

mgr. lic. Maria Ludwig
Uniwersytet Opolski
Instytut Nauk Teologicznych

SUMMARY

The phenomenon of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is perfectly determined by the principle of activation and activity of a child. Movement, work, and independence in a way define all its actions taking place in an *atrium*. It emerges that the experience of unfettered freedom in acting and thinking becomes exceptional for a child, thus giving it the possibility to discover the uniqueness of its own activity.

The above mentioned issues have become an inspiration to undertake scientific reflection on the principle of activation during the classes of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and that is reflected in the title of the work, namely “The principle of activation in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd”. Therefore, the primary aim of that work was to present activation as the supreme law for the whole Catechesis of the Good Shepherd which also was presented in a very detailed way. Among others, the dissertation originated from the conviction that there is a need to point to inalienable advantages of that form of catechesis in catechizing of the youngest children as well as to present activation as the guiding principle in the whole philosophy both of Montessori and CGS. The activity of a child and its independence are in a way at the centre of all actions in an *atrium*, thus becoming an axis for the spiritual development of a child, so important in catechizing. Contemporary catechesis needs active models of teaching and new ways of work with children. It should be emphasized here that exceptionality of CGS is that activity and activation of a child are not pedagogical measures forced by a teacher but, being natural children’s needs, in an *atrium* they are constantly strengthened by the prepared surroundings.

In connection with the research problem anchored in such a way, the above dissertation was divided into four chapters. In the first chapter the history of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd was presented in great detail as well as the philosophy of work according to the Montessorian pedagogy and in the following paragraphs the personality of a teacher was described, namely a catechist desired to work in an *atrium*. The whole of that very detailed description, based on the source materials written by Maria Montessori and Sofia Cavaletti and the literature of the subject, was intended to present a coherent picture of the concept of the

Montessori religious education. Also the paragraphs dedicated to the sign method and a pedagogy of alliance, so important for CGS, became a crucial part of the chapter.

The conclusions and reflections from that chapter delight with the freshness of the pedagogical thought of their founder and at the same time they inspire to undertake work according to that philosophy of work. The presented description of a child and its needs very clearly indicates what is necessary for its harmonious development. Treating a child subjectively and following a pupil should therefore mean attempts constantly undertaken by an adult to satisfy all its developmental needs. Maria Montessori and Sofia Cavaletti perfectly understood children's needs and, responding to their inner hunger, they wished them to experience fully the situations shaping their development through learning. In catechizing, especially of younger children, it is worth realizing that catechesis is not only a space of learning about God, but it should, above all, be a living encounter and an experience of joyful staying with God as a friend. The meeting becomes an objective and a task in the religious space of an *atrium*.

In the second chapter physical activation of children in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd was described. The motor needs of children at kindergarten age and realization of those abilities in contemporary families and children's environments were presented and analyzed in great detail. In the following paragraphs an *atrium* participants' own activity was presented as well as the interactions taking place in the religious space and the possibilities to stimulate physical activity. The last paragraph indicated CGS as a perfect form of physical activation of a child.

The analysis of the materials revealed how a child's own activity, properly adjusted surroundings, and a prepared teacher constitute a frame within which the whole development of a child in an *atrium* takes place. That chapter also presents the difficult situation of a small child who experiences physical neglect by the closest family members. A contemporary Polish child is overstimulated, over-scheduled, and experiences an overabundance of material goods. On the other hand, it receives alarmingly little parents' interest, attention, and warmth. In this perspective an active model of work is extremely needed by contemporary children since it is creative, developing, and, above all, putting a child and its spiritual needs at the centre of didactic activities. According to the thought of Montessori, accompanying a child and enabling it to be physically active inevitably leads it to its development through the possibility to improve manual

dexterity, accuracy, coordination, agility, and concentration. Physical activity increases and naturally leads children to intellectual as well as emotional and spiritual activity.

In the third chapter the materials were analyzed from the point of view of intellectual activity of a child. An attempt was made to analyse in depth the intellectual activity of pre-school children and then also their own intellectual activity during CGS. The following paragraphs pictured interactions between a child, an adult, an environment, and other participants of the meetings as well as the possibilities of intellectual stimulation through stimuli present in an *atrium*. In the last paragraph the issue of CGS as a form of the intellectual activation of a child was discussed.

The analyzed materials inevitably lead to the conclusion that through creating a religious space that is rich in developmental stimuli a child is allowed to stay in intellectual activity. He or she experiences development in an *atrium* somehow incidentally and “by chance”. The very process of learning and getting to know God is for a child an interesting adventure that naturally fits in with its daily activity. Unhindered movements, free position on a carpet, freedom to choose materials and learning pace makes a child more and more attentive with every movement as well as determined during work, and, most importantly, it enjoys every undertaken intellectual activity. It is also worth to notice that the satisfying level of the knowledge acquired by a child is influenced mainly by its motivation, participation in a group, lack of outside control, and above all, its own high activity. It turns out that an activated child acquires both a stock of knowledge and vocabulary desired by an adult and does not feel tired nor discouraged at the same time.

Spiritual achievements resulting from individual emotional and spiritual work in an *atrium* became the subject of deliberations in the fourth chapter of the dissertation. Similarly as in the previous chapters, on the basis of the analysis of the source materials, literature, and available research, the framework of children’s emotionality and experiences in the area of religion and spirituality was first determined and then a child’s own activity concerning emotions and spirit in the space of an *atrium* was presented. The stimulation of emotional and spiritual activity and emotional interactions resulting from the contact with both an adult and presented material became the subject of considerations in the following paragraphs. The fourth chapter was ended with the presentation of CGS as a unique form that activates spirit and emotions of a child.

Both activity and the rule of activation during CGS classes are obvious in a way. Still, it is also a task through which the aim is pursued, namely leading children to deep intimacy with God.

After the in-depth analysis of the source materials as well as many texts by Maria Montessori and Sofia Cavaletti, it should be clearly stated that CGS is an exceptional response to the children's need of deep and spiritual intimacy with God. It is also an uncommon response to the emotional and spiritual needs of a child. The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is based on the most important truth and essence of Christianity which is passed on to the youngest: "Jesus – the Good Shepherd loves you and wishes to have a relation with you". That truth, knowledge, and experience conveyed during the Catechesis are rooted in children's heart and accompany it when he or she enters an adult life, in the future allowing to draw spiritual strength from that experience.

The rule of activation in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is ubiquitous and in a way further specifies all the actions of a child in an *atrium*. That was also thoroughly and very clearly presented in the present dissertation. The continuous experience of physical, intellectual, and emotional and spiritual interactions between a child and material, also a child and an adult, and between a child and God causes the increase of commitment and motivation of a child to undertake new tasks in the space of an *atrium*. Still, the stimulation of activity taking place during the catechesis indicates how significantly the principle of activation is a part of the whole CGS.

Therefore, the supreme principle of the activation of a child in CGS to a large extent consists in the preparation of conditions for a child to enable him or her to undertake independent work and the reflection on the prepared material. In an *atrium* a child learns how to listen. An adult, surprisingly, does not give ready answers and does not teach as it is customary. The uniqueness of the Catechesis consists in asking questions in such a manner that a child independently makes an effort to look for answers. Thus, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd prepares for undertaking reflections and also encourages the young generation to thinking, drawing conclusions, and asking questions. From an early age a child is able to undertake spiritual reflections and that is why the only proper adult's task is to make undertaking of that intellectual and spiritual effort easier for a child. The experiences of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd indicate that children not only have an excellent religious sense and are sensitive to the tender relation with God, but they stunningly understand the transcendental reality. Children long to experience activity and effort and they want to develop in all dimensions of their personality, including the spiritual one, and thus their feeling of discovering great mysteries makes them see

themselves as exceptional. That precious discovery of their “own wisdom” allows them to believe in their strength and encourages to further, incessant, and multidimensional efforts.

The undertaken issue of the principle of activation in CGS is new and beyond all doubt it has not been fully exhausted. In summary, it should be stated that the principle of activation is a kind of azimuth and reference point for the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and the concept of working in an *atrium* is based on it. Owing to that principle and through it a child experiences physical, intellectual, and last but not least emotional and spiritual development.