

St. Augustine wrote a short text to a deacon of Carthage on Catechizing the Unlearned. \* The text was divided into 27 chapters and 55 numbered paragraphs. He divides the material into two sections: 1. The Theory of Catechesis (15 paragraphs) and 2. The Practice of Catechesis (40 paragraphs). In paragraph 4, he cites that Christ came to manifest and to teach God's love for us. In paragraph 10, he writes of the problem of adapting to the capacities and limitations of his audience. These two paragraphs became the springboard for Spred.

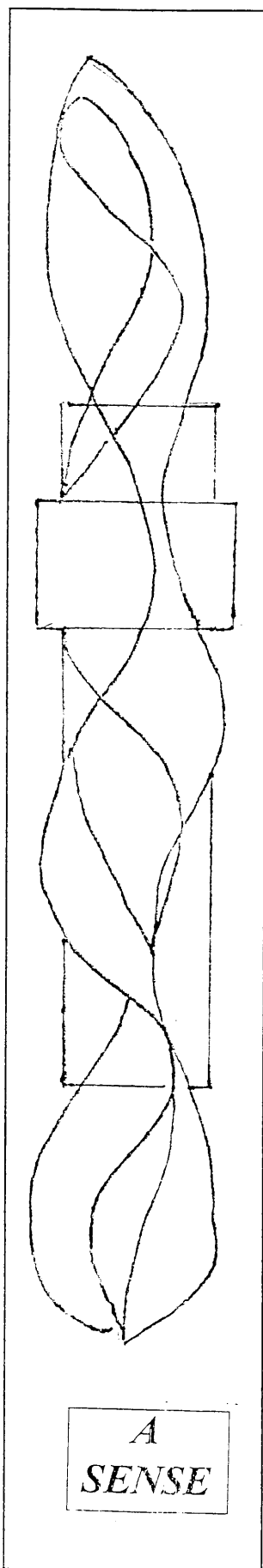
It was Fr. Eucharist Paulhus and Fr. Jean Mesny who brought all this down to earth for us by citing that our task with persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities was to create

1. a sense of the sacred
2. a sense of Christ
3. a theological sense ( a living faith, hope and charity)
4. a sense of the church.

The sense of the sacred is the starting line. Paul Claudel once wrote to a friend, "the religious crisis of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was not - perhaps above all - a crisis of intelligence...it was rather a crisis of a badly nourished imagination." I believe you do not have to hunt far for the lack of personal faith, it can simply be the consequence of a lack of a sense of the sacred. Sr. Beatrix Medina\* asks, what are the characteristics of the sacred? She offers three examples:

1. A perception of the "wholly Other" in an unnerving relationship with an admirable reality which evokes mystery, leading to ever greater admiration.
2. With this encounter, there comes a quiver of fear because of a felt presence, a formidable power, an uncontrollable energy and inaccessible purity, evoking a sentiment of weakness, littleness and humility.
3. Whence the origin of a formidable attraction, fascinating us because this presence seduces us in a strange fashion.

Before this reality, there arises the desire for an invocation, an appeal, a cry that will become a prayer. We develop our capacity for admiration, a love for beauty itself. Maslow says that the aesthetic perception to be true, must be free, naive.\* It is non-possessive, expressing admiration rather than need. It has no end. It grows rather than disappears.



The findings of Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson show that in the first two or three years of life, the child is not conscious of self. In the embryo the child is part of the mother's body and wholly dependent on her. In early infancy the child's psyche is to a large extent part of the mother's psyche, and soon it will be part of the father's psyche as well. It is the beginning of the genesis of such things as trust, wonder, awe. A sense of identity, intimacy and autonomy begin as steps to religious experience in either a full or less complete sense.

James Fowler, when speaking of the faith development of the four to eight year old says:

Meaning is made and trust established intuitively and by imitation. Knowing is primarily by intuition and faith is formed by imitation of the moods, example, and actions of the *visible* human faith of significant others, primarily parents. Affectivity dominates. Knowing and feeling are fused. The locus of authority is in parents and primary adults.\*

Jean Piaget would call this the pre-operational state of development. During this time, the use of objects become operative, especially in the development of language and play. The ability to operate with objects is itself achieved through the internalization of motor action. Play is an important task at this point cognitively to "conquer the object." There is the phenomenon of egocentrism where everything tends to center on the child's own activity. This mentality is a prisoner of the child's own viewpoint. This too is a time when the child has a never-ending series of 'why' questions, along with the tendency to conceive things as living and endowed with intentions.

Most of our friends are locked into the stages of development prior to or in concrete operational thought. They may be blocked from Piaget's stage of formal operational thought, i.e. the capacity for abstract thought. Yet, some with Autism break through. There is still a lot for all of us to learn.

Martin Buber, the great Jewish theologian, wrote that "in the beginning there was the relation." It is a magnificent definition of the Trinity which constitutes the archetype of our human relations. It is relation that makes us a 'person'. We are a person in relation to another. That is why Martin Buber could say "All true life is a meeting."

In this effort of Spred, it is still important to keep adult faith as the norm; we are as interested in the faith of the catechists as well as the catechumens in terms of religious experience or the sense of the sacred. Frankly, we are all catechumens, groping our way in the darkness of anxieties, disappointments, joys, the highs and lows of life and death.

Relating to a story in the adult preparation session releases our imagination, it lets our humanity take wing, it becomes a mirror of our own fumbling self, if we let it. It becomes our own story. If we really listen to ourselves, the past returns. We can respond as an adult to the trail that leads to a recognition of our commonality with others, to how liturgy, true ritual is actualized, how scripture is speaking to us now, and finally how Jesus relates to us at this moment. We meet him. And then we rejoice. "Eucharistia" is the Greek translation of the Hebrew "Berakoth." The English translation limps and has come to mean merely gratitude, i.e. thanking God for a particular favor. It is thus limited to a gift received (ego-centric). Whereas Eucharistia and

Berakoth express a proclamation, a confession of the wonderful works of God, the 'mirabilia Dei', the God who reveals himself in a free gift of himself. And we immerse ourselves and express ourselves in an appropriate musical response.

I have been a follower of Pierre Charles\* for many years. He writes:

"We are quick to divide the world of ideas from that of things, and to believe that ideas are great and noble whereas things are common and vulgar...yet all around us hosts of silent messengers lead us without effort by paths of love to the holy springs of peace. ... Water, wood, fishes, the morning dew, clothes, and flowers, perfumes and pearls, the wind whistling past, the bread on the table, the jug, chair and roof - all these things have been sanctified, loaded with blessings, and divine inspiration of the Word."

The same dynamic is true in the preparation phase of a session with our friends of all ages, the 6 year old, the 13year old, the 40 year old. The adult catechist relates to a friend by modeling concentration on an activity. Concentration is being focused in such a way that it is 'other'. It borders on a moment in time that is, shall I say, 'sacred.' It is attractive. The friend too would like to enter that same zone through activity. I believe that our friends and ourselves are operating on the same level. It is a meeting of imaginations.

When we are in the actual catechesis, the leader catechist brings the groups attention to a given moment of time, perhaps through an object. The leader is doing what each adult has done in the prior preparation session, nudging memory by way of story. Whether using pictures, events, whatever it is, it is an action commensurate with the memory of all present; it is an evocation of something common to all. When we are sufficiently bound together, we go down the same path, the same liturgical, scriptural trail. The message of Jesus is the same, as is the music.

And then, as in the preparation session we have an 'agape'. We share food with glassware, lighted candles, cloth napkins. It is akin to a liturgical meal. Everyone joins in the setting of the table. We sing our grace, our 'berakoth' and catch up on what is happening with our friends at home, at school. We end the evening gathered in a circle to sing "Shalom O My Friends."

The experience is breathing. We have nothing to do with its presence. It is wholly not ours. We did not ask for breath; but we cannot exist without it. It is a gift. The Spirit is a gift, dwelling within each of us: the Father for the Incarnate Son, the love of the Son for the Father. A commingling of love inhabits us. Someday the Father will take this gift back to Himself and we will all drown in his love. All our friends, including ourselves, need this sense of the sacred.

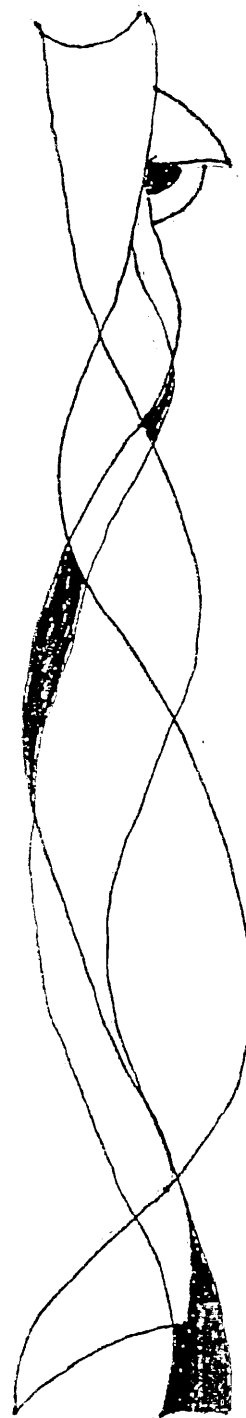
Rev. James H. McCarthy  
Director, SpreD - Chicago

\*Liber De Catechizandis Rudibus by St. Augustine, translated and annotated by Rev. Joseph P. Christopher Ph.D, Newman Press, Westminster, Maryland, 1946

\*Unpublished manuscript by the late Sister Beatrix Medina, S.H.

\*\*"Religious Experience as a Goal of Religious Education" Brendan Carmody, S.J. Lumen Vitae, Nov. 1981

\*The Prayer of All Things, Pierre Charles, Herder and Herder, NY 1963



*OF THE*  
*SACRED*

## CALENDAR

### SPRED TRAINING

#### +3-1 Role Orientation, English and Spanish

Spred Center Saturday October 15, 22. 1:00 to 6:00pm  
2956 South Lowe Ave, Chicago Il 60616, 312-842-1039

#### SPRED FAMILY LITURGIES SUNDAYS 11:00 am

Oct.2, Nov. 6, Dec. 4, Feb. 5, Mar. 5, April 2, May 7

#### MAMRE AUTUMN DINNER DANCE, SAT.NOV. 12

Crystal Sky Banquets, McCook Illinois

### OBSERVATION - Spred Center

6-10 Mon. 6 pm Oct. 3, 17, Nov.14, 28, Dec. 12

11-16 Tues.7 pm Oct. 4, 18, Nov. 15, 29, Dec.13

22+ Mon. 7pm Oct. 3, 17, Nov. 14, 28, Dec. 12

#### +Helper Catechist Training

Spred Center 2956 So Lowe Chicago, 312-8421039

Spred Center - English - October 29 1:00 to 6:00

Spred Center - Spanish - November 5 1:00 to 6:00

Queen of Angels Parish - English - Oct.8 11:00-4:00

Register on line: [www.queenofangelsspred.org](http://www.queenofangelsspred.org)

# SPRED

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