



Basic to the mentality and method in Spred are three French texts entitled Orientations Pour Ceux Qui ne Peuvent pas Suivre ( Orientation For Those Who Cannot Follow ) by Fr. Jean Mesny and Marguerite Marie Orban written in the early 1960s. The texts were to be used in a school setting according to grades. We knew that in Chicago we would not be working in schools and we could not work according to grades as our friends needed more than a year in a group to form relationships, besides many were adults. What attracted us was the method that was used and the psychological and theological undergirding for the texts.

The texts were structured around two fundamental axes:

Family Spirit, which is revealed progressively by Christ the Word of God, who gathers us together into one family, and

Family Action, the Eucharistic celebration through which family life is discovered, and the sacraments, through which family life grows.

Fr. Jean Mesny's goal was to write according to the needs of a child with intellectual and developmental disabilities, i.e.

Persons whose mode of comprehension and interest are egocentric, concrete and syncretic.

Persons whose affective development needs a sustaining milieu for security. This depends largely on the quality of relationships, being alert to their deep capacity for symbiotic relationships with others.

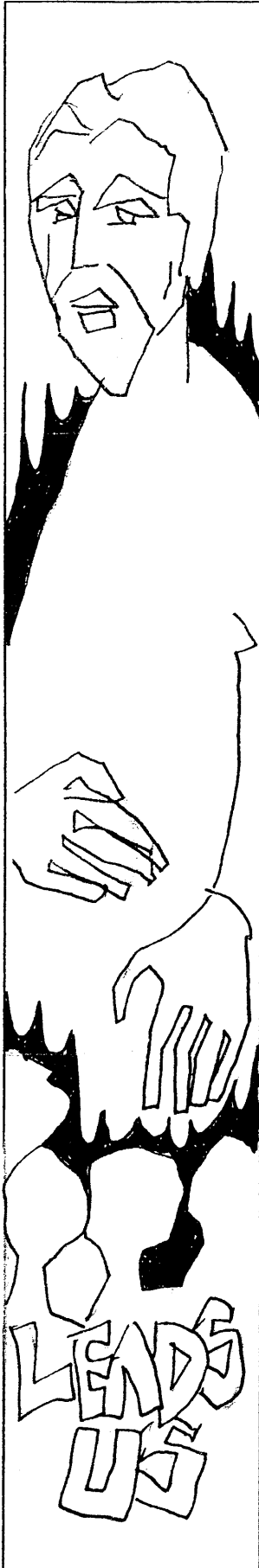
He kept two fundamental realities before him:

The child is baptized.

The child lives in Christ, the church.

The child, unaware of his place in the church, still belongs. His complete being has been changed on every level of existence by baptism. He is in Christ and participates in Christ's response to the Father.

The joy of friendship is the human experience which corresponds to the supernatural reality of faith. All catechesis is to be preceded by the experience of a catechetical community which



loves with the love of God. So the first step is to build a catechetical community which comes to know the children and is loved by them. The catechetical community gathered together in love is in the presence of Christ and God. This must be so real that the child will sense it.

An adult community of catechists that meets separately and experiences mystery prayerfully was deemed vital to Spred. We want the person with intellectual and developmental disabilities to move from one family to a larger prayerful family.

The person with disabilities bears an egocentricity that makes it extremely difficult to go beyond self. The child is imprisoned within and needs great help to enter into personal relationships. The child has to feel chosen, called by others who are genuinely concerned. The catechists present the child with familiar objects, events which have already a religious dimension. The child meets Christ in his church concretely through life in the family and through the team of catechists.

This reality is seized in a synthetic rather than in an analytic way. The child's simple intuition grasps this synthesis. For example, Christ leads us to the Father. He reveals the Father. Being who He is, Christ reveals the Father in the same movement that He reveals Himself to us.

The child's emotional difficulties make adaptation and personal autonomy difficult. The child does not apply principles in a concrete way. The child feels inadequate, inferior and hence has a profound need for affection within a sustaining community. The child will seek to please those with whom he or she feels a bond of understanding. The child wants to build up a sort of capital of affection from which to draw support.

Esteem and approbation are reassuring and confidence building. The role of the catechetical community is to help the person become profoundly aware of belonging to a faith community that is larger than his or her own family.

Through a series of sessions we experience the action of Jesus drawing us together as we receive His message. We affirm His presence in our midst.

Now we must discover the reality of God which we have sensed in a global manner. Who is the Word? The Son, the Eternal Word is equal to the Father. The Son is full relation to the Father. Through the Father, He is all that He is. This is the reason the Son offers Himself back to the Father in an inverse movement of love. Having received all from the Father, He returns all back to the Father. He is the perfect praise of the Father because the life of God is spoken in an eternal Word of love.

In the heart of the Trinity, God expresses Himself through a Word, through His Son. He is the full revelation of the Father. In Him are all the secrets of the Father. He is the Creative Word who expresses the Father. When others ask Jesus who He is, He answers, "The Son has not come to reveal Himself, but to reveal the Father." However, in revealing the Father, Christ reveals who He is Himself. We must try to penetrate the reality of Christ in the heart of the Trinitarian mystery. We must not separate Him from the Father and the Holy Spirit but see Him in His filial relationship to the Father and in His relationship to the Holy Spirit. This Love between the Father and the Son makes up Trinitarian life.

In the church of today, we meet the person of Christ, the Son of God made human and risen from the dead. We meet the Son who reveals the Father. A great focus of Mesny's work is that Christ reveals the Father and helps us to know the reality of Trinitarian life through creation, the gospels, liturgy, and the present life of the Mystical Body.

Creation is the concrete and most effective means to help even the slowest friend to penetrate the mystery of Christ and His revelation of the Father. We are not concerned with doling out conceptual morsels so that in the end our friends will have a jigsaw puzzle of God. Rather there is a progression in our knowledge of God. But it is always a question of global knowledge.

In the choir of praise to the Father, each creature translates the praise of the Son to the Father and thus reveals one aspect of God's glory. Creation is the sensible, concrete praise of Jesus to His Father outside the intimate life of the Trinity. Within the Trinity, the Son, the Eternal Word springing forth from the Father, tells the being of the Father. He is the living praise of the Father. God created through His Son, and now continues creation through His Son made human and risen from the dead.

All creation is but a reflection of God and although outside the Trinity, it reproduces the interior movement within the Trinity. Creation then permits us to join Christ in his act of praise of the Father. We enter into communion with the praise that rises to the Father in Christ through creation. Creation is stamped with the seal of the Father and Son loving each other eternally. In praising His Father, Jesus helps us to discover little by little God as Father and as Son. When I read creation with the eyes of Christ through which I see all things, I see simultaneously the reality of the Father who creates through the Son, and the Son who gives praise to the Father. Creation does not only affirm the existence of God, it helps us to communicate with God in the mystery that He is.

The children are led to become more aware that they belong to a family, God's family which reflects Trinitarian life. This family that Christ has gathered together to lead to the Father is animated by the Holy Spirit. To help us live within this family, Christ has given us His sacraments. Participation in the liturgical life of the Church becomes more and more conscious. Family life is nourished and bears fruit through these same sacraments.

In Spred Chicago, we are in parishes, not in schools and not in grades. From the beginning we were aware that there were people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who were uncatechized: children, adolescents, young adults and adults. So our work would have to be more than child oriented. We wanted to develop a life-long catechesis. We turned to grouping our friends according to their chronological ages: 6 to 10 years, 11 to 16 years, 17 to 21 years and 22 years and older. We were perplexed on how to use Fr. Mesny's material with these categories until we happened upon a text by the French Bishops called Fonds Obligatoire a L'Usage des Auteurs d' Adaptation.<sup>1</sup> This text proposed a manner of working with a set core of biblical, theological and liturgical axes in such a way that various groupings of individuals would still be respected according to their developmental sensitivities. This helped us to develop the axes we use today, while integrating the insights of Fr. Mesny. Our catechesis is to invite our friends into an every widening and deepening circle of relationships in a global love of life.

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<sup>1</sup>Catechese, Revue Trimestrielle de Pastorale Catechetique, no. 29, 1967, Association Episcopale Catechistique

