

Catechesis and liturgy with persons who have intellectual disabilities present a pastoral challenge. One is reminded of the ancient grave markers which often bore the words, "I was not, I was, I am not, I care not." So popular was this epitaph that, eliminating the second clause, the marker often just bore the six letters: n-f-n-s-n-c, for the Latin words *non fui, non sum, non curo*, meaning, "I was not, I am not, I care not." 1

In a similar way, the needs of persons with intellectual disabilities can become *invisible, non-existent* within a parish, though the data tells us otherwise.

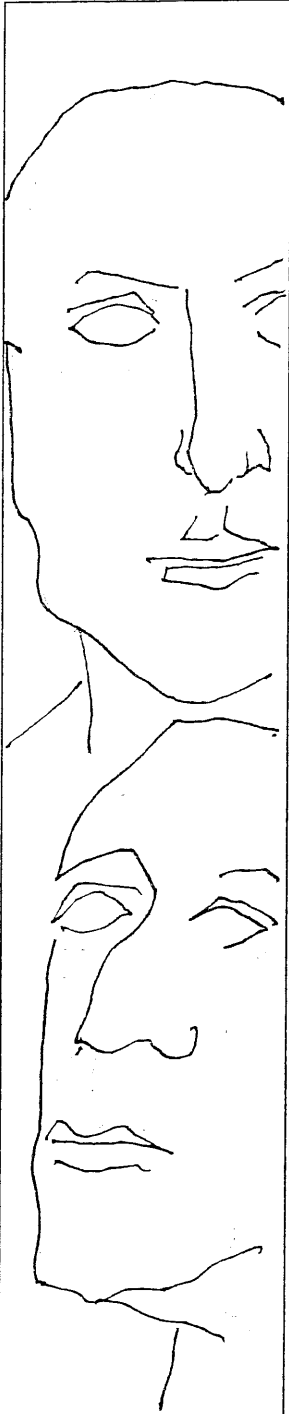
In canonical and sacramental life, there is the singular adage: *ecclesia supplet*, meaning that the community of believers supplements, fills in, for whatever is lacking in faith. As helpful as this view is, it can also be an excuse; a presumption that persons with intellectual disabilities cannot have a spiritual life.

Fr. Euchariste Paulhus has written extensively on this subject: the capacity of persons with disabilities to have a spiritual life. 2 With temerity, I distill an aspect of his work which he approaches both objectively and subjectively. He outlines four realities as essential in the life of the spirit: *sacred, theological, christological and ecclesial realities*.

The Sacred

The life of the spirit in anyone exists in reference to something that is transcendent, that is totally other, infinite, in a word, sacred. The sacred presupposes that one rise above daily life, that one tend toward the absolute. The spiritual life achieves a profound relationship with the sacred. This relationship is filled with respect and irresistible attractiveness because the transcendence of God involves mystery. This mystery fascinates us and at the same time causes fear.

An inductive catechesis melts away the impersonal - insists on being personal. A liturgy that is automatic, perfunctory, not encased in silence can leave one cold and disengaged from others. Whereas in a personal liturgy, we cannot escape those around us. Singing with others in praise lifts us out of ourselves. In the catechesis of the Method *Vivre* and in true ritual, we sense where we are, with whom we are. We feel a serenity there in catechesis and ritual. We engage what we are embarking on. Tension is there. But the evocational demands in catechesis and the boundaries of ritual allow a containment and simultaneously an opening.



ARE
CAPABLE
OF

Paulhus sees that reflection gives us the advantage of being able to recall and respectively analyse the ecstasy that transcendence awakens. Yet to be open to the sacred and its essential active qualities depends less on the rational ability of a person than on that person's intuitive capacity. Spred catechesis and the Eucharistic liturgy are oxygen for our friends. They are put in touch with the most important relationship in life, in face of the incomprehensible God manifest in creation and in others. Yet, this is a quieting experience.

Theological Reality

Paulhus uses the term *theological* to imply an impulse toward God in faith, hope or love. In 1 Corinthians 13:12, St. Paul writes, "I shall know even as I have been known," meaning one can know God because God first knows us. True sanctity, a vital relationship with a loving God, a personal God, is only realized in the gifts of faith, hope and love. Far from supressing the sacred, grace gives a new strength and a new dimension: love becomes sacred. Catechesis and worship henceforth will be a relationship of a human person with a person God who speaks and who loves.

Theology manuals prefer to speak of "revelation" rather than of the "Word of God." So, the Word of God can be reduced to a collection of formulas, or is considered as "Holy Scripture" a mere communication of ideas (an anemic intellectualism). For the pious Jew, the Word of God signifies an intensely living reality, not merely ideas, but a personal intervention in the person's life. It is the primary experience of someone else entering into our life. For Israel, the Word of God is not only an action, a personal intervention, a presence which asserts and imposes itself, but also produces what it proclaims by its own power. It intervenes not simply to modify pre-existing reality, but, in a radical way to cause its existence. It has nothing to do with abstractions; it has everything to do with God's knowledge of us, being concerned for us, loving us, showering gifts on us. It goes hand in hand with a preferential choice, election, of a person, a boundless love bestowed, an unmerited love. Because God knows us, we are called to have an obedient faith. *We know* God only by believing - so that everything that is not God, does not proceed from his Word will fade. To know God as we have been known is ultimately to acknowledge the love with which he loves us and pursues us to the ends of the earth. It is to consent to it. It is to surrender to it. It is to abandon ourselves to the love with which he loves us, responding to his love by the very force of his communicative love.³

Can this reality develop in a person with intellectual and developmental disabilities? Paulhus offers distinctions between pre-conscious and conscious thought. With Baptism, a person becomes a member of a community. This is the primary threshold of the Christian life. This is the foundation for a pastoral obligation to cultivate the seed of faith. Paulhus explores the role of symbiosis with the mother as evidence of this primary threshold of Christian life. At the other extreme end from the primary threshold is adult, mature, conscious faith. We need to be clear that there are possibilities and limitations to the faith development of each one depending on the age, development and capacity of the person.

Further, Paulhus draws a line between abstraction and intuitive thought. Human intelligence can reason according to universal principles and affirm deductions as conclusion from these principles. Whereas intuitive thought has a direct and global knowledge of reality which corresponds to the person's profound needs.

Christological Reality

In history God chose a people whom he invested with a mission to prepare for Christ. People began to become aware that God is unique - that He is great and near at the same time. This God, we believe, at a given point became human. He offered himself in sacrifice to redeem us from the darkness of sin; then He arose and shares His Divine life so as to lead us all to the Father. Christ becomes our Way, our Truth, our Life on the journey to the Father. The Spirit of Love between the Father and the Son - the Holy Spirit - becomes our guide.

Only with Christ will we learn that God is Trinity. All preceding phases were assumed by the revelation of Christ and we can say that all religions are contained in an eminent manner in the supreme religion of the Gospel. Catechesis and Ritual must be related to the Trinitarian revelation of Christ. Then we can call it a Christological or Christian life.

An awareness of Christ brings us essentially to an awareness of God who is Father. Christ in assuming a humanity is always turned toward the Father because he is Son. Jesus, the Son, knows the Father and the Father knows him. With reason we can come to this insight, but in living as children of God, we adhere intuitively in faith to the mystery of the Incarnation.

With St. Ignatius of Antioch I hear, "a living water that speaks within me saying, 'Come to the Father.'" The thoughts I have when I ponder a Spred Catechesis or Liturgy: Why did Jesus become a Christ who so rigorously sought to be deconstructed? Why do the four suffering servant passages of Isaiah present Him so well and at the same time savage all the presumptions I carry around with me about greatness? Why does he seek out the ignorant? Why does he give the intelligentia such a hard time?

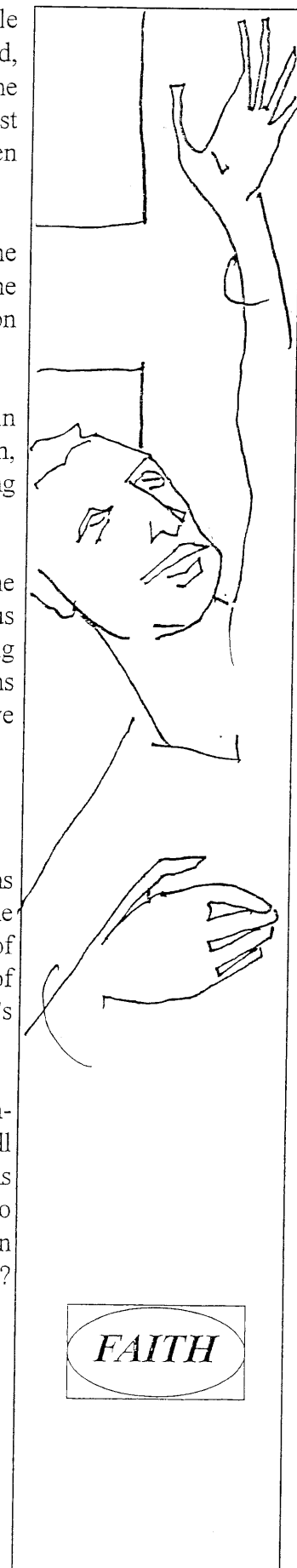
Ecclesial Reality

Revealing the Trinity, Christ also preached the kingdom. This intrinsically spiritual kingdom begins to take form here below. Christ mystically associates himself with a community of which he is the head. This church he gives the mission of building up his own body and of maintaining the work of revelation to the end of time. The spiritual life, catechesis and liturgy, linked to this revelation of Christ must be realized with, by and in the heart of the community. For this reason a person's religion is communitarian or ecclesial.

An awareness of the church goes beyond human reason in that we are called to enter into communion with all Christians. It is necessary to study discursively the theology of the church. It is still more necessary to live intuitively in communion of spirit in the body of Christ. How come persons with intellectual disabilities offer such a strong witness and challenge? Why is their affective life so much more available to them than mine is? Why do they disturb me, and make me question achievements? What do they produce but themselves? Why can't we escape their disarmament?

Rev. James H. McCarthy
Director, Spred Chicago

1. Gorman, Michael. The Apostle of the the Crucified Lord. Eerdman, 2004
2. Paulhus, Euchariste. L'Educabilite Religieuse Des Deficients Mentaux, Vitte, Lyon. 1962
3. Louis Boyer. Eucharist, University of Notre Dame Press, N.D. Indiana, 1968



SPRED CALENDAR

SPRED FAMILY LITURGIES

Nov. 6, Dec. 4, Feb. 5, March 4, April 1, May 6

SPRED TRAINING

Role Orientation (Resource Days)

For parish chairpersons, leaders and activity catechists in English and Spanish
Spred Center, 2956 So Lowe, Chicago
312-842-1039 Third floor over the church
Saturdays, Oct. 15, 22 1:00 to 6:00

FUTURE PLANNING

Please let us know if we can be of assistance if you are thinking of including Spred in your estate plans.
Spred 312-842-1039

MAMRE AUTUMN DINNER DANCE

Saturday, Nov. 19, 2011
Crystal Sky at 47th and Joliet Road
Countryside

OBSERVATION

6-10 Mondays 6:00 p.m. Oct. 17, Nov. 14, 28
11-16 Tuesday 7:00 p.m. Oct. 11, Nov. 1, 15, 29
17-21 Tuesday 7:00 p.m. Oct. 11, Nov. 1, 15, 29
22+ Mondays 7:00 p.m. Oct. 17, Nov. 14, 28

Helper Catechist Training

Spred Center, 2956 So Lowe, Chicago, 312-842-1039
Saturday, Nov. 12, 1:00 to 6:00 p.m.
English; Sr. Susanne Gallagher, Mary Claps,
Spanish; Ramiro and Eva Hernandez

Queen of Angels Spred Center,
Saturday, Oct. 8, 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
4412 Western Ave, 2nd floor, Chicago
English; Mary Ward, 773-685-9423

St. Francis de Sales Spred Center
Saturday, Feb. 4, 2012, 11:00 to 4:00
33 S Buesching Rd (lower church) Lake Zurich II
English; Kelly Corrigan, 847-726-4742

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