# Concerning the "Little Gospels"

Early in their work with children in the atrium (in the late 1950's), Sofia and Gianna realized that the child needed even more direct access to the Word than just in hearing it read by an adult, and so they came up with individual Scripture booklets for each of the texts presented to the children. Their realization of the importance of the texts as the "primary material" for exploring the Christian message was further reflected in their choosing to have the texts hardbound and simply but beautifully illustrated by Gianna. In honoring both the importance of the gospel texts and the needs of the young child, they made the booklets small (easily handled by the children), with a limited number of lines on each page. Sofia and Gianna did not rely on a published translation of the Bible; rather, they relied on the original Greek and adjusted their translation according to the capacities of the child.

When our U.S. association was being formed in the mid 1980's and we were lacking the resources to duplicate the Rome hardbound books, Catherine Maresca (of the original board) offered to publish the booklets in paperback form through Christian Family Montessori School. Sofia reviewed and approved the English Bible translations that were used. The booklet sets have been sold to many catechists and parents through the years and have been a great gift. They continue to be sold through Center for Children and Theology.

Over the years, some of us began to make our own, handmade booklets for the atrium in an effort to further honor the importance of the texts and the sensitivity of the children to handmade prayer cards and other materials. We realized that carefully handmade booklets serve a similar purpose as the hardbound books of the Rome atrium: they further communicate how precious these words are.

But some of us had also never given up on the dream of producing booklets that looked like the Rome atrium booklets, complete with Gianna's lovely artwork. Sofia had long ago said how delightful it would be to re-discover these "little gospels" wherever one traveled… in whatever atria one visited. Finally, just a few years ago, the "time was ripe" and we began the process of publishing the hardbound "Little Gospels." Pat Sauerman's particular enthusiasm for the project spurred us on. Kathleen Garness did a wonderful job of restoring Gianna's original artwork. Rebekah Rojcewicz, of the Executive Committee of the International Consiglio, led the translation and editing process, assisted by Patricia Coulter on the translations from the original Italian booklets and by Pat Sauerman and Mary Mirrione on the editing work (which Sofia had agreed was necessary and which the Executive Committee reviewed and approved).

The hardbound "Little Gospels" are a treasure, and we rejoice in their publication. We are grateful to LTP and to our CGS editor there, Margaret Brennan, for the beautiful job they have done on the boxed sets of the Level I booklets. But it is important to clarify that these hardbound "Little Gospels" are by no means a mandatory atrium material. Homemade booklets are also a treasure for the children; and we continue to offer bookmaking workshops to encourage this endeavor. And the paperback booklets published by the Center for Children and Theology certainly remain a valid option.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a "living work;" thus, it is always being refined, as guided by the responses of the children. It is always seeking to be even more essential, and this has prompted certain edits of the original texts as well as our choosing a more readable font for children. Again, our publication of these hardbound books is not meant to supplant the homemade books or even the published paperback booklets, but simply to offer an updated version of the most treasured material of the Rome atrium.

*Submitted by Rebekah Rojcewicz*
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