

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd



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History of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is an approach to the religious formation of children, 3-12 years of age. It originated in 1954 with the founding of the children's center or "Atrium" in Rome, Italy. Inspired by Montessori principles of education, it now extends to many countries, including Africa, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Canada and the United States.

The catechesis is based on the conviction that God and the child are in relationship. The child has a deep need to experience and a special capacity to enjoy the presence of God. The task of the adult is to help the child live fully the encounter with God. When helped to do so, this experience becomes formative of the child's whole person and generates great joy. "My body is happy," Stefania said after praying with other youngsters.

After 35 years with this age group, it was found that whatever their culture, children responded in the same way to certain elements of the Christian message. Because of this fact, a core curriculum took shape. The curriculum is constructed so that it accommodates and nurtures the faith, moral and psychological states of the child's growth. The themes are offered in such a way as to develop the precious religious potential present in every child: the capacity to love and be loved.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd was initiated under the guidance of Dr. Sofia Cavalletti, Hebrew and Scripture scholar and member of the Vatican commission for Jewish-Christian relations and Prof. Gianna Gobbi, colleague of Dr. Maria Montessori and educator of children and adults.

Curriculum of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Covenant

Using Scripture, and showing the children how the covenant is lived in the Liturgy prepare this fundamental biblical theme. The Covenant, because it is relationship, is the pivotal theme of the curriculum: the celebration of our relationship with God and our brothers and sisters.

Christology

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The covenant with the Father is established in the New Testament through the mediation of Jesus Christ. The following themes are presented, centering on the person of Jesus.

- The historical events of the life of Jesus, especially the infancy narratives.
- The passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.
- The preaching of Jesus, particularly the images of Christ, the Good Shepherd; Christ, the Light; Christ the True Vine.
- The parables of the Kingdom of God.

Liturgy

The biblical message is lived in the liturgical experience of the Church. The covenant is actualized and celebrated in the Liturgy.

The language of “sign” is a vital aspect of the Liturgy. Through exploring the sign, the child is helped to enter into the meaning of the Covenant.

Sacraments

Baptism

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Christ, the Light of the world, joins us together with him in the mystery of his passion, death and resurrection. In Baptism, we receive the gift of His Risen life. The baptismal light and white garment is sign of our covenant with God in the Risen Christ.

Eucharist

The gesture of the epiclesis (the invocation of the Holy Spirit) and the words of our Lord at the Last Supper express the first moment of the covenant: the gift of God in Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who gives his life for his sheep.

The action and words of the offering gesture express the second moment of the covenant: our response to the gift we have received.

The gesture peace expresses the universal dimension of the covenant, our union with God and others, as it is proclaimed in the parable of the True Vine and lived in its liturgical expressions of the breaking of the bread.

Reconciliation

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The sacrament is presented through the signs and words of the rite of reconciliation. The covenant is renewed in the liberation from sin, in the renewed gift of the Holy Spirit, and in our renewed participation in the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. This empowers us to continue our life's journey with our light enkindled and our

baptismal robe unstained.

The Preaching of Jesus

Jesus' method of preaching is represented in the parables. The Kingdom of God is the central theme in the preaching of Jesus. The aspects of the Kingdom which are highlighted with young children are:

- The mysterious nature of the Kingdom:

The parables of the Mustard Seed, The Yeast, The Grain of Wheat.

- The inestimable value of the Kingdom: the parable of the Precious Pearl and of the Hidden Treasure.

The aspects of the Kingdom which are highlighted with the older children are:

- The Kingdom is like a wedding feast: the parables of the Ten

Bridesmaids and the Guests Invited to the Marriage Feast.

- The Kingdom calls forth our response: the parables of the Pharisee and the Publican, the Good Samaritan, the Sower, the Debtors, the Labourers in the Vineyard, the Insistent Friend, the Rich Fool.

Moral Formation

The theme of the covenant is fundamental for the moral formation of the child. It is the foundation for the formation of the whole person, through the dynamic of relationship. Since moral formation is interpreted as the encounter with God and others, it is present in every theme of the Christian message we offer, either in an implicit or explicit form.

In order to be a true relationship, the covenant requires a response.

in younger children this response consists primarily in the peaceful enjoyment of God's presence, as called forth by the image of Christ, the Good Shepherd. It engages every aspect of the child's being and orients the child in a trusting, joyful way towards reality.

In older children, after six years of age, this response extends to action as well, and inspired a certain quality of behavior. It draws the child to bear fruit as part of the True Vine, and to make a personal contribution to the history of salvation.

The following are in the older child's formation:

- A selection of evangelical maxims:

These proclaim that God's life in us enables us to aspire to love and to do as Jesus. They provide a stimulus for actualizing what is most profound in the human spirit: "Love one another as I have loved you."

- A selection of moral parables:

These reveal various types of human behavior and situations, in the lights of which we can reflect upon and orient our own behavior.

- The parables of mercy:

The parables of the Found Sheep, the Found Coin, and the Prodigal Son announce God's unfailing, unchanging love, whatever our limitations, weakness and sin.

- Biblical history:

Present the Good News that we have a unique and indispensable contribution to offer in the building of the Kingdom of God. This provides meaning and motivation to all our activity.

- The Sacrament of Reconciliation:

This sacrament celebrates God's faithful and limitless love for us. It offers us the experience of a personal encounter with God's steadfast love: "With unchanging love do I love you."

The History of the Kingdom of God

Since the Kingdom Jesus spoke of has a history, we offer this to the older child through a series of successive presentations.

- Globality: The Kingdom of God begins with creation, culminates in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, and stretches forward to its completion, when “God will be all in all,” at the Parousia.

- Unity Between the Bible and the Liturgy: The history of the Kingdom of God is the history of the many gifts God gives to humanity. The greatest is God’s gift of self in the person of His Son. This gift continues to be given, particularly in the Liturgy, until it will have filled the whole of creation.

- The Plan of God: In probing the plan of God, which is being realized throughout history, we discover it is the history of the covenant. This is the progressive communion between heaven and earth and all creatures. It is a plan for communion, the fullness of which we eagerly await. Each of us is called to make our own personal contribution.

- The Unfolding Stages: The detailed reflection of the various stages in the history of God’s Kingdom includes: creation; the choice of Israel; the gift of the Law; the preaching of the prophets; the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. These are the events, which prepare for and are directed towards fulfillment in the Parousia.