

Over the years we have described Chicago Spred in various ways:
 by what we do - Animation, Education, Publication, and Materials
 how we exist in the Archdiocese - Ministry, Agency, and Place
 by our mode of catechesis - Mentality, Method and Program

Though helpful, none of the descriptions are complete. Still, in the order of importance, I would focus on **Mentality** which is the foundation of the Method Vivre. Recently I re-read a paper that Fr. Eucharist Paulhus, our mentor, delivered in Chicago some years ago.⁽¹⁾ I paraphrase it, as its importance is hard to overemphasize. He puts light on what we mean when we say Mentality.

Paulhus states that the problem of faith education for persons with intellectual disabilities might bring us great fear. We are forced to unite psychology and education, and if we talk about faith, we must add another dimension, theology. The uniting of psychology and education is beautiful but very difficult. It is embraced because it is supposed to teach new skills for catechetical work. Psychology will help us to find the truth in education, but not skill. Psychology can make education more difficult but more truthful. It requires each of us to find the real problem of the person with limitations in order to help him according to his capacities.

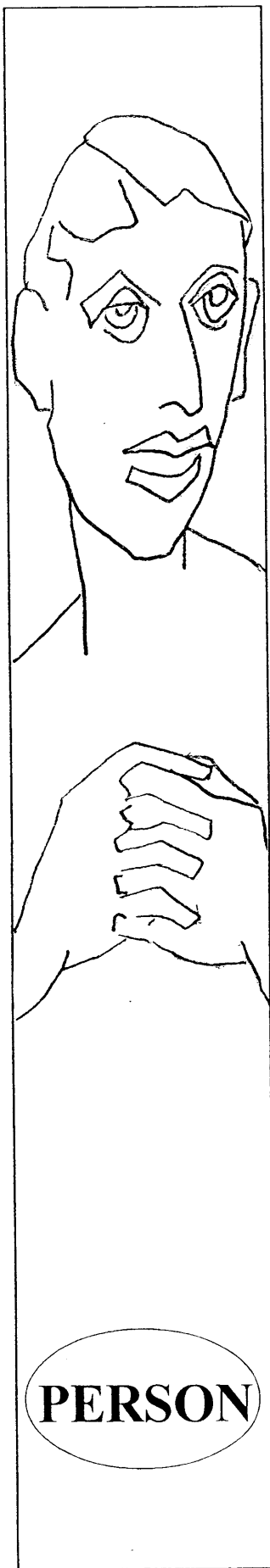
Historically, Paulhus lists the regard of civilization for persons with disabilities: from useless to the bizarre. Christianity tried to keep them in institutions to help them be happy. A time of heart without science. Now we can combine friendship and science and find a richness for humanity and for our faith.

Still, the question persists: are persons with intellectual disabilities educable in faith? Paulhus addresses three objections: 1. *Teaching religion is too abstract because the object of faith is invisible. God is too far from us. God is a spiritual being, the true Transcendent One.* This difficulty emanates from a confusion of language: spiritual is too often involved with an abstract concept. *Abstract* goes with a logical operation of the mind, a capacity to reach general principles. Whereas *spiritual* involves God. These are two different realities. Many elements are spiritual but not abstract. The sacraments are connected with very physical biological actions: washing, eating, meeting, etc. They are spiritual but not abstract. They are spiritual and concrete.

2. *The person with intellectual and developmental disabilities does not need catechesis. He or she is not a responsible person.* Paulhus would agree that neither grace, nor faith would

MENTALITY:

LIFE



make a person with an intellectual disability normal. The person remains what he is, but he must live, as others do, on a spiritual level, and thus receive the nurture he needs. Such a person might not be logical or academic, but must receive nurture for faith according to each one's capacity. Faith enlightens intelligence, every type of intelligence. The child or adult with intellectual disabilities lives in the light of faith, not in the light of abstraction, logical progressions or academic resources.

3. *Religious development would be possible if we could build a special religion for them. This is a seemingly necessary condition. Is it possible to imagine an easier religion? A special religion for people with special types of the human condition? Decidedly not! We must teach everybody the religion of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. The doctrine of faith will be the same for a person with intellectual disabilities as for a theologian working on a thesis for a Ph.D. The actual educational unfolding will take into account the differences in the human situation but there will be no change in the doctrine itself.*

Paulhus then distinguishes between *theology* and *catechesis*.

Theology is the pursuit of faith through human reason. Human reason may logically question and discuss revelation, for example. Theological reasoning has to rally proofs about a revealed truth. Theology seeks to prove that revelation is not illogical. This is an abstract endeavor. People are taught to engage in the highest processes of human thought.

Catechesis is a teaching process which wants to *help christians to live* - to live their faith, hope, and charity. The teaching itself makes us live. It may be concrete or abstract. But we are situated on a whole other level. Perhaps we should not even use the words concrete or abstract, but the word LIFE. We live in walking, eating, playing just as we live in thinking, learning and reasoning. A theologian may live in a state of mortal sin while a person with intellectual disabilities may make a true sacrifice to express his own faith.

When Paulhus thinks of catechism, he thinks of a logical process of theology. Catechism and catechesis call on two different educational processes. Catechesis takes a person in his own life where ever it is, while catechism attends to the logical processes of the mind.

Paulhus would hold that a person with intellectual disabilities cannot be taught through the traditional way of the catechism, but he may be catechized, if we take the person in the heart of his life, that is, in his specific human condition. If we remember that there are different kinds of knowledge, we understand that many people can learn things through participatory knowledge instead of by an operational or logical process.

Those with learning problems engage their intuitive intelligence rather than their operational or logical intelligence. Intuitive knowledge directly engages the known thing itself. It is founded upon the direct perception of the mind. It is true that we are aware that this perception may lead us into mistakes. On the other hand, there is also a danger in presenting a theological formulation to persons with intellectual disabilities who would understand the reality in a whole other way than intended because their intuitive perception would mislead them. Yet, there is a way to avoid this danger, by using the intuitive process and eliciting participatory knowledge. The way is in the catechesis itself. Take the child or adult in his life, as he feels it, as he experiences it, as he perceives it. If the person deceives himself, his mistake comes from the

misperception of his own experiences. His false perception is not projected on a theological formula. This problem can happen with other types of disabilities: a gifted person who has various neuroses might project his pathological perception onto a doctrine.

Paulhus would accept the person's perception and feeling about his playing, eating, working just as much as he would his fear, his obsession, his mistrust. But it is always possible to find some happy experiences. If we awaken difficult parts of his life, then we must live them with him in order for the person to accept them and to perceive them in a whole other way. The catechist creates a bond with others through their own lives and draws them into a true community of charity. The Church is discovered in this way and Christ himself is discovered when we live in a community of friendship.

The catechesis is then lived personally through the community. **Life, person, community:** these three words constitute the foundation of faith education.

Doctrine is not eliminated, but the teaching itself is lived by a person who has the capacity to learn in living instead of reasoning. Participatory knowledge is in play. Normal people will go further, assuming this knowledge is within operational and logical thought. Persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities have not the capacity to go further, but the essential elements are grasped and lived.

Learning by heart incomprehensible and useless formulae, even very simple ones can be dangerous.

A symbolic unfolding of life will be the pristine way to bring the essentials of nurturing faith to persons with intellectual disabilities because this way remains intuitive.

The great symbols - water, earth, fire and air - are found in the bible and in every religion. Jesus Christ utilized them to create the means of sanctification: the sacraments through which we receive grace upon grace, i.e. through the sacrifice of the cross applied to each one of us.

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(1) Paulhus, Introduction to the Mentality of the Method Vivre, Chicago unpublished paper, 1969.

Other texts by Rev. Euchariste Paulhus:

L'educabilite religieuse des deficients mentaux, Lyons, Edition Vitte, 1962

L'engagement chretien du jeune inadapte, en collaboration avec Jean Mesny et autre collaborateurs, Paris, Fleurus, 1963

L'education de la foi, aspects psychotherapeutique, Paris, Sherbrooke Quebec, Le Centurion, 1982

Enfants a risque, Paris Fleurus, 1990

Face a l'enfant qui souffre, collaboration avec Unberto Dell'Acqua, Jorge Serrano et autres, Paris, Fleurus, 1989

Cheminement vers la maturite chretienne, Productions G.G.C. Itee, Sherbrook, Quebec 2006

