

## Archive for December, 2008

December 27th, 2008

### **All I want for Christmas (part 3) to teach the children of the world**

Christmas comes and goes too quickly. The anticipation, the excitement builds and then suddenly it's over. As a child, nobody ever explained the "Twelve days of Christmas." It was a long song that took forever to sing. (A lot like "Father Abraham"!)

Have you ever studied the song? On one hand it really is for the birds. Half the lyrics deal with ornithology – one partridge, two turtle doves, three French hens, four calling birds, six geese a-laying and seven swans a-swimming. But outside of that maybe we need to go back to the days when we celebrated the twelve days of Christmas. From the birth of Christ until the Epiphany with the Magi. The twelve days may give us time to savor the season and the reason. Peace on Earth and good will to men takes time to nurture. It is in this same spirit that we spend our lives in a Montessori environment – creating peace on earth and good will to the children.

And it is these blessings of peace and good will that we experience and want to share with the children of the world. Each of us in our corner of the world is getting to do that but there are thousands of corners of the world where children neither know God nor the great joy and peace that comes from learning in this unique way. Each of you is doing an amazing work in Christian Montessori. You are a "city on a hill", a light to the possibilities of what Christian education can be. And your success is critical to both spreading the Gospel and sharing Montessori. Matthew 5:16 tells us "Let your light so shine before men that they will see your good works and glorify your father in heaven." Supporting and encouraging your efforts is a major purpose of the Christian Montessori Fellowship. Providing resources for parents and teachers is part of that support. But there is one other major purpose for which we need your help.

We want to teach the children of the world but we can't do it without you. You are the foundation on which this movement is built. Your very existence as a school and as a teacher speaks to the real possibilities of this

transforming way to teach and to live. But to reach the world requires the efforts of many people. Just running a classroom or a school requires great energy and is often a daunting task given all the challenges we face from society culturally, educationally and now in particular financially. So what do you even have left to give?

That same question was asked by the prophet Elijah to a widow at Zarephath (I Kings 17:10-17). He asked for a piece of bread and she replied that all she had was a little flour and oil and she was going to make a meal for her and her son, "That we may eat it – and die." (It sounds as if she could have used a bailout.) Give me some bread first, he said. And your flour and oil will last. And they did.

I can't promise you that your support of the fellowship and the important work it represents will result in any easier time for you economically. I don't guarantee you that you will receive extra money in the mail or under your door. But what I do know is that your donation to the work of helping children all over the world will bring a big smile to our Heavenly Father's face.

In one sense, we are your missionaries to the world. You have your own mission field right where you are. But there are countless other fields that your giving can help seed with the Gospel and with this fantastic way of educating. We are getting ready to put our training programs on line to be able to reach schools and teachers all over the world. The Good news is too good to keep to ourselves. We need to shout it from the house tops and we have the ability to do so – with your support.

Please consider a donation – I know everyone is asking for them – but if Christian Montessori is dear to your heart – please put some of your treasure here. Jesus commended the widow (Mark 12:44) who put in her two coins at the temple treasury. She didn't give out of her wealth but out of her poverty. (She may have well been a Montessori teacher.) She gave out of her love. I'd like to encourage you to do the same. Visit our website [www.crossmountainpress.com](http://www.crossmountainpress.com) where you can find a tab for donations and

memberships. God bless you for your consideration and support.

By **Fidellow** in Uncategorized ... (Add your comment)

December 25th, 2008

## **All I want for Christmas (part 2) – World Peace**

In the movie "Miss Congeniality" one of the running jokes about the beauty pageant – scholarship program is that every contestant always answers that what they want is "World Peace". It is a high, worthy and lofty goal. The irony of world peace is that it does not start with the world – it starts with us, then moves to our families, our communities, our state, our country and then the world.

Most people living in the troubled corners of the world are just looking for safety and stability and food and water. Those of us who continue to enjoy those things have the luxury of pondering the way to create that peace that the world so desperately wants.

Montessori educators have really taken to heart Dr. Montessori's vision of world peace. God gave her a unique tool on which to build this quest. And great hearted people have made this quest their own. Montessori education is a great transformative experience. And the seeming miracles that occur in children's lives (and adults) are awe inspiring. And many Montessorians truly believe that if anything could bring peace on earth it would be a generation of Montessori children.

However, there is one great caveat. It is not education, not even Montessori education, that will usher in a world of peace. It is the spiritual transformation that occurs in the child. The environment, the attitudes, the guides, the treatment and nurture of the child makes this transformation possible. The Montessori community wants to nurture children intellectually, socially, physically and emotionally. Many stop at that point. Yet there are others who realize the spiritual nature of the child and therefore are looking for ways to nurture children spiritually but many don't see "religion" as a viable, acceptable, effective way of bringing that about. In this group you have people who don't want to "offend" anyone by teaching religion. You have others who have

had negative experiences and you have others who have no personal experience with religious faith. Yet, these people (some of the most wonderful people I know fall into this category) feel a great need to instill in children an ethical and moral component for their lives. Montessorians have become known for their enthusiastic search for new ways (new age) to instill spirituality in children. The challenge is how to empower that spirituality.

Dr. Montessori writes that normalization has been likened to a conversion. And normalization in its ultimate form is a conversion – but that conversion must include the Christian spiritual. The wonderful soothing ideas, feelings and emotions generated by non-Christian spirituality lack the one ingredient that will bring peace both to the individual and to the world. They lack power.

An airplane is able to leave the ground because it has power. Once aloft if it loses power it begins its descent back to earth. Human effort can take us so far for only so long. But when we are connected to the source of power our motivation and ability to soar becomes unlimited. When Jesus taught, the crowds were amazed (Matt. 7:29) because He taught as one who had authority – power. When Jesus was sleeping in the boat (Mark 4:38-39) the disciples woke Him up, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" "He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Peace! Be still!'" The disciples were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!" He had power.

The challenge for us at Christmas and all year long is to believe Jesus' words in John 14:12. "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to my Father." Later in verse 27 He says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you." This is the time of year when we celebrate along with the angels (Luke 2:14), "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

World peace is a wonderful goal and aspiration. But the power to achieve that goal does not come through the intellect but through the transformed, converted heart filled with not only the power of love but the power of God. It comes with the Prince of Peace.

May you have both a Merry Christmas and a Blessed Christmas.

By **Fidellow** in Uncategorized ...: ([Add your comment](#))

December 11th, 2008

## **All I Want for Christmas is My Wisdom Teeth! (?)**

Maybe you've heard the classic song, "All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth." It's a great fun song that says if I had my two front teeth I could wish you Merry Christmas. So why would anyone (in their right mind) wish for their wisdom teeth? It seems that when we "get" them at 25 or 30 that they cause a lot of problems and pain. There is an old joke that says I've already cut my four wisdom teeth - I've volunteered, chaired a committee, been fired and bought a used car. Each of these can certainly be a learning experience. Some experiences have happy outcomes, others do not. And life continues to bring us experiences that can help us develop wisdom.

Scripture tells us that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature with both God and man. There are dozens of proverbs in the Bible that extol instruction, learning, knowledge understanding, discernment, insight, judgment and wisdom. And there is a hierarchy, not only in the use of the words, but in an understanding of their meaning and value. The founding fathers of our country had a far more rigorous education than that being offered our own children today. Today's emphasis is on the lowest rung of this intellectual hierarchy - the pursuit of knowledge. With our emphasis on facts and testing we cause our education to be both mind numbing and passionless. Our emphasis on memorization and regurgitation takes the life out of learning (making it dry bones) but even more importantly tends to exclude both the wonder and mystery of God and His creation.

Our challenge in Montessori is to use all of the God-given insights to reach the goals that God intended for His children. Our first challenge is to have our own minds transformed to the goal. Montessori is more than just doing a better job than what the competing educational philosophies offer. It is a totally different way of looking at the child, at

education and at life. Montessori is a spiritual journey lived out in an educational setting. That is a starting place. Trying to make a concrete definition of Montessori education certainly includes concepts such as hands on, individualized, an environment, observation etc but these are trees in a unique forest. In "The Secret of Childhood" when Dr. Montessori wrote "There is no method, there is only the child." she was emphasizing the relationship between the adult and the child and not concentrating on the 'formula' of interactions. Interestingly, one does not "do" Montessori any more than one "does" Christianity. Both arise out of a relationship.

It is not just the method but the goal that truly differentiates Montessori education from the rest. A lot of educators do hands on, create environments and try to individualize but their results are not the same because they do not start with the same end in view - the transformed child. They start with wanting an educated child which is far different than a transformed or "normalized" child.

Dr. Montessori, like most pioneers and explorers, didn't know what was on the other side of the educational mountain but after she made those discoveries she retraced her steps in order for others to be able to follow. She literally saw a promised land, populated with the new child and she was anxious to take others with her. It is again ironic given that so many people consider Montessori education a place where children can do "anything they want", that the operative word in Montessori's writing to bring about this transformation is the mundane and common word - training. But isn't that what all schools of education consider that they are doing - training? Again, the difference about Montessori education is the end goal. And it is that end goal that changes everything.

Modern education sees learning to be about knowledge where God sees education to be about wisdom. You can have knowledge without wisdom but it is difficult to have wisdom without knowledge.

Most educational systems start with the training of the intellect. The insight Dr. Montessori was given was to start with the training of the senses. From that beginning she certainly moves on to the training of the intellect and her experiences led her to also look at the training of the spirit of the child. A

deeply spiritual Catholic woman (her writings are filled with her Christian spiritual insights) she came to a realization that to meet the needs of the child she had to include the spiritual dimension.

But when she looks at the training of the will of the child she further separates herself from the rest of the educational field. Many educators, parents, and professionals for years have considered the "breaking" of the will of the child to be important. Dr. Montessori looks at the training of the will (which in the end may be of more significance than all the other trainings) as being crucial. Much of life is made up of small details and small actions that performed over a long period of time create an outcome not always envisioned from the beginning. A few calories extra each day become pounds. Actions become habits, habits become character. Acts of kindness practiced over a long period of time lead to an attitude of happiness and contentment. Constant complaining leads to its opposite.

So what is the singular action that both defines Montessori education and leads to the transformation of the child? It is choice – choice with all its attendant responsibilities, consequences and privileges. (It is this same choice that makes Christianity what it is – a relationship based on choice – "Choose you this day whom you will serve.") It is not coercion but choice. Scripture is full of choice – choose life, choose wisdom, choose God.

It seems way too simple (most profound things are.) Choice! Choice is not the first word we use in describing Montessori education nor in explaining normalization. But what part of our description of Montessori is not touched and transformed by choice? Hands on, a prepared environment, individualized, working out mistakes, grace and courtesy, silence, freedom, discovery and on and on.

The significant difference in understanding the place of choice in transformation is that choice is not random or uninformed. Our experience shows that too much choice, overwhelming choice, paralyzes and does not free the child (or the adult). So what makes choice a blessing and not a curse? We come back to training. Again, Montessori is NOT doing just what you want but (like life) making wise choices. And this is the beginning point of transformation.

Knowledge alone is not enough. And

knowledge alone and by itself does not confer wisdom. It has been said we gain experience by our own mistakes but we gain wisdom by observing the mistakes of others. Why do you think that the scriptures are full of moral and ethical failures – as well as grace and redemption? For us to learn wisdom! Scripture teaches that the "fear (the awe) of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." And to make wise choices you have to have the options from which to make a choice. Defining Montessori as "meeting the needs of the child", requires that the spiritual dimension, as well as the physical, emotional, intellectual and social components be present in the environment. It is not possible to choose what is not present. And to fail to acknowledge the majesty and awe of God and His creation is certainly to shortchange the "education" of our children.

Education has to be about more than just knowledge – it has to be about wisdom if our children are going to be able to love and serve God with their whole heart. And yet even wisdom by itself is not enough! Well, for Heaven's sake what is enough? That is an excellent question for those of us who want to train, educate and nurture children to ponder.

Dr. Montessori came upon a revolutionary insight when she understood the need to train the child's will. Most of us were raised in school and home with the emphasis on the "negation" of our will – doing what you're told when your told to do it. There was little emphasis placed on choosing to do what's right because it was what's right. Movement in a Montessori environment is not negated or prohibited but it is directed toward a purposeful goal under the control of the child. Will, is accorded the same respect as movement – it has a purpose, it has a function, it needs to be under the child's control

When Jesus was asked what is the most important commandment, He answered "Love the Lord your God with all you heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." Loving God with our whole heart is the spirit; loving God with our soul are our senses; loving God with all our mind is the intellect but loving God with all our strength – has to be our will.

Solomon, the wisest man, had great knowledge and great wisdom and yet at the end of his life he followed strange gods. What

was lacking in Solomon? Might it have been

the will to do what is right?