, secretary, or president of many societies, councils, and committees both nationally and internationally. His CV mentions not less than 34 such mandates, some of them mainly honorary, most of them implicating huge responsibilities and a heavy workload. Let me just cite a few of them:

- medical director of the University Hospital from 1991 to 1999, a job he describes himself as the right punishment for someone guilty of the vilest crimes
- President of the European Board of Ophthalmology from 1994 to 1996
- Member of the “Hoge Raad van genees heren –specialisten en huisartsen, from 1997 on
- External examiner for the Royal college of Ophthalmology of Ireland
- President of the Standard Committee of the International Council of Ophthalmology from 2002 to 2006
- Program Secretary of the European association for Vision and Eye Research, EVER, from 1999 to 2004

Professor De Laey was the organizer or member of the scientific committee of 24 Symposia, Courses and Conferences in Belgium and abroad. Ghent hosted several prestigious conferences thanks to his efforts: the Conference of the International Research group on Colour Vision Deficiencies in 1997, the Michaelson Symposium in 2005 and the EUPO course on Retinal Diseases in 2006.

The EUPO course which he organized three times, exemplifies his role as a teacher. Professor De Laey's enthusiasm for teaching is reflected by the fact that he gave more than 120 lectures in Belgium and more than 240 lectures abroad, in every continent of the world, underscoring his international reputation in medical retina.

Chairman, administrator, organizer, teacher, but also prolific scientific writer.

Professor de Laey contributed as author or co-author to five books, among them a classic work on vascular tumours and malformations of the Ocular Fundus in collaboration with Professor Hanssens. He has published more than 260 papers in peer reviewed journals, mainly on retinal disorders. He was a precursor in the use of indocyanine green angiography in the mid- eighties and the first papers on this subject published with Dr. Hayashi from Japan already belong to the history of our specialty. To his scientific credit we must add that he was managing Editor of the Journal International Ophthalmology from 1978 to 2000 and member of the editorial board of 10 other ophthalmology journals.

Professor De Laey also stimulated and guided others to do scientific work: he was the promotor or copromotor of 11 doctoral theses. Seven of these were written by former or present staff members. Needless to say that he acted as an extramuros member of many theses in Belgium, France and the Netherlands.

Such a broad range of responsibilities and activities inevitably resulted in a number of honours and awards. Let me just cite a few. Professor De Laey delivered the Montgomery Memorial Lecture in Dublin, The European Guest Lecture in Oxford, and the Saudi Ophthalmological Society Gold medal lecture. He is honorary fellow of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists of the United Kingdom and of the college of Ophthalmologist of South Africa. He is an honorary member of the Club Jules Gonin and of the Instituto Barraquer. Last year he was the recipient of the Donders Medal, the most prestigious international honour given by the Ophthalmological Society of the Netherlands. Professor De Laey retired in 2006 but ophthalmology did not disappear from his life as he got elected secretary-general of the International Council of

Ophthalmology. It is an honour for Belgian ophthalmology to have our “éminence grise” in such an important position.

Professor De Laey is a compulsive reader of non-fiction and his interests range from linguistics to geography, politics, and of course history. His knowledge of medieval history is legendary and on several occasions he has combined his interest in ophthalmology with his passion for history. At the occasion of the biannual scientific reunion of the former residents of our department in 2005, professor De Laey gave a wonderful overview of the development of ophthalmic care in Ghent from the nineteenth century till today that started with a discussion of the importance of the struggle against trachoma, the so called “ophthalmie militaire”, and its role in the development of the ophthalmic care system in the Netherlands and Belgium as well as in the whole of Europe. In 2007 he delivered a prestigious keynote lecture at the EVER meeting (European Association for Vision and Eye research) on the history of the ophthalmoscope. For this audience it might be of interest to mention that these two topics, l’ophthalmie militaire and the use of the ophthalmoscope invented and introduced by Helmholtz in 1851, were the official subjects of the first international conference in ophthalmology held in 1857 in Brussels. The third topic of the conference addressed the mechanism of accommodation discussed at the conference by Cornelius Donders himself.

I believe it is clear that Professor De Laey has the right credentials to deliver this Sarton lecture and it is my privilege to introduce him. His lecture will scrutinize Vesalius’ understanding of the eye and the visual pathways and we are all anxious to hear how Vesalius, a giant in the history of Belgian medical science, stands up against the critical reading of a contemporary expert.