

Archive for November, 2008

November 18th, 2008

A Pearl of Great Price

Montessori education has been given to us as "A Pearl of Great Price." This new booklet from Cross Mountain Press will help you articulate this unique spiritual and educational heritage. This is a great book to give to pastors, board members and other people who you want to understand why Montessori is truly a spiritual journey lived out in an educational setting. Order today at www.crossmountainpress.com

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The Challenge of Santa Claus

There are four stages to Santa Claus in life:
First you believe in him.
Then you don't.
Then you become Santa Claus.
Then you begin to look like Santa Claus.

There is probably no better example of imagination versus fantasy than our North Pole friend. The reality of Santa Claus is that he was a Christian bishop who lived in the 4th century in Turkey. He was noted for his generosity. Those are the facts – the rest of it is fantasy. And so what's our challenge?

Dr. Montessori writes in "Spontaneous activity in Education", "But how can the imagination of children be developed by what is, on the contrary, the fruit of our imagination. It is we who imagine, not they; they believe, they do not imagine." Santa Claus is a wonderfully "imaginative" icon of the best of the generosity of the season – but it is a fantasy. And to teach our children anything else is a disservice to them and to their lifetime quest for truth and reality. Now I'm feeling like the Grinch who stole Christmas. Santa Claus brings up many wonderful memories and feelings but the reality is that when we share the "varnished" "truth" of Santa Claus we are doing harm to

our children. (Now, I'm also Chicken Little, and the sky is falling.)

Harm? With the sweet story of giving and holiday cheer? Unfortunately, we imagine – they believe! And that's the problem. When we present a lesson, we tell the child "This is red. This is blue. Touch the red. Touch the blue. What is this? Now, what is this?" When we give the lesson, we are opening the door for the child to reality and to be able to name and define his environment. The young child is not yet ready for abstract concepts like honor and justice. All that he knows is presented to him as reality – and truth. What would happen to the child after three or four years of having presented "This is red. This is blue." you one day tell him, "This really isn't red. This really isn't blue. This is green and this is yellow." Confusion? Distrust? Perplexity? "But I wouldn't do that to a child? So then why do we carry on this sweet fantasy when it causes this future confusion?"

The four great characters that enter a child's early life are Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy and Jesus. If you are "untruthful" about the first three, are you to be trusted about the fourth? Does the fantasy of the first three impinge upon the truthfulness of the only reality in the quartet? These are wonderful sweet cultural icons and stories but are they worth planting the seeds of disbelief in the credulity of our children? (Credulity is defined as readiness or willingness to believe especially on slight or uncertain evidence.) We are far more familiar with the terms incredulous – unwilling to accept what is offered as true, skeptical; and incredible – too extraordinary and improbable to be believed. Dr. Montessori writes, "Religion is not a product of fantastic imagination, it is the greatest of realities, the one truth to the religious man."

Our service and dedication to the child must be based on reality and truth. Better to lose the fantasy of Santa Claus than the reality of Jesus – the one we really celebrate at Christmas.