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# Religious experience and profoundly developmentally disabled persons

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RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE  
AND  
PROFOUNDLY DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED PERSONS

by  
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A Research Paper  
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS  
SPECIAL EDUCATION, IN MENTAL RETARDATION  
AT THE CARDINAL STRITCH COLLEGE

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1982

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This research paper has been  
approved for the Graduate Committee  
of the Cardinal Stritch College by

Sister Collette Dunn, ref  
(Advisor)

Date May 1, 1982

## Jesus Blesses the Children

Mark 10: 13-16

Some people brought children to Jesus for Him to touch them, but the disciples scolded those people. When Jesus noticed this, He was angry and said to His disciples, "Let the children come to Me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Remember this! Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." Then He took the children in His arms, placed His hands on each of them and blessed them.

It is because of children such as these, blessed by Jesus, that this paper was written. The particular "children" in mind are those who have severe or profound developmental disabilities. In some ways, they will never lose the gift of childhood, and in other ways they contain the wisdom of the ages.

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated, therefore to all those "children" young and old who have shown me the mystery of God's love and His desire to be known to us.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Gradually, over the past years, my interest and desire to work with the developmentally disabled has grown. So many people have encouraged and have fostered this yearning. They have supported me in countless ways. It is only appropriate that they be mentioned at the successful completion of my formal education. With this in mind, I would like to thank:

The Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, my religious community,

My brothers and sisters,

The dedicated staff at Misericordia Homes, at Specialized Living Center and at Murray Center,

The qualified and devoted staff of Cardinal Stritch College,

The terrific and supportive group of people who call themselves the Office of Education Staff of the Diocese of Belleville Illinois,

To my personal friends who gave me the extra 'push'

To the developmentally disabled themselves who have taught me that the soul of the person can be found deeper than the outer appearance, and that it is life itself that gives our existence meaning.

A special thanks to Carolyn Greten who's gift of typing ability brought this work to completion.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

The Lord God created all. "In Him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28). God works in and through our lives, coming to us through the center of our existence. Our sense of the HOLY grows out of our experiences. Such a sense is not an afterthought, or merely tagged-on to the rest of our lives, but rather flows naturally from our inner selves. But, we do not always comprehend the ways of the Lord. His wisdom and knowledge constantly baffle us by virtue of our own limits. "How deep are the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How inscrutable his judgements, how unsearchable his ways. For who has known the mind of God? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever." (Romans 11: 33, 34a, 36).

### Statement of the Problem

God touches our lives and moves in mysterious ways. After having worked with severely and profoundly retarded persons in both catechetical and worship settings, the writer has noted some phenomenal changes in some of these persons during catechesis and liturgical celebrations, especially Eucharistic Liturgies. Such changes were

observed by several volunteer catechists and other catechists form varying programs serving profoundly developmentally disabled persons. These changes include apparent decreases in drooling, seizuring, and self-injurious behaviors. Also observed was a perceptible increase of head raising, eye contact, and attending behaviors. These behavioral changes were noted because of their significant differences to behaviors exhibited during other parts of the day.

These changes have catechists assessing the power of catechetical or worship experiences for accomplishing these changes.

The purpose of this study was to derive from the findings in behavioral psychology and philosophy some notions for these phenomena. A review of the literature was made to help answer the following questions.

1. To what can these changes (i.e. behavioral changes in profoundly developmentally disabled persons during prayer and catechetical experiences) be attributed?
2. What implications does this have for catechetical and worship times?
3. What structural and programmatic considerations must catechists take into account in meeting the spiritual needs of the profoundly developmentally disabled person?

#### Justification of the Study

Some excellent programs have been developed for use

with mildly and moderately developmentally disabled persons. The Journey With Jesus series by Sr. Sheila Haskett et al., offers a wide variety of concepts for sacramental preparation and for studying scripture. The Archdiocese of Chicago offers the SPRED program for their developmentally disabled persons. Various other dioceses and organizations (such as the National Conference of Diocesan Directors of Religious Education-CCD (NCDD) offer some guidelines for catechists of persons with mental retardation (Fretz, Jordan, & McGinty, 1982; O'Donnell, 1975). Also various publishers, especially Winston and Sadlier Inc., have also attempted to meet the needs of mildly and moderately mentally impaired persons. However, few, if any comprehensive programs have been constructed to meet the catechetical needs of the low-incidence population of severely and profoundly retarded persons. Catechists of these individuals generally adapt already adapted programs sometimes at the expense of the program's content. This paper was done with the intention of using its findings for a future program for this population.

Very recently, with the passage of PL 94-142, educators are taking more seriously the challenge to teach all children. There have been advancements in the area of teacher education for low-incidence populations, including the education of profoundly retarded persons.

This challenge and obligation has also been experienced in the area of Special Religious Education as well. The challenge to provide religious education for severely and profoundly retarded persons gives evidence to a need for this study.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how catechesis can <sup>9</sup> effect the lives of profoundly retarded persons and what implications this might have for catechist training and for the liturgical and the catechetical environments. Since new awareness of the special circumstances of religious education and of worship among profoundly developmentally disabled persons is emerging, the study seems to be amply justified.

#### Limitations of the Study

Interest in this area is recent and registers minimal. Because the population under question is of low incidence, interest is also confined to a small number of concerned religious educators.

This study was also limited by the dearth of material addressing the religious nurture of individuals with profound mental retardation. The sample includes only those enrolled and attending special religious education sessions on a regular basis.

Limitation is also defined by the fact that people who might be experienced in this area are few in number

and not easily identified. The lack of written evidence confirms this limitation.

### Definition of Terms

**Profound retardation:** Significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning (with an I.Q. score of 24 and below) existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior, and manifested during the developmental period (Grossman, 1973).

**Numinous:** Something beyond rational and ethical conceptions. It embodies a mystery that is above all creatures, something hidden and esoteric, which we can experience in feelings. (It) is the mysterium tremendum et fascinans (a mystery which at the same time overwhelms and fascinates us)...quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar (McBrien, 1980).

**Catechesis:** The efforts which help individuals and communities acquire and deepen Christian faith and identity through initiation rites, instruction and formation of conscience. It includes both the message and the way in which it is presented. Catechesis aims to enrich the faith life of the individual at his/her particular stages of development. Catechesis is a lifelong process for the individual and a constant and concerted pastoral activity of the Christian

community (NCD, 1979).

**Nurture:** Nurture is derived from the Latin verb, *nutrire*, to suckle, to nourish. *Nutrire* shares shades of meaning with *educare* (the root for education), but is more elemental. Without nourishment, an infant would die. Without direct feeding, the growing child might find some way to eke out a minimal existence (Westerhoff, 1978).

**Symbolic Catechesis:** A reflection of the signs and the symbols of God's revelation, and the human experiences which are symbolic of the human condition. These experiences include belonging, praising, listening, crying, caring, and thanking. Symbolic catechesis reflects on such experiences and relates them to God's saving activity symbolized in the biblical, liturgical, ecclesial, and natural signs (Frye, 1981).

**Catechist:** One who proclaims Christ's message, participates in efforts to develop community, leads people to worship and prayer, and motivates them to serve others (NCD, 1979).

**Environment:** A designated setting in which time for catechesis and worship is provided.

### Summary

Chapter I provided a base for this study. Introduced

were the concepts of the numinous as it relates to profoundly retarded persons and what roles this might play in the catechetical dimensions of their lives. "Catechesis strives to foster a profound dialogue, which arises from God's living self-communication and the trusting response of human beings in faith, under the guidance of the Spirit (NCD, 1979, #47)." Other points contained in the chapter were the justification of the study, its limitations, and clarification of some key terms specific to this paper. Chapter II, a review of the literature, will address the authorities of behavioral psychology, philosophy and other schools of thought to derive some possible explanation for the occurrence of the phenomena.

Also included in Chapter II's review will be an exploration of symbolic catechesis, and how this experiential approach can be of use with profoundly mentally impaired persons. The roles of the catechist and of the environment will also be studied in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

A person with profound developmental disabilities is often not recognized as one who would benefit from liturgical celebrations or from catechetical opportunities. However, some of these individuals who participated in such experiences prove this to not be the case. Their behaviors showed marked changes during these times and the occurrence of these changes indicate further investigation.

The questions at hand are complex: How can these physiological changes take place? What role does the catechist play in providing for the "mystery" of revelation in catechizing the severely and profoundly developmentally disabled persons. What role does the environment play? As a result of these findings, some structural and programmatic adjustments should be considered in regard to the religious education or religious "nurturance" of these individuals.

Behavioral Psychology and the Question

In the long history of psychology and its dealings with religion, the one field of psychology that maintains an uneasy relationship, is the area of behavioral



psychology. The most noted and probably the most feared psychologist in this particular field is B. F. Skinner. He may very well also be the most misunderstood behavioral psychologist because of his deterministic views of man.

In completing a rather extensive search in the area of religious psychology, Elias (1979) found no mention of the extensive research of Skinner relating to human behavior. However, Elias did confirm the fact that Skinner maintains an anti-humanistic view of man. This, coupled with his atheistic attitudes, identifies his conclusion that we are nothing but our behavior. The purpose of this paper is not to challenge his philosophies, but rather to gain insights as to the nature of behavioral psychology as it addresses the question of the phenomena presented earlier.

Skinner (1971) holds that we are controlled by our environment. It would follow, then, that we can be manipulated by external means. As was stated earlier, certain behaviors changed in the special religious education environment, as well as in the worship setting. A behaviorist, such as Skinner would attribute such changes to some element that served as a positive reinforcement. In order for a specific behavior (i.e. head raising, eye contact or

attending) to recur, these behaviors should be immediately followed by a response that is reinforcing. Such responses could include physical contact, visually attending the student and voice contact of a positive nature. Since there is much (in special religious education classes) that resembles those responses that are positively reinforcing, it is a reasonable assumption that some of this reinforcement fosters, or even causes an increase in these desirable behaviors of head raising, eye contact and attending.

Conversely, the deterministic view of Skinner might offer some thought to the decreasing of unwanted or undesirable behaviors demonstrated by the students of special religious education. In order to decrease or eliminate undesirable behaviors, the incidence of the behavior must be immediately followed by a response that is punishing. It is generally thought that punishment only suppresses the undesirable behaviors, and does not eliminate them completely. Also, when the response (viewed as punishing) is removed, the undesirable behavior returns, sometimes with more frequency. What this insight could mean in the religious educational environment is that the use of aversive treatment may decrease undesirable behaviors such as drooling, seizuring, and self-injurious behaviors. It should be noted that in the religious

education setting with profoundly developmentally disabled persons, a decrease in these behaviors was not intended, but gradually became apparent over a long period of time. What may have occurred, in behavioral terms, becomes evident: a student may engage in some type of self-injury (head slapping). The catechist ignores the behaviors and continues as if nothing happens. By not attending to this inappropriate behavior, the catechist places the student in a variation of Time Out. The catechist has removed the student from a reinforcing environment by merely refusing to take notice. Since having the catechist's attention is positively reinforcing, the student reverts to more appropriate behaviors. Very simplistically, the catechist has "punished" the student for the behavior. In dealing with more organically based, yet undesirable behaviors, such as seizures and drooling, the behaviorists' approach can find no ground. And yet, these too seemed to decrease in the religious education and worship environments.

Skinner (1971), like other behavioral psychologists, would propose a greater control to eliminate the illusion of freedom and dignity. Life always involves control. The problem is to make sure that means and methods of control are ethically sound, as well as resulting in correct behaviors.

According to Elias (1979), the control that religion has over the lives of people fascinates Skinner. He continually compares his proposed technology of behavior with the forces that religion has for control--the behavior of people.

Likewise, Lee (1971), a religious educator who has espoused the social-science approach, views religious education in terms of facilitating the modification of the learner's behavior along the religious lines.

Neither the Skinnerian approach nor the Lee philosophy allow for the basic element of religion: the free response to an invitation. For this reason, a more satisfactory answer seems to be warranted. Perhaps philosophy provides such an answer.

#### Philosophy and the Question

Should a philosopher be asked the reason for the occurrence of these phenomena (i.e. the reduction of undesirable and the increase of desirable behaviors in religious/liturgical environments), Sartre might begin with his basic premise: "The philosopher should concern himself with what appears to consciousness, he must give an exact and careful description of what appears; truth lies in what appears and not behind it (King, 1974, p. 22)."

Indeed, many philosophers would look to these physiological changes and allow them to fall into the category of mystery. Others might view them as problems.

Gabriel Marcel's thinking would reflect and possibly respond with the notion that a mystery is not the same thing as a problem, but is often reduced to the level of a problem (Van Ewijk, 1965). Regarding the phenomena in question, "The mystery is something in which I feel myself involved, and the essence of which is therefore that it is not entirely before me. It looks as if in this field the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning (p. 78)."

There seems to be a strong element of mystery, and not mystery initiated by nor finalized unto itself. Rudolph Otto (1917) points to seeking a balance between the observable, the rational and that which portrays the non-rational. "So far from keeping the non-rational element in religion alive in the heart of the religious experience, orthodox Christianity manifestly failed to recognize its value, and by this failure, gave to the idea of God a one-sidedly intellectualistic and rationalistic interpretation (p. 3)."

Otto addresses a category coined the 'numinous' which is a state that cannot be reduced to any other state and which also defies exact definition. 'The

numinous' alludes to the revelation and presence of a divine spirit. In focusing on an experience in which 'the numinous' shows itself, Otto adds that "This X (experience) cannot, strictly speaking, be taught, it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes 'of the spirit', must be awakened (p. 7)." Primarily, when Otto's observations are paired with the questions at hand, this could mean that any physiological changes would be allowed to flow naturally as a response to an invitation.

In the catechetical settings, the students do seem to respond naturally to the situations in which they are allowed to express themselves. When asked, "Terry, what do you want to say to God?", their responses, though non-verbal, reflect a real 'knowing' that they are talking with God. Again, Otto reflects: "There must be felt a something 'numinous', something bearing the character of a 'numen', to which the mind turns spontaneously; ...these feelings can only arise in the mind as accompanying emotions when the category of 'the numinous' comes into play. The numinous is thus objective and outside of itself (p. 11)."

The nature of 'the numinous' is as undefinable as 'the numinous' itself. However, its manifestations strongly resemble those phenomenological changes witnessed during sessions of catechesis. The 'mysterium

tremendum' may show itself by "sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship." Could this explain a decrease in self-injurious behaviors, drooling and seizing in the profoundly mentally impaired during Sacred Time (a time set aside during catechizing for various forms of prayer)?

The feeling of this 'mysterium tremendum' may also manifest itself through expressions of 'awe'. That which causes the fear or dread of God also evokes a natural sense of the 'holy'. Could this be what moves normally listless heads to an erect position, or calls to attention the child whose attention span has been determined at 4-6 seconds? Or could these children be filled with some type of special grace?

It is virtually impossible to determine, in a scientific manner, the progress of grace in children. "We must always expect the unpredictable initiative of God's free will and of human liberty (Ranwez, 1965)." Though many limits are placed on those who try to determine the movement of grace, the better attempts are made when the child is observed in his normal setting, or one in which he feels comfortable. Generally, to delineate the 'workings of God' in a child's life, one asks certain questions. Because conceptualization is often beyond the grasp of

profoundly mentally impaired persons question-answer periods prove to be an invalid mode of observation. The observer would do better by standing back and watching for a long period of time, the child in 'dialogue' with God.

The setting in which such observation should take place is the environment in which the child feels relatively comfortable, his home, the religious education center's Sacred Place, 'his' corner, or the chapel. The environment seems to be a key element in allowing for an 'existential encounter'. "The mystery of God is present within each life event and the mystery will become more transparent to the extent that each person can relate to his own event (Gallagher, 1978)."

The dialogue that may take place in this comfortable environment, need not be taught. Religious education for profoundly developmentally disabled persons will not include the Ten Commandments, but will rather include opportunities to engage in the dialogue that God so longs to have with His child. This type of conversation needs no particular conditioning. "The harmonious development of religious life is conditioned to a certain extent by the atmosphere in which he (a person) has lived... this conditioning is essentially emotional long before it can be intellectual. Before instruction begins, or even in the



course of the first stages of instruction, the emotional responsiveness of the child is what matters, and what will prepare him in a real and, we might say, tangible environment, for the later acceptance of the mystery of life.

To specify precisely all the elements of this emotional conditioning is impossible. The realities governing every life are too fluid, too dynamic, to be enclosed within strict boundaries of a system, for this is precisely to destroy their existential character. Every individual has his own history; and each life commences all over again with complete unpredictability and fundamental newness, the dialogue that is established between God and this individual through the intermediary of the Church (Oraison, 1959, p. 129)."

The role of the Church, therefore, is to provide for such opportunities that offer 'good ground' for a dialogue between God and His creatures. Those who have profound mental retardation are capable of this type of dialogue. It cannot be limited to intellectual functioning alone. "A person knows and grasps God's love in a lived way (McCarthy, 1980)."

The concept of dialogue is examined by other existential philosophers such as Kierkegaard and Marcel. Buber (1958) also addresses this 'philosophy of dialogue' in which relations become the central meaning

of existence. The 'I-Thou' encounter, from which Buber gained his popularity, offers a possible explanation to the cause of the changes mentioned above. There is involved, in the encounter, grace and searching, planning and spontaneity. There seems to be a sense of timelessness during the catechetical sessions. "The world is set in the context of space and time. The world of Thou is not set in the context of either of these (p. 71)."

Could these encounters occur without the marked changes in appearance? Perhaps, but in the experience of the writer, the entire self, the whole 'being' of the profoundly developmentally disabled person seems to respond. "The primary word I-Thou can only be spoken with the whole being (p. 76)." Observations of the mentally impaired in 'prayer' bear this out. "In the philosophy of dialogue, the question of 'relation' as central meaning of existence, finds no better proving ground than a specific concrete disabled person's capacity to encounter the Eternal Thou (McCarthy, 1980, p. 3)."

#### Other Catechetical Theories and the Question

Both behavioral psychology and philosophy, each in their own area of expertise, offer a part of an

explanation for the physiological changes in the profoundly retarded in catechetical and worship environments. Individually, neither field seems to completely answer the questions, but collectively, they offer a more total reply. The areas of developmental psychology and a life-centered or person-centered religious education program may add further thought to the situation and provide more 'puzzle pieces' for the completion of the mystery question probed in this paper.

Many of the developmental theories for catechizing come from the works of renowned individuals such as Piaget, Montessori, Erikson, and Ashtcn-Warner. Based on these and other philosophies, religious educators have set out to produce solid programs.

Known for his work in the area of catechesis for various age levels, Goldman (1965) a Piagetian, had no specific category for profoundly retarded persons. He might, however, conveniently suggest their placement among pre-religious, since they parallel normal infants in so many ways. Like a normal infant, their world is taken in through the senses of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting and total body sensations. In regard to how the child 'perceives' these sensations the parallel is made with the normal infant. Indiscriminant reception is followed gradually by the 'fine tuning' of the sensory information. This information provides a

basis for catechizing the profoundly retarded individual.

Of the young child, and possibly of the profoundly retarded, it can be said, "A delicate, and uncertain life that is barely conscious makes contact with its environment through its senses and reaches out to it through its muscles in an unending attempt at self-realization. There is an interchange between the individual, the spiritual embryo, and its environment. It is through the environment that the individual is molded and brought to perfection. A child is forced to come to terms with his surroundings and the efforts entailed lead to an integration (Montessori, 1966, p. 42)." This interchange, if selectively provided, could supply 'good ground' for an encounter with the Lord. In an environment that is welcoming in nature, it is not uncommon for a child to develop that level of 'basic trust' that strongly resembles a mother-child relation. A transition to God having maternal characteristics is natural (Gleason, 1975). Moving from this concept, catechists can draw some implications, "The significance of the necessity for the Church to make meaningful applications of understandings of the nature of human beings, their needs, and their psychosocial-religious development in its overall ministry cannot be overstated (p. 37)."

Recognizing that a child is a being of imagination, affection and imitation (Mouroux, 1964), the retarded child in catechetical settings may respond to the relatively calm, warm environment and the low-key respectful catechist with increasing attention, eye contact, and head raising. Such an environment is also so non-threatening, that self-injury may decrease. In essence, the child could be responding in imitation to the affection that he is shown. As far as the level of 'faith' is concerned, Mouroux refers to the age of reason as not having significant influence. "For children, that use of reason is sufficient which permits them to conceive devotion (p. 35)." This also might answer another part of the questions at hand. "Faith, before the age of reason is also an inchoative gift (the 'gift of a beginning'), in the sense that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is present and acting, a divine strength infused at the root of the spirit, the pure divine activity in the child. But faith is not awakened because the conditions of this exercise are not yet developed... The Holy Spirit will do His work, which is to enlighten and to attract; He will not do the work of the teacher, which is to open, to instruct, to orientate and to prepare the child (p. 40)."

The description of faith above would move the catechetical program directors to provide an appropriate

life-centered or person-centered approach (Elias, 1979). After studying various angles of psychology and religious education, Elias champions the work of Goldman as monumental in developmental catechesis. In pairing the works of Goldman with the characteristics of profoundly mental retardation, the writer assumes that Goldman would probably place profoundly developmentally disabled persons in the stage of pre-religious thinking, or pre-evangelization. Elias criticizes Goldman's omission of the affective dimension of man's being. While Elias salutes Goldman for his insights in developmental studies, he would possibly categorize the profoundly retarded as those who demonstrate immaturity and egocentricity. The aim of such religious education would therefore be to meet the needs of the students, as these are felt at various stages of development. "Students have needs for love, belonging, trust, acceptance, identity, freedom, positive self-concept, relations to others, understanding, relation with the divine, and a sense of stability (Elias, 1979, p. 59)." Goldman (1964) maintains "The true aim of developmental education is to satisfy the child's deeper needs for security, significance, and standards which create the conditions for growth (p. 228)."

Conceivably, then, "An intelligent programme of Christian education, rooted in the children's experience,

can lead to their more satisfactory religious development (Goldman, 1965, p. 8)."

Assuming that the judgements of Goldman and Elias are correct, one concludes that if programs of religious education for mentally retarded persons are to also be life-centered or person-centered, they must therefore truly grow out of the needs that the person actually experiences, not the needs that the catechist has to 'impart knowledge'. Goldman suggests: "Passively acquired information is more quickly forgotten and ready-made religion is more easily jettisoned than where truth and belief have been the result of personal growth. We find it difficult to accept an infant's religion as infantile, and the children's belief as immature when we have no such difficulties about children's mathematical or literary immaturity... Perhaps the most striking achievement of child psychology has been the education of teachers in the intellectual, emotional and social development of their pupils so that the content of what is taught, and the methods by which children are taught, are now more in accord with the real capacities and needs of children at various stages of their development (p. 12)."

If the insights of Goldman are correct it should also be recognized that not all areas of the child develop at the same rate. This may be especially true

of the profoundly retarded person. Often, their receptive language far surpasses their expressive language. This discrepancy alone points to varying time lines for development in the profoundly retarded. "Some segments of an individual's personality may be very developed while others are still infantile (Panzarella, 1974, p. 2)." Usually, this may refer to the religious development being far behind the growth of other areas. Could not the reverse also be true, making the religious development ahead of that in other dimensions?

It seems that throughout his/her development, regardless of the present stage or stages in which an individual student finds himself, experience is the key to development. "It is one thing to go to church, another to understand why, yet another to experience it as something that touches the delicate part of you and changes you. Experience is both the beginning and the goal of development. A child's first experience of the world is religious, the world is a mysterious place, filled with awe and guided by some sort of personality (p. 4)."

The taking in of such experiences is not beyond the capacities of mentally impaired persons. "Internalization is an important psychological process taking place in all stages. This is the process by which external realities are experienced and absorbed and



which seem to account for development (Losoncy, 1977, p. 13)." In order for the child to 'absorb' the experience in its purest form, it would be wise for the catechist to take into account also the relatively short attention span and the egocentric nature of the child (Conway & Anderson, 1966). Recognizing the effect this will have on the student, the catechist will be offering the best possible environment for the Lord to reveal Himself.

Religious philosophers would suggest that the area of revelation is often neglected in the structure of program's curricula, and in answering questions such as this paper faces. Ironically, the dimension that is most elementary to faith is frequently not found within the 'lesson plans'. "God is revealing Himself in the life experiences of people today. Finding God in one's life and believing in Him, gives one a view of things that affords deeper insights into the mystery of the universe and oneself (Panzarella, 1974, p. 44)." Could the physiological changes apparent in profoundly retarded persons be a result of the Lord revealing Himself, as religious philosophers, like Marcel and others would maintain?

In looking at the whole area of developmental psychology and its contributions to catechesis, another facet of the mystery falls into place. Some of the

physical changes witnessed in the religious education centers for the profoundly retarded may be due, in part, to those areas of growth that might be considered 'splinter' areas; that is to say that while intellectual maturity may not be exhibited, the religious development may have far surpassed it. A style of catechesis which is related to the developmental school of thought and to the Experiential Approach, is Symbolic Catechesis. Perhaps in the examination of its philosophy, an answer to the question faced by this paper can be found.

#### Experiential Approach: Symbolic Catechesis

If, as is affirmed by Frye (1981) and the NCD (1979), the purpose of catechesis is to echo back the Experiential Approach as a viable method of catechizing. Presently, most programs claim to be of this mode, however, few actually strive to use the true experiences of the child to focus on God's revelations. Many programs still follow the techniques which emphasize the content of the faith (Frye, 1981). Since mentally retarded persons are sometimes unable to grasp the doctrine, theological implications, or the content, it is essential that the programs developed for them be of the experiential approach.

With this premise in mind, and based on the teachings of Paulhus and Mesny of France, the Chicago Archdiocese has developed the SPRED program to meet the needs of mentally impaired persons. The program is solidly rooted in the process and begins each session with evocation. Those directing this program are highly aware that the "mystery of God is present within each life event and that the mystery will become more transparent to the extent that each person can relate to his own event (Gallagher, 1978, p. 1)." In this program, the thought that pervades is that of community which helps to prepare for the reliving (an evocation) of an event that becomes explicitly sacred. One of the contributing factors for the relative success of the program in Chicago is the stress on timing and pacing. They are "indicators of the human phenomenon of 'unhurriedness'. What is important is the psychic space, allowing me room to hear, to absorb, to enter into the evocation. This element of unhurriedness indicates a person caught, enraptured in the magnetic depth of the symbol (p. 2)."

Rather than randomly attaching a symbol to different experiences and events, the symbol is presented and explored first, with a significant amount of time rendered for a genuine and freely given response, which often reflects a relationship to and even beyond

the symbol selected for that session. This is done in a highly ritualistic manner, so the structure of the event offers the consistency needed by developmentally disabled persons.

Other programs, similar to the structured SPRED program, enlist the concept of experiential learning and have rather specific, almost ritualistic elements. Dreves (1971) endorses the use of guided encounters, rather than randomly allowing the child to 'roam through' the lessons. "Any concrete ideas, which are not based on experiences which he can interpret and express in action which he enjoys, are totally meaningless to him. Before truth can become an integral part of himself, he must be given the opportunity to encounter it many times, through as many of his senses as possible, and to express it creatively through a variety of media (p. 3)." These sensory experiences call for direct involvement of the child, and are important in developing relations with God, others and the world (Tobey, 1970).

Other approaches, still in the realm of experiential learning, include the structure of a didactic approach, but balanced with the catechist merely being an observer during the free response time, enabling the child to also develop creativity (Reynolds Barnett, 1978). Walters (1974) adopts a similar approach yet

providing the teaching process that is indirect and implicit rather than direct and explicit.

Approaches that reflect a bit more freedom, recognize that life grows through each interpersonal relationship one experiences and lives, and that God reveals Himself through ALL experiences (Beacom Dreves, 1976). If this is true, then every event and person becomes a sign for the child while every place becomes sacred. The catechists may want to 'saturate the environment' allowing the child to learn through all of his senses. This may prove to be an unwise decision when working with the profoundly retarded due to the fact that such over stimulation may result in an overwhelmed child rather than one involved in the discovery-approach.

In all of this, it is essential to remember that any program for profoundly mentally retarded persons must maintain that 'grass-roots' quality, drawing on actual life situations of the child (Blandford, 1976).

Like anyone else, the retarded "first come to know themselves before they come to know God--and their ability to know God and their idea of God are strongly influenced by their ideas of themselves (Ensor Plum, 1980, p. 1)." They increase the sense of themselves through some type of awareness of God in their lives (Hubard & Yavarone, 1980).

This revelation is the goal of the experiential approach. Likewise, "Experience is of great importance in catechesis. Experiential learning, which can be considered a form of inductive methodology, gives rise to concerns and questions, hopes and anxieties, reflections and judgments, which increase one's desire to penetrate more deeply into life's meaning. Experience can also increase the intelligibility of the Christian message, by providing illustrations and examples which shed light on the truths of revelation. At the same time, experience itself should be interpreted in the light of revelation (NCD, #176)."

The experiential approach for catechesis, and the liturgical, natural or ecclesial symbols derived for the events, have much to say to the catechist of profoundly mentally retarded persons. The catechists' roles and qualifications may be clear, and yet there may be need for further explanations.

#### Role of the Catechist

The role played by the catechist in religious education is definite and well defined (O'Shaughnessy, 1965). That role should be equally specific for those in the catechetical ministry with the profoundly developmentally disabled. In essence, in its broadest form,

the role of the catechist is to present a Christ-centered message that is delivered not only by the catechist but through the person as well (Conway and Anderson, 1966).

Losoncy (1977) suggests that in addition to the above, a psychological 'transference' occurs in the child's mind between his view of the catechist and his limited view of God. "It is clear that children learn about a loving God through the people who touch their lives (Hubard and Yavarone, 1980, p. vi)." Therefore, if a positive attitude of God is to be a goal in the catechetical process, the teacher must provide a model with which the child will develop a positive rapport.

Putting aside the expected attributes of a warm, loving and sensitive person, this role also requires the catechist to act and communicate in a positive manner with positive words (Beacom Dreves, 1976). Therefore, a catechist must be properly trained for the ministry.

This role, traditionally left to the women (Durka, 1977), relies heavily on the catechists' disposition and interior preparation for the task at hand (Montessori, 1966). This preparation must be interior, recognizing the gifts and the talents of the individual who will catechize himself/herself. But personal readiness is only half the picture. A certain preparedness regarding the knowledge of developmental

disabilities is also required. So, while good solid adult education filters into the catechist's experiences, simultaneously, a training or in-service should take place to help the catechist better understand the students. Because of the nature of such information, it seems more realistic to provide this part of the in-service to accompany the student sessions (Haskett, 1977).

During the training periods catechists must continually recognize or be reminded that they are called to be covenant-people dedicated to the religious formation of their students (Conway and Anderson, 1966). To truly fulfill this call, catechists must feel and demonstrate a genuine love for their students. "Love is like air: without it we die; we can never breathe too much of it. Love, for the emotional development of an infant and child, is like food, water, vitamins, medicine all put together. It is absolutely necessary all the time for continued growth and healthy development. Love means, among other things, a great deal of affection, such as kissing, stroking, rocking, touching and caressing. It means stories, playing games, seating the children at table with us, talking to them often, listening to what they say (Losoncy, 1977, p. 16)."

Listening to what the students say and how they say it, cue the catechist into their level of trust.



With those having profound developmental disabilities, the language may not be expressed in fluent verbal forms, but may manifest itself in gestural or symbolic language, even more simply, by the increase or decrease of eye contact.

It is essential to the catechizing of the profoundly developmentally disabled that the teacher recognize the students' needs (Conway and Anderson, 1966), and that with this information the catechist affords the student a personal encounter. "To be human, to be a person, one must experience personal encounters in one's own life situation (O'Shaughnessy, 1965, p. 209)." The mentally impaired ARE capable of such encounters if the conditions are adequately prepared for them.

In the method of symbolic catechesis, the encounter is 'invited' by the catechists' ability to evoke the human experiences (Gallagher, 1978). But, also basic to this gift, is the catechists' knowledge of the significant events in the childrens' lives. It is equally as important that a welcoming community receive this sharing, regardless of its apparent quality or amount (Harrington, 1973).

Therefore, regardless of the functioning capacity or the I.Q., or verbal ability, each person can experience the presence of God, as well as a particular encounter, and as well as an increase in faith. "We

must then prepare the child for faith by nurturing him in all the elements which living faith implies: Knowledge, love and service of Jesus Christ. These elements must be nurtured together because objectively, they all hold together, and because subjectively, one can only awaken faith by making it live (Mouroux, 1964, p. 41)."

In working with students whose capacity to receive knowledge is impaired, the other elements: love and the service of Jesus Christ, must be central in the focus of the catechists.

The role of catechists, therefore, is rather clearly defined, though not so easily lived. Above all, the role needs to be recognized for what it truly is: a call.

#### Role of the Environment

It would be speculated that the setting, the environment for catechetics would play only a minor role in the actual sessions. Surely, one would think that the setting be optimal, free from unnecessary distractions, adequately lighted and ventilated, and sufficiently warmed or cooled. But the environment needs to be more than the 'basic necessities'. The catechists, and students should be able to say of this environment the same thing the apostles said: "It is good for us to be here (Matthew 17:4)."

It is expected that the environment be one of a welcoming spirit that is pleasing (Harrington, 1973), bright and cheerful (Blandford, 1976), where an atmosphere of joy and love has been created (Dreves, 1971). It is just as important that the environment be one that offers the chance for the students to be relaxed and feel at home (Ensor Plum, 1976). In order for the catechist to make the environment similar to home, it is important that the catechist be aware of how the child views him/her. The furniture selection and arrangement tells the child much about the setting and the catechists vicariously. For example, if chairs are set around a table where the beginning of class is to take place, a student arriving in a wheelchair may not feel too welcomed if one of the chairs must be removed after he arrives. If this happens regularly, the child will get the non-verbal message that he is not welcome. A simple solution to this problem would be the removal of the extra chair before the child arrives giving him a 'special' spot.

A good sign of an enriching environment is the eagerness of a child who looks forward to the next session (O'Shaughnessy, 1965). With this as a start, the child may more easily be readily able to enthusiastically and prayerfully learn about God and communicate with Him (Blandford, 1976). This would

then become the Christian environment that encourages religious growth and development (Hubard and Yavarone, 1980).

Of course it is presumed that the catechists' relation with the student is the basic element in the environment. This relationship is of primary significance, offering an atmosphere of gentleness that shows some type of structure and routine, so necessary in the lives of developmentally disabled persons (Hahn and Raasch, 1969).

Within the structure that the catechist needs to provide for the disabled students there can still be beauty and a sense of the sacred. Dividing the center, the room, or whatever area is used for catechesis, the teacher can supply the needed 'space' for the lessons and for the time for worship. Several programs suggest this specifically, (Haskett, 1977), (Harrington, 1973), (Blandford, 1976). The sacredness of the environment, of the Sacred Room, or the Holy Corner, or the Prayer Center, or whatever this area is labeled, will, if prepared properly and revered, will remind all of the love, the creativity and the presence of God (Beacom Dreves, 1976). This should be a special prayer place, with a Bible, for services or private prayer. It should be quiet, peaceful, conducive to prayer and meditation (Blandford, 1976).

Some suggestions for the decorating of this sacred place are made very explicitly for the SPRED Program. Its description of the environment includes the Celebration Room as containing fresh flowers, low lamps, soft music and a paschal candle, along with the Bible. The catechists demonstrate the sense of God's presence by their movement into this room in silence and by remaining quiet and relatively 'low-key' throughout the entire session in this 'holy place'. The attitude portrayed in this room is not intended to be one of sullen silence but a joyful, respectful quiet (Harrington, 1973). Again, just as important as the decorations in the room, is the teachers' attitudes toward the silence, their sense of presence. It is in such a session as this that opportunities for the presence of God to be felt will truly be realistic.

In all of the above, consistency is essential. Maintaining the same place, style, and routine is very important in developing a religious education program for the mentally impaired. But that consistency needs to flow beyond the catechetical setting if the program wants to have lasting and far-reaching effects. The total environment, not just the religious education setting will provide this (Durka, 1977). Many people have influence on the children. Often times, catechists are concerned about what will be 'undone'

when the students return home. Some how, there needs to be a level of trust that the Lord will provide what is best for this child, regardless of where he/she is. But knowing this and truly experiencing this trust are two different things. Regarding those who touch the lives of the students: "Their personalities, relationships and personhood are the primary environment which will have the most influence upon their children (Losoncy, 1977, p. 19)." This seems to sum it up well.

## CHAPTER III

Summary and Implications

In gathering the conclusions from the previous chapters, something must be said of their input in the areas of catechesis and developmentally disabled persons. The material and data collected here support the necessary premise that catechesis for developmentally disabled persons is not only valid in the view of its feasibility, but also its importance cannot be denied.

Behavioral Psychology

If the assumptions made regarding positive reinforcers and increasing desirable behaviors are correct, more specific applications need to be made. Touching, rocking, rubbing the children's backs, caressing their faces when speaking to them, are all means of positive contact which, in turn, will have positive effects. Initially, these actions were demonstrated to help the child stretch from the concept that "If this special person loves me (touches me, rocks me, etc.), then I can understand that this God of whom she speaks also loves me (touches me, rocks me, etc.)." This initial intent escalates and now includes the increase of attention to

the task at hand, the increase of head raising, and the increase of eye contact. These tactile contacts are coupled with stimulation of other senses. Correctly positioning the children in bean bag chairs, or chairs that fit their bodies, offers good kinesthetic stimulation. Pleasant music, candle scents, and tasty treats provide the necessary stimulation of their other senses.

Other reinforcers that positively add to the dimension of catechesis with developmentally disabled persons are those created by the environment. Low lighting, chairs of appropriate size, or that fit their bodies (i.e. bean bag positioning chairs), few people in the room, and the low-key atmosphere established by the catechists, all contribute to an environment that is pleasing. It is also necessary to remove the undesired distractions from the setting. For example, when a child is uncomfortable because of poor positioning, he/she cannot even begin to hear the message of the lesson or session.

### Philosophy

The conclusions drawn from the philosophers of religion point to the need for allowing the movement of God in the children's lives and especially in the room. In order to do this, the catechist must be aware of what causes distractions and remove these distractions if



possible. Ample times of silence must also be provided within the sessions' times. These times should be actually structured into the lessons' designs as well as be added as need indicates.

Past history address the 'going to God' by means of use of some type of 'mantra'. These vary depending on the religious structure and ritual of the major religions. For profoundly developmentally disabled persons, some helpful mantras have included the use of a song with a simple 1-2 line melody (see appendix), or by merely rocking the child.

Essential to the philosophical thrust of catechesis with profoundly developmentally disabled persons is a strong belief in the mystery of God, and His ability to touch and to talk to these individuals.

#### Experiential Approach

Regarding the experiential approach, it is important to address the developmental approach as well, and note their relations. As far as this population is concerned, the students would possibly be in the pre-religious or pre-evangelization level. This information, coupled with their life experiences frequently makes the 'content' aspect of catechesis difficult to pinpoint. Because this is assumed to be true, working with what the catechist DOES know of the child, offers the

best possible catechesis for these profoundly developmentally disabled persons. The effective use of symbols and relating these to the child's experiences appears to be an appropriate method of catechizing (see appendix).

Another consideration that needs to be made here is the effective use of language. Though there is a need for some type of adjustments in communicating with persons with profound retardation, there is also a danger that in attempting to simplify the language, the words become simplistic instead. This can be demeaning to the individual. This could harm the very person that the catechist is trying to help. Care must be taken to use that mode of communication, verbal, nonverbal, or gestural, that suits both the catechist and the student.

#### Instruction or Environment?

The question is raised: "Which is the more basic to catechizing the profoundly developmentally disabled person, the instruction or the environment?" Naturally the answer depends heavily on the projected goal of the program. If the goal is to provide a place and setting wherein God's presence can more easily be sensed, obviously, the environment is more important. If actual instruction in the faith is the object for the program's existence, then it stands to reason, the thrust would center on the instruction. However, when it comes to

the level of intelligence of the population in question, how much instruction, per se, can really be absorbed? Would it not be better to speak in terms of religious nurture rather than religious education or religious instruction? Going back to the Latin roots for each of these three, instruction means 'to build', education means 'to rear, to bring up', while nurture means 'to nourish, to suckle'. As far as religious contact and profoundly developmentally disabled persons are concerned, the concept of nourishing seems to be the most realistic goal.

In essence, the question of instruction or environment could possibly be negotiated to maintaining a balance between the two. This should provide the structure and the atmosphere necessary for the catechetical and worship experience.

#### Catechesis or Catechist?

Though it is quite obvious that both the message and the messenger are important in this catechetical program, of the two, which element holds the position of top priority? Arguments are strong for both sides. The program is important in that it offers a structure to what might otherwise be an awkward situation. A discomfort is frequently present in catechists of this population, because of the feelings of 'not getting

through' to the student. Some of this can be eliminated if the program has a sufficient amount of structure. It is also important that some religious stimulation is offered, otherwise, the session could be viewed as merely a pleasant sensory stimulation program, under the guise of religious education. And, a designated program would offer the structure for a session-to-session continuity, which also serves to ease some discomfort found in working with persons with profound disabilities.

On the other hand, because there is a need for a child or person-oriented program, there should be a response to the student from another person, not from some 'cook book'. Many times, the 'person' of the child is lost in the attempts to use prepared materials. Lessons are presented AT the child, rather than experiences shared WITH the child. With profoundly retarded persons, the 'being' of the person has far greater impact than words. The child's specialness to the catechist parallels his specialness to this greater Being, even if he can't name God.

#### Implications for the Catechist

Because the above section points to a greater need for solid catechists over a solid program, a catechist's competencies and qualifications are imperative to catechesis. Among other qualities listed by the NCD for

catechists (sections #205-211), and the necessary training required, catechists of persons with mental retardation must also be 'special persons'. The personal faith life must be rich enough to truly believe God's desire to share Himself with these persons. Without this, no amount of lesson plans or atmosphere will aid true catechesis for this group. A certain amount of calmness, patience and willingness are also needed.

One of the elements that causes a great deal of frustration in all areas of work with persons with profound mental impairments, is that of little visible rewards. The same thing is true of catechesis. Also, religious education, on any level, offers few, if any tangible results. When speaking of catechizing a group of persons who naturally give little response, the likelihood of visible rewards decreases sharply. A catechist of persons with profound developmental disabilities, then, must be satisfied with this as a premise. In lieu of this, catechists have commented on the personal rewards they have gained from sharing religious experiences with these individuals.

#### Implications for the Environment

The environment has been deemed important to the catechetical dimension with profoundly retarded persons. This environment must be, above all, invitational to the

the student, not just pleasing to the catechist. The actual design of the room(s) is (are) important. Some suggested 'blue prints' are provided in the appendix. Also, because timing and pacing have been rendered essential as well, some considerations should be made including the individual persons' needs such as fatigue and hyperactivity etc.

Another consideration for the environment includes the number of persons in the room. Too many individuals provides too much distraction. A suggested ratio would be 1-1, with as much as 3 catechists and 3 students per session, depending on the size and the design of the room. This specific ratio is needed to gain and maintain the student's attention, and to convey the unspoken message of specialness. A larger teacher-pupil ratio decreases the effectiveness of the program, though is recognized as sometimes being a necessity.

#### Implications for Language

The individual who has a developmental disability such as mental retardation often has a language level that is significantly lower than that of a peer with no such disability. Because the disparity between chronological age and mental age is positively correlated to the severity of the disability, considerations must be made in dealing with persons with profound mental retar-

dation. Language development is slow with progress being negligible. Because of this, language adjustments must be made in order to maximize communication. Simplifying language is the key. Care must be taken, as stated earlier, to provide simple, not simplistic language. It is difficult to find the balance between talking in order to be understood and talking 'down' to these individuals.

Language adjustments must be made. The answer is to use the method that is most appropriate for the student. Generally, the student's receptive language is higher than his/her expressive language. One simplified method is referred to as Reduced Utterances. To put this method into practice, the catechist needs to use just the essential words of a sentence. For example, instead of saying "Put your coat on, it's time to go to Church", the catechist eliminates some words, "Coat on, time, Church". Agreed, this sounds a bit ridiculous, but in language development, the student may very well be in the prelinguistic stage where he/she has a real difficulty in siphoning out the key words from those that may be considered extraneous. If the catechist can do this sorting for him/her, communication has a better chance of happening.

Regardless of the determined mode of communication, the key to success with persons with profound develop-

mental disabilities is SIMPLICITY. The forms of communication may be the use of gesture, sign, total communication (sign and voice), Bliss symbols, picture communication boards or others, but all of these methods should be kept as simple as possible.

### Conclusions

Catechesis for persons with profound developmental disabilities is not only a mission, but a commission from our Church. In a recent talk given at Cardinal Stritch College (November 10, 1981), Abbe Henri Bissonier shared his reflections as to the successful catechetical program. He said that success is "based on a deep faith in the natural abilities of every child and on the faith in the supernatural abilities of every child."



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## APPENDIX A

Catechist Training Program

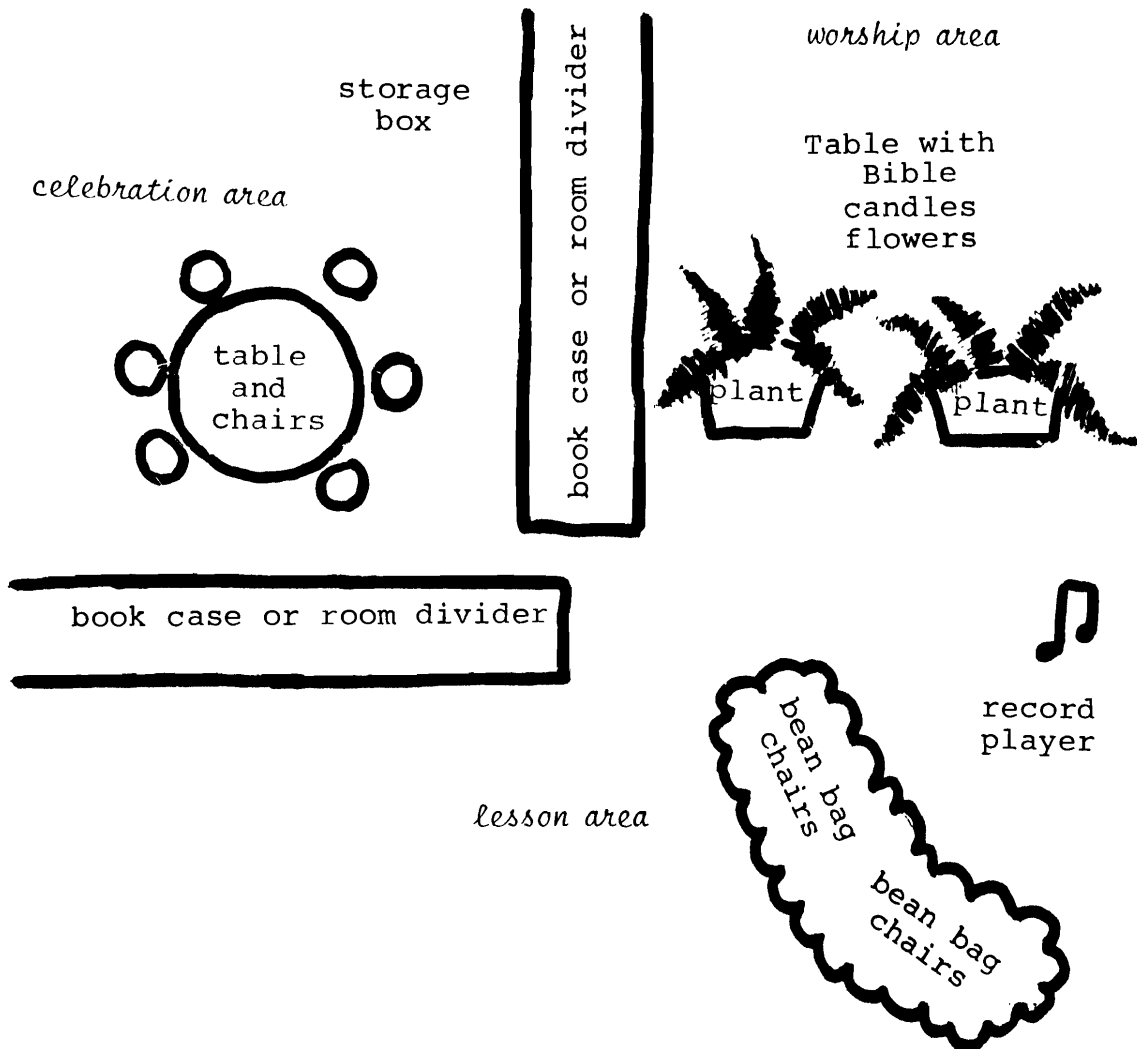
A catechist of persons with profound developmentally disabilities is to be enrolled in the diocesan program for catechist certification, or that program in the diocese that adequately trains all catechists. In addition to this, the catechist is to have obtained the training designated for catechists of persons with special needs, again, as designated by various dioceses. Beyond this extensive training additional training is necessary. Presuming that the above training is completed the following areas are also to be addressed by the teacher training personnel.

- A Profound Developmental Disabilities
  - Classification
  - Population distribution
  - Characteristics
  - Learning Characteristics
  
- B Catechesis for this population
  - Purpose
  - Goals
  - Instructional materials available
  - Supplementary materials
  - Methods
  
- C Techniques
  - Language
  - Management
  - Motivation
  - Room design
  - Planning
  - Evaluation of
    - Lesson
    - Self
  
- D Worship
  - Suggested methods
  - Use of symbols

## APPENDIX B

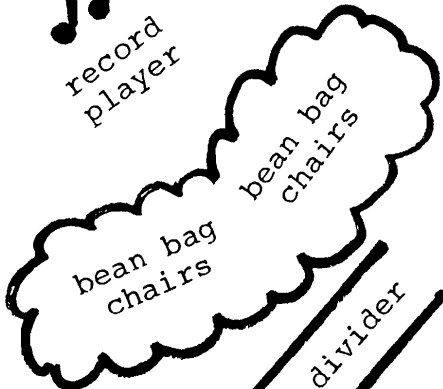
Environmental "Blueprints"

Below are some suggested plans for room arrangements for use with persons with profound developmental disabilities. It should be noted that there is a need for tables of adequate height to provide for the type of chair needed (wheel chair, wedge chair, bean bag, etc). While the setting should be cheerful, care should be taken not to make the room overstimulating.



lesson area

record  
player



bean bag  
chairs

bean bag  
chairs

book case or room divider

Celebration area

storage  
box

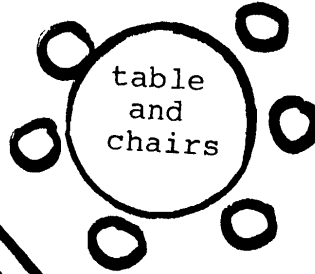


table  
and  
chairs

book case or room divider

worship area



plant

table with  
Bible  
candles  
flowers



plant

celebration area

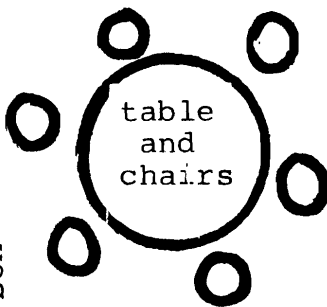


table  
and  
chairs

storage  
box

book case or room divider



table with  
Bible  
candles  
flowers

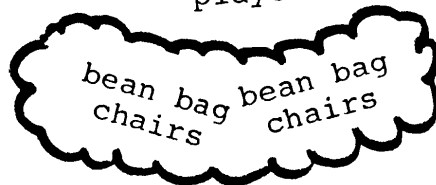
worship area

book case or room divider



record  
player

lesson area



bean bag  
chairs

bean bag  
chairs



plant



## APPENDIX C

Suggested Uses of Symbols

While materials from SPRED can be obtained that significantly address this area, some suggestions can be made here to provide some guidelines in determining appropriate symbols. As stated in the body of this paper, the symbols are to be liturgical, ecclesial, or natural. Below are some criteria for symbols that are appropriate for use with persons with profound mental retardation.

1. Familiarity. It is important that the symbol used have some recognizable qualities realizing that its newness might be more a distraction than a help.
2. Function. If an object designated for the symbol has a common function (ie. a cup), the student may have difficulties in moving 'beyond' the natural function for the object (insisting that the catechist fill the cup so he/she may drink).
3. Handleability. The object chosen for the session's symbol, must be able to be explored, touched, or even dropped by the student himself/herself. If a fragile object is used, the catechist is overly cautious about the potential destruction. This in inadvertently communicated to the student.
4. Safety. Care should be taken to provide objects that are safe for the student. One liturgical symbol, a lit candle, can prove extremely dangerous to the individual. If such a symbol is to be used, the catechist must give complete attention to the student.
5. Realism. Use the object itself, not merely a picture of the designated object. The talents that are needed for such transfer may not be enjoyed by the student

Symbols that may be used in the catechetical or the worship setting:

1. candle, lit or unlit. Use the paschal candle if one is available.
2. flowers in a vase. If possible, have the student help picking and/or arranging the flowers.
3. plants. Perhaps the student can aid in the plant care.
4. stones or rocks
5. bowl of water
6. Bible
7. book with pictures
8. pieces of soft material
9. bread
10. incense
11. palms or other types of branches
12. ashes
13. other symbols that fit the criteria given on the previous page.

## APPENDIX D

Language Adjustments

Below are some suggested criteria for making the necessary adjustments to language for use in the catechetical program with persons with profound developmental disabilities.

1. Regardless of the communication mode used, it must remain simple.
2. Use the mode of communication most familiar to the student. If he/she needs to learn a new style of communication, the effectiveness of the program decreases.
3. Adjust your own style to fit the student's.
4. Reduced Utterances is a style of verbal communication that has met with success in working with this population, both in receptive language and in increasing expressive language.
5. Should gestural, sign, or total communication (sign and voice) be used, those signs that the child already knows, should be used first to establish a basic communication relationship. Then, new liturgical, ecclesial and catechetical signs can be introduced. Adapted signs may be needed depending on the severity of the student's disabilities.
6. If the student is nonverbal, but has no established form of alternate communication, allow him/her to respond in the sessions by appropriate methods. Perhaps teaching a simple sign might be helpful here. Or give directions or ask questions that the students might easily respond by touching or by pointing, etc.
7. If the mode of communication follows the bliss symbol techniques, or the picture communication board, ask the parents or staff (if the student resides in an institution) to use the board during the catechetical sessions. Gain some knowledge of how this board is used with the student.
8. Know that silent, nonverbal communication is also valid.

## APPENDIX E

Music Suggestions

Music can and should be a part of catechesis.

This is especially true when catechizing persons with developmental disabilities. Below are some suggestions for the use of music during sessions, and the criteria that indicates appropriate music. The following pages include some simple songs for use during catechetical or worship experiences.

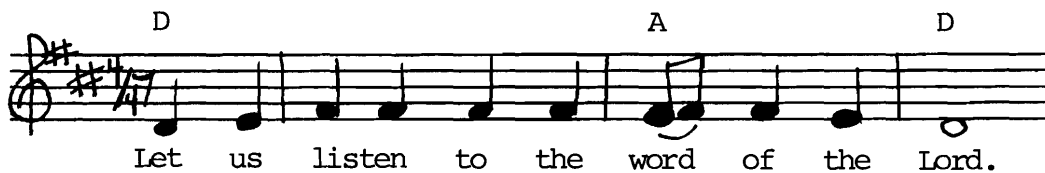
1. The music selected should promote a sense of peace and joy in the room. Music that is too lively may destroy the very mood that the catechist is trying to create.
2. Music should be played on a record player, tape recorder or musical instrument (guitar or harp) that is of good quality, giving the music itself the attention it requires.
3. Classical music is suggested because of the soothing quality it has.
4. Try to choose music that has only one instrument playing. The violin, the flute and the solo piano each have a calming effect.
5. Volume control is important. Start and finish the piece softly, adjusting the volume during the body of the piece so the student can easily hear.
6. Care should be taken not to spend too much time 'listening to records'. Finding the balance in this concept will take time and practice to discover the appropriate length of time.
7. Don't let the music merely fill the background. If it is appropriately selected for a session, then the music deserves the listening time.

Song Suggestions

There is a wide variety of songs that are written for use with children in the catechetical and worship settings. Some of these are quite appropriate for use with profoundly retarded persons. Because of their lyrical composition, others are not. Again, the key to successful use of songs is SIMPLICITY. Below are some suggested melodies found to already have been helpful with profoundly mentally retarded children and adults. Some are for enjoyment, others teach a lesson, while some are also used for praise or as a 'mantra' for some individuals.



Sr. Deborah Davis



Sr. Deborah Davis

D G D

This was bread, now it is Jesus.

D G D

This was bread, now it is the Lord.

D G A D

1. He wants us to come. He wants us to eat.  
2. He wants us to share. He wants us to love.  
3. He wants us to live. He wants us to grow.

by Sr. Deborah Davis

C F G C

Don't be afraid, the Lord is here. "I am here."

by Sr. Deborah Davis

C G C Am C

Jesus, come to me. Jesus come to me. Come, come.

by Sr. Deborah Davis