

The priest brought a group of his prospective Spred catechists to observe a session of an eleven to sixteen year old group. The group had six persons with intellectual disabilities, three were children with autism. They were each accompanied by a helper catechist. The activity catechist in the preparation room and the leader catechist in the celebration room, let alone the helper catechists, had had a challenging evening. The noise and behaviors had stretched everyone. In the exchange with the observers following this session, the priest asked a question that was to the point: "How do you support the adult catechists from week to week?" In a nutshell his question answered the question of "Why do you have an adult preparation session that focuses on the catechists?" This preparation is to undergo an approach to a facet of the Mystery - the same facet- as the children have the following week - only in a way that is addressed to their own personal adult faith. The catechists cannot sit like automatons distributing facts. They need to get inside this Mystery, up close, from their adult perspective. There is a prayerful submerging in refreshing waters of personal faith to uphold the adult catechist.

Initiation into faith through connatural knowledge is vital. Chicago Spred sees the importance of the adult catechist engaging in mystery. Sure specific medical and behavioral information is important, but for spiritual development you need to engage the mystery in a manner appropriate to adults. And to do this in a session prior in time and day to that of the persons with disabilities. After much experimentation, and anguish, this template was established in 1969.

Experience showed we needed to take a stance: we are all beginners in faith. There are three stages in faith development; initiation into faith, deepening faith, and expressing faith with precision. Expressing faith with precision is a conceptual exercise. However, there are vast acres within all of us that have not consciously heard the word of God, nor succumbed to Him. We need to shed light on all the corners of our lives. It is personal faith that puts us on a level with our friends. We join them on their trek, their pilgrimage through life. In working with persons with intellectual disabilities you begin, and for the most part, remain in the initiatory stage. In large part, so do the adults. Emotions play a central part in the shaping of character. Fr. Jean Mesny would call the passage from sensory to intuitive cognition, "the intelligence of the heart."

Crafting a session for adult catechists that corresponds to the mystery of the integrated session is done by way of a story. Awareness of life experience enters through this door of the imagination.

How are the stories chosen? By serendipity. You can be reading a newspaper, thumbing through a periodical, a novel, or biography and be struck with a passage of human interest. As Gerard



CATECHISTS

Manley Hopkins wrote, “What you look hard at seems to look hard at you.” It is a sign that starts to become symbolic. There is some flash of interest, a hint of self recognition that lingers within you.

Yet even after a story or literary selection is made, choices need to be made in how the story is distilled, how it is summarized. The essentials of a story are condensed into a brief paragraph. It is remarkable how many people see the essentials of a story through different lenses. The summary can be tilted, slanted, in many different ways for when you are bonded with the story and its explosions of meanings, many different paths are offered on what you might stress.

If there are 4 syllabi (6-10, 11-16, 17-21, 22+), each of which have 12 sessions, are there then 48 stories used for the initiation of the catechists into the same mystery as that of the integrated session? Not so. Only twelve stories are selected for the adults. Each of the twelve stories goes in four directions, for the four different syllabi. It is possible, if one really believes in the explosion of meanings in the symbolic dynamic, that one story could be used. Still, for variety and human interest, 12 different stories are chosen.

Further choices need to be made. An additional generally more comprehensive statement needs to be written from the distillation and be easily applicable to anyone apart from the distillation of the story, yet easily evidenced in the story.

Finally a question is drawn from the material and directed to each person which enables the catechists to begin a personal search within their own experience during 20 minutes of silence, with some classical andante music played briefly. This exercise of the catechists is focused on the same intentionality as that of the integrated session.

A central choice in this crafting of a question is to have it link with the title, goal, interiorization and message of the integrated session with our friends. The integrated session is written first, and the adult catechists' session is later attached to it.

This melding of an adult approach to the mystery to the same unfolding of the integrated session with our friends is a craft, an acquired art form. It is easy to get lost in this outbreak, this eruption of meanings.

Memories of a sculptor friend comes to mind. In the summer time, he would take his truck and drive around the country to different saw mills, looking for just the right kind and shape of wood pieces. His sculptural style was to choose just the right piece, clean it, put a finish on it and let the piece stand for itself. It was the natural beauty of the tree forms that drew him. On a visit to his garage workshop you could see all kinds of tree pieces in various stages of being prepared. Choosing the right piece of wood was essential to him and reflected his robust taste. It is close to this intuitive jump to choose the right question from a story's summary that links with the integrated session and at the same time is an invitation to each catechist to explore his or her memories and later express them verbally. It is a judgment call, a creative leap.

The attributes needed are seen in the life of Gerard Manley Hopkins, the Jesuit poet.¹ He was deeply influenced by John Ruskin who taught him at Oxford. SEEING was Ruskin's first imperative. He viewed nature as a “holy book.”

Hopkins developed his own vocabulary to forward the theory of seeing of John Ruskin. **Inscap** happens, was his belief, when one understands a person, an object, or even an idea, through close study, that radiates back a meaning, one that is necessarily unique. Inscap is not a superficial appearance; rather it is the inner core of individuality, perceived in moments of insight by an onlooker who is in full harmony with the being he or she is observing.

Another of Hopkins' invented terms is **Instress** which appears to have two essential meanings.

Instress is a force that holds the inscape of an object together (cause). Instress is also the effect, the feeling produced by the inscape within the beholder of a particular object (effect). Inscap is the objective reality existing independent of the beholder.

Instress is partly the response of the beholder and partly the force which links the object and the beholder.

After Hopkins joined the Jesuits, he created the beginnings of a synthesis between delight in beauty and selfless dedication to God. He began to see life and see it whole by seeing Christ in every particular experience. Because of the incarnation, creation became a sacrament for Hopkins. For Ignatius, and more explicitly, for Hopkins, the most particular of particulars is the self.

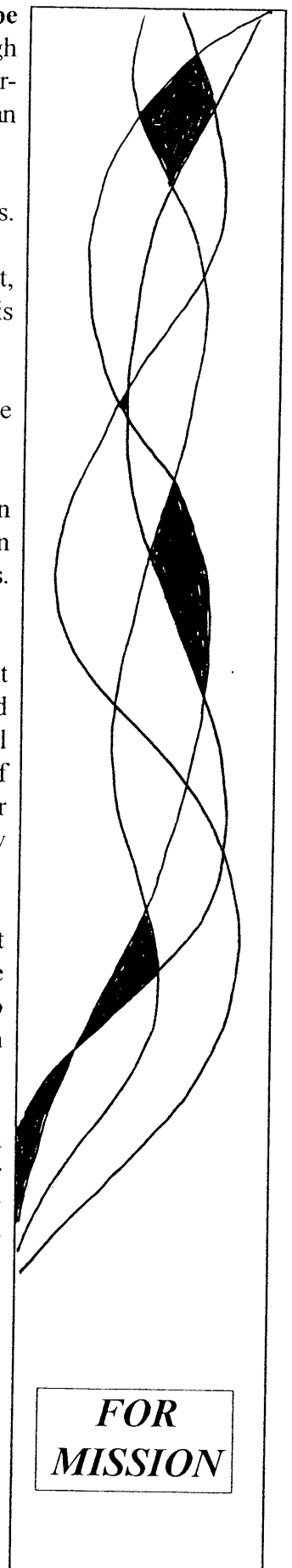
Hopkins was strongly influenced by Duns Scotus' teaching on the incarnation. A single event could be coincident with the whole of time. For Duns Scotus, Christ's aeonian incarnation and his earthly incarnation were parallel executions of the same divine intention. Creation is a radical *kenosis*, self-emptying of God in Christ. The world indeed is "charged with the grandeur of God." Beauty is God's self-expression. Many Hopkins scholars equate **inscape** with another concept in Scotus, *haecceitas* (thisness). People take part in their own **selving**, or creation, by corresponding with grace and seconding God's Christic design in themselves.

All these elements can be at work as the adult preparation session is experienced. It is all about the elusive task of evocation. We see backwards into our own mental caves: some inscape instresses itself, has a bidding force about it because of its thisness within and without us and so we self ourselves, express ourselves in words. We share the Mystery of ourselves with each other. We become sacraments to each other.

When the catechists complete an adult preparation session they are alert for the coming session with their friends with disabilities. They want to know ever more about their friends' lives, their activities, the events, good and bad. Of course these elements shift, change, and develop as they age. For this reason, the sessions are also always being re-written by the Chicago authors. Our mentors stress weaving in their themes of Creation, Community and Word (Fr. Jean Mesny) and Person, Community and Word (Fr. Euchariste Paulhus) as well as our constant concern; to develop a sense of the sacred, a living faith, hope and love, a sense of Christ and a sense of the Church.

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1 The Poem as Sacrament, The Theological Aesthetic of Gerard Manley Hopkins, by Phillip A. Ballinger, A Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monograph, Peers Press, Louvain, W.B. Eerdmans 2000.



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