

To 'enter into the secret of childhood' requires of us, as adults, both a willing spirit and a particular discipline. Above all, this discipline comes as a result of patient observation of the children in addition to a careful preparation of ourselves, so that we can understand what we observe and know best how to respond to the child's self-revelation."

Gianna Gobbi

Listening to God with Children

*(Loveland, OH: Treehaus Publications,
1998), vii*



The United States Association of

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd



Remembering Gianna Gobbi

1919-2002



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Sources:

A Year of Sofia Cavalletti, Ann Garrido, "Gianna Gobbi," p. 337

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Essential Realities, ed. Tina Lillig, "Gianna," by Sofia Cavalletti, p.46

NAMTA Journal, Vol. 27.1, Winter 2002, "A Tribute to Adele Costa Gnocchi," p. 19

NAMTA Journal, Vol 29.1, Winter 2004, "Obituary: Gianna Gobbi by Camillo Grazzini," p. 247

The Good Shepherd and the Child, A Joyful Journey, revised and updated, 2013, ed by Rebekah Rojcewicz, p. 105



Finally, Sofia, following Gianna's passing reflected upon Gianna in light of her experience with her at Gianna's country home as follows:

"Why is it so difficult for me to write about Gianna when we have spent almost half a century united by friendship and by work?... My memory of Gianna cannot be separated from her beautiful country house. I would like to underline the words beautiful and countryside. Gianna's house was beautiful because it had kept all of its rustic character. The countryside made it so beautiful and special...



...I have spoken of Gianna's countryside, because Gianna lived in relation to it with a spirit that I would define as religious. It is not possible to separate the peasant Gianna from the researcher and Montessori educator. In her, the soul of the educator and the soul of the "peasant" were combined in perfect unity, and both constituted her person. The seasonal rhythms of the countryside entered into Gianna and forged in her the discipline she brought to her work as an educator...

As Gianna watched the slow changes in nature, she also knew how to watch, without attempting to hasten, the slow normalization of the child and his or her manifestation as a child of God. Gianna's knowing how to wait was the expression of a deep respect – a religious respect – in front of the manifestation of the miracle of life, in all its forms."

(From *Essential Realities*, "Gianna," by Sofia Cavalletti, p. 46)

A Brief Biography on Gianna Gobbi

The following excerpts offer a brief biography of Gianna Gobbi



Gianna Gobbi was born in Rome, Italy on December 15, 1919. A significant part of her youth – and adulthood – was spent on her family's farm in Senigallia which she referred to as "la campagna" or "the country." This property near the Adriatic Sea was only a short distance from Maria

Montessori's childhood home in Chiaravalle. (A Year With Sofia Cavalletti, Chapter 11 Gianna Gobbi, p. 337)

At the age of 20, she dropped her studies in order to attend the Montessori course for Children's House. This was an international course held from November 1939 to May 1940 in Rome at the Istituto Nazaret (a prestigious residential convent school for girls in Italy and one which also prepared its students for teaching). The course was held by Adele Costa Gnocchi who lectured in theory and by Maria Antonietta Paolini who dealt with the practical aspect. It was one of the few "Parallel courses" held under the auspices of the Association Montessori Internazionale during the 1930s in Europe. Costa Gnocchi was Maria Montessori's 'legatus pedagogicus' and therefore did not sign the diplomas which were signed by Maria Montessori herself. This course was held at the same time as the one in Adyar, India, given by Maria Montessori. (Camillo Grazzini, Obituary: Gianna Gobbi, NAMTA Journal, Winter 2004, Special Edition, p. 247)

Gianna Gobbi began working with Dr. Maria Montessori in 1940, and in 1942 she assumed responsibility for the two-year old children in the Casa dei Bambini (Children's House) of Professor Adele Costa Gnocchi in Palazzo Taverna, Rome. Gianna Gobbi collaborated as Dr. Montessori's assistant during her course on young children in 1951. (Good Shepherd and the Child, A Joyful Journey, p. 105)



Adele Costa Gnocchi — an early collaborator of Montessori — became an important figure in Gobbi’s life. In the years following her Montessori training, Gobbi worked in Costa Gnocchi’s “little school” at Palazzo Taverna in the center of Rome. Observing Gobbi’s presence with children, Costa Gnocchi — who shared Montessori’s interest in the intersection between Montessori methodology and faith formation — thought Gobbi would have particular gifts as a catechist.

In a Tribute to Adele Costa Gnocchi written by Salvatore Valitutti found in The NAMTA Journal 15:3, Summer, 1990 and again in 27:1, Winter 2002, he wrote the following about Adele saying that she “believed in the redemptive power of education; she shared Kant’s view that we have not yet accomplished the task of educating humanity to achieve its fullest potential.” Such a vision she saw could produce marvelous results but hasn’t realized yet. Meeting Maria Montessori was decisive for Adele because she found a kindred spirit discovering Montessori’s “faith in childhood’s hidden treasures,” and seeing in that a “portent of a purer humanity. She had the ability and knowledge to “awaken people’s consciousness and led her to invent efficient stratagems to confront the most negative and adverse attitudes towards education.” She had an ability like that of a “dowser” for “divining people’s deepest essence and leading their gifts into educational channels. During her lifetime she awakened many spirits, giving them strength and guiding them into a fully responsible, active life. She was an educator who inspired people to “know themselves better and to be faithful to their inner best.” And it is her remarkable abilities and knowledge of Montessori’s work and how she implemented that work along with connecting others to that work, that made it possible for Gianna Gobbi to meet Sofia Cavalletti. (NAMTA Journal, Tribute to Adele Costa Gnocchi, Winter 2002)

On January 29, 2002 in her 83rd year, Gianna Gobbi suddenly, unexpectedly, left us.” This is how Camillo Grazzini began his obituary on Gianna and he concluded it with the following, “Of the many things that I have heard and read during the days following Gianna Gobbi’s death, I particularly like what a mutual friend and colleague wrote in a letter from Mexico: ‘

“Il Regno dei cieli è simile ad un piccolo granello di senape, che un uomo prese e seminò nel suo orto. Quel granello crebbe e diventò un albero e gli uccelli vennero a fare il nido nei suoi rami”. (Luca 13,18-19)



“Gianna was a person with a great sense of humor, very human, very strong in Montessori understanding but, at the same time, with enormous humility. She was always generous with her time, always ready to listen and to be there if needed. Her death is a great loss for the Montessori movement.”

Also, in a telegram sent to Gianna Gobbi’s family, Renilde Montessori, the President of AMI, wrote:

‘A steadfast flame has ceased to burn and we mourn. Her unassuming contribution to the cause of the child was staunch, valuable, unceasing...’

And the C. I. S. M. Foundation of Bergamo remembered Gianna Gobbi with these words:

‘Her work was authentic, constant, and precious, and her friendship generous in gifts.’

(From Obituary: Gianna Gobbi by Camillo Grazzini, The NAMTA Journal, Vol. 29, No. 1 Winter 2004, p. 247.





In addition to her work as a Montessori guide and catechist in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Gianna began in 1959 offering lectures to adults caring for children under the age of three at the Assistants to Infancy Training Program in Rome. In addition, she was principal lecturer with Dr. Silvana Montanaro at the A.M.I. Assistants to Infancy Course in Houston, Texas, and in Rome, Italy.

At the 1979 International Montessori Conference, Dr. Silvana Montanaro discussed the possibilities for educating the youngest children. In 1980, Dr. Montanaro, Gianna Gobbli, Lydia Celli, and Gabriella Bartoli taught the first AMI Assistance to Infancy training. One of the students was Judi Orion. In 1983, Judi Orion, Dr. Montanaro, and Gianna Gobbli hosted the first AMI Assistance to Infancy training in the United States in Houston, TX and then in 1989, Judi moved the Assistance to Infancy course to Denver.

(An interesting side note: The Montessori Institute in Denver has a placemat embroidered by Gianna Gobbli and a doll house she created.)



In 1954, Costa Gnocchi introduced Gianna to Sofia Cavalletti, who had approached Costa Gnocchi about the best way of working with children preparing for the sacraments. Cavalletti would later write:

I cannot think back without emotion to that first encounter with Gianna and the little group of children long ago We were thinking it would only be the first of a limited number of meetings before each of us returned to our field of work. Instead, it signaled the beginning of an impassioned and thrilling work with children that opened up for us always wider horizons in the world of childhood. (Foglietto no. 7, 2007) (A Year with Sofia)

Gianna Gobbli was co-founder with Sofia Cavalletti of the Center of Catechesis in Rome. From 1954 until her death January 29, 2002, Gianna worked with Sofia in the religious formation of children and collaborated in the Good Shepherd Catechesis training courses for adults in Rome and other centers in Italy, as well as in Canada and Mexico. Her book, *Listening to God With Children: The Montessori Method Applied to the Catechesis of Children* (Loveland, OH: Treehaus Communications, 1998) offers a treasure-house of practical wisdom for all those who seek to serve the young child's religious potential. (*Good Shepherd and the Child*)



Gianna soon became Sofia's close collaborator. The two taught in several of the same schools — not only Costa Gnocchi's, but also the Armando Diaz Professional Institute and Virgil State High School, where during the 1960s and '70s Gianna led home economics courses and Cavalletti taught religion but their deepest collaboration took place at 34 Via degli Orsini where they prepared the atria for children from the ages of 3 - 12.

Originally participating families called the project the Montessori School of Religion, and the first move to organize and support the effort — coordinated by Adele Costa Gnocchi in 1963 — was named the Maria Montessori Association for the Religious Formation of the Child. But shortly thereafter it became more widely known as the Center of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

Gianna Gobbi and Sofia Cavalletti first published their joint insights in *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy: The Montessori Approach* (available in Italian in 1961, English in 1964). As their thoughts developed with time, Sofia produced a significantly revised volume, *The Religious Potential of the Child* (available in Italian in 1978, English in 1983) followed by a second volume focused on older children, *The Religious Potential of the Child, 6 to 12 Years* (available in Italian in 1996, in English in 2002)

Although these volumes were published under Sofia Cavalletti's name alone, she readily acknowledged Gianna's contribution to them:

Of my many collaborators I will name only Gianna Gobbi. She is the one to represent the many others, my dearest friend among dearest friends, who, from our earliest beginnings in 1954, has brought to our common work her knowledge of the child . . . and her personal wisdom, the strength of her intuition and intelligence. (, xiv)

While Gobbi continued to assist with Montessori courses locally, she also travelled with Sofia for catechist formation courses — including trips to Mexico, Canada, the United States, and Croatia. She later gathered her own lecture themes for publication in the book *Listening to God with Children* (available in Italian in 1992, in English in 1998). Gianna coauthored *The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey* with Sofia and colleagues Silvana Montanaro and Patricia Coulter (available in English in 1994, revised by Rebekah Rojcewicz, 2013). And she assisted with the development of the *I Am the Good Shepherd (Io sono il Buon Pastore)* workbooks and guidebooks designed for Italian school children and embraced widely in Latin America.



Gianna worked alongside Sofia Cavalletti until her unexpected death on January 29, 2002, from complications after a fall. In her moving tribute to Gianna, Cavalletti wrote,

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. This intertwining, so evident and visible in the atrium, corresponds to an intertwining of feelings, of agreements, of passions, that our relation created between us. I will never be grateful enough to Gianna for this friendship, and to Adele Costa Gnocchi, who made us meet.