

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd & Godly Play Compared

by Rev. Joyce Scherer-Hoock

Key Concepts & Approaches Shared

Both are rooted in Montessori philosophy and method

- Material is presented in an evocative rather than didactic manner.
- Children are drawn into discovery by leading questions or “wondering.”
- Biblical but with an open, rather than closed, view of the Bible.
- Silence is valued as a space for God to speak with the child.
- Use of symbolic religious language is taught by modeling.

In both classroom space becomes “sacred space.”

- Space and materials are the teacher. The teacher is a facilitator in use of space & materials.
- The child is taught how to work in and maintain the space & materials. Order & freedom are held in tension. A careful external ordering of space and materials facilitates the child’s autonomy and mastery.
- Content is communicated in demonstrations with specially prepared, three-dimensional models rather than by storytelling, paper and pencil work, or crafts. Honors the young child’s need to learn in a multi-modal and sensorial manner.
- “The Unspoken Lesson” is made explicit. (Berryman) Practical Life (COGS).

Both methods strive to provide Christian formation rather than education.

Some Key Differences

- Godly Play is Theocentric.
- COGS is Christocentric / Trinitarian.

- Godly Play offers the child Biblical material in the order it appears in the Bible.
- COGS offers Biblical material based on the child’s spiritual sensitive period and level of cognitive development.

- There are three levels of COGS. These levels are based on Montessori's “planes of development.” At each level children are drawn to aspects of the Christian faith that correspond to their developmental need at that time. Ages:
 - 3 – 6 are sensitive to protection - The Good Shepherd;
 - 6 - 9 sensitive to moral issues - The Vine;
 - 9 – 12 sensitive to heroism - Abraham, Moses...

- Godly Play’s published material is for children 3 – 8. Additional stories are in preparation.
- COGS’s formation courses prepare adults to work with children 3 - 12 in atria at three levels.

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- GP contains some liturgical and sacramental material; tends to be Biblical/Protestant.
- COGS explores liturgy and sacraments in great depth; is Biblical/Sacramental/catholic.

- GP focuses on Biblical stories - a “story” approach.
- COGS’s selection and presentation of biblical material is rich in theological background and resonance. Cavalletti’s writings quote extensively from the early church fathers - a “theological” approach.
- COGS integrates natural history, including evolutionary theory, world history, and culture, and Biblical criticism with Biblical story, liturgy, and theology at Levels II & III in timeline material.

- Godly Play presentations & material patterns are published and can be purchased in a bookstore. Berryman also conducts weekend-long workshops for teacher training.
- COGS is committed to an oral method of adult formation and transmission. Presentations are seen during formation courses (100 hours each level) and transcribed by the students into an “album page” and gathered in albums. Album pages include “Doctrinal Content” statements, which are written following group theological reflection and discussion. CGS adult training is similar to the Montessori method of teacher training. Many Catechists are also formed in local church atria by watching and assisting a formation course-trained catechist.

- Only those enrolled in a formation course can purchase CGS patterns for materials. Material making is seen as a way of praying. Churches and individuals are strongly encouraged to make their own materials and to view this as an extension of their spiritual preparation.
- GP materials can be made or purchased and are sold through Berrymans’s courses.

Key Terms compared

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Sofia Cavalletti

Atrium

Presentation

The Work of the Child or just “work”

Godly Play

Jerome Berryman

Children’s Worship Center

Play