

History of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Maria Montessori (1870-1952)

- First woman medical doctor in Italy
- Method based on scientific observation and guidance verses direct instruction
- Recognized from the youngest children a “silent plea”, “Help me to do it myself”
- Saw religious formation as essential to the fullness of child’s development
- Believed that “Liturgy is the magnificent expression of the content of our faith. The liturgy can even be called the pedagogical method of the Catholic Church
- 1919: Created an environment she entitled the “Atrium”

Sofia Cavalletti (born August 21, 1917, died August 23, 2011)

- Received her degree in Hebrew & Comparative Semitic Languages from Sapienza University, Rome
- Contributed to several editions of the Bible and to international publications on biblical studies
- Studied under the former Jewish Rabbi, Eugenio Zolli
- Was asked by a friend to help prepare some children for first communion
- She was introduced to **Gianna Gobbi**, a Montessorian, in 1954

Gianna Gobbi (1919-2002)

- Montessori certificate was signed by Maria Montessori
- Worked for 15 years in various Casa dei Bambini and as an assistant for national Children’s House courses
- Sofia and Gianna became good friends, set up an Atrium modeled on the Casa Set up by Montessori
- “In every material that I look at, I see Gianna’s pencils and pens, and also my saws. There is no material that was only her work or only mine.” (*Essential Realities*, 49)
- “In my memory, it was Gianna’s work to take the children by the hand and lead them to the Word of God, while Sofia brought the Word of God to the Children.”

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS)

- 1962: Maria Montessori Association for Religious Formation of the Child began as a movement of catechists exploring with Cavalletti and Gobbi the theology of children / the way children come to God
- 1975: The first CGS training in the United States was in St. Paul, MN (University of St. Thomas)
- 1984: Pope John Paul II visited Rome Atrium
- 1984: CGSUSA, the National Association of the United States, was formalized
- 1996: Surge in growth in the Catholic Church
- 2009: Adopted by Missionaries of Charity (Mother Teresa)
- CGS is a method or way of living
- CGS is marked by a profound respect for children and their rich capacity for relationship with God
- The underlying belief/premise is that there is already a relationship between God and the child

Resources:

- Standing, *The Child of the Church*
- Lillig, *The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd: Essential Realities*, 1-61
- Lillig, *The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd in a Parish Setting*, 3-13
- Cavalletti et al, *The Good Shepherd & the Child: A Joyful Journey*, 101-104
- Cavalletti, Sofia, “Prehistory and History of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, *Journals of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*, 1998-2002, 68-72
- Coulter, Patricia, *Way of Holy Joy, Selected Writings of Sofia Cavalletti*, 79-82
- Garrido, *Mustard Seed Preaching*, 5-9
- Grazzini, Camillo, “Obituary: Gianna Gobbi,” *NAMTA Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 1, winter 2004, 247-250