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CATHOLIC EDUCATION AND MONTESSORI PRINCIPLES

The SA Cathilic Church , being founded by Our Lord and guided by the Holy Spirit , possesses within herself infallible standards by which she is enabled to pass judgments on the various persons , events and movements which from time to time pass across the stage of history and influence the minds of men . What is bad she rejects ; what is good she eventually incorporates into Her own life , thereby preserving it for future generatitms - as she once preserved what was best in the ancient world after the collapse of the Roman Empire .

Every new idea , whatever the sphere in which it operated , takes time to unfold the possibilities -whether for good or evil - which are latent within it . The greter the depths and originality of an idea the wider is the field over which , as the years pass , it makes its influence felt. It is now over a generation since the Montessori Idea came into existence , sweeping like a comet across the sphere of education as the astonished world read of the almost incredible doings of those small slum children in the first Casa dei Bambini in the San Lorenzo quarter of Rome . There is nothing in the History of Education quite to compare with the sudden spt spread of the Montessori Method to all parts of the globe , where it was successfully put into practice irrespective of race , clime, culture or religion .

When Dr. Montessori died last May she left behind her a Movement as extended and as active as ever it had been .

We may well ask ourselves the question at this juncture ,
What will become of the Movement now that its original found-
er is no longer with us ? Is there something permanent in
DR. Montessori's contribution to education , something that wi
will survive the acid test of time ?

We can best answer this question by answering another .
What was the secret of the universal recognition given to
Montessori's work in her own life time ? Without doubt the
answer to this second question lies in the unparalleled in-
sight with which Montessori looked into the soul of the
child and discerned therein the laws of its development .
By treating the child as an indissoluble unity of soul and
body - instead of an isolated "mind" to be instructed
housed in a separate body ; and by giving this little "person
freedom (not license) to develop according to those inner
laws in a specially prepared environment she was able to
reveal to us traits which we do not usually associate with
small children . We know now with scientific certaintay
that if we treat children in the way that she has shown us
we shall see (not without astonishment if it is for the
first time) children who love work even more deeply than
play ; who are capable of long periods of spontaneous int-
ellectual concentration ; who love order and silence ;
who are calm , serene and obedient yet at the same time
showing an unusual degree of independence and initiative ;
children who have learnt to live freely and happily with
others in a common environment in which "mutual aid" has

replaced competition and where their attitude towards the things in that environment is "usare non possedere" - and this because they are more interested in & intellectually exploring that environment than in owning anything in it. And finally - most remarkable of all - children who have acquired such a degree of self-discipline that it has to be seen in order to be believed. Yet all this - and more - without losing the spontaneous charm of childhood.

There is no doubt whatever that all normal children potentially possess these virtues: they can be witnessed any day in any country where Montessori's principles are being faithfully put into practice.

Speaking theologically these are natural virtues. They belong to human nature as such like the faculty of reason or the power to create. The order and ~~xxx~~ discipline which is revealed in the behaviour of these children is akin to that which presides over the affinities of the chemical elements or keeps the stars in their courses: it is in fact a part of the cosmic order.

But because they are natural virtues we have no right to neglect or belittle them on that account. On the contrary, if these claims made by Dr. Montessoria and her followers can be substantiated they are fact of the greatest importance - especially to Catholics. For, while it is true (as St Thomas Aquinas tells us) "that the good of a single grace is higher than the natural good of the whole

universe " it is also true - and on the same authority - that the fullest development of the natural ~~faculties~~ faculties is the best preparation for the supernatural life , since Grace builds on nature not destroying but perfecting it .

St. Thomas also says " It is clearly a false opinion to say that with regard to the truth of faith it is completely indifferent what one thinks about created things provided one has the right opinion about God ; an error about creatures reacts in a false knowledge of God " . Now children are creatures : and if Montessori has illuminated certain basic truths about their development it is surely our duty as Catholics to make ourselves acquainted with them : and this not only on the grounds mentioned in the last sentence but for the very practical reason that we can thereby better help them to develop the potentialities both natural and supernatural within them .

A Catholic Montessori Guild has recently been formed whose chief aim is to study the dynamic principles of Dr. Montessori's method with the purpose of applying them to the teaching of the Catholic Faith. It aims at accomplishing this first , indirectly , by an all-round development of the natural faculties and virtues ; and secondly , directly , by the application of Montessori's principles (such as guided activity , individual work , control of error etc.) to the teaching of the Mass , Liturgical Year , Doctrine , Church History and so forth .

The longer she lived the more clearly did Montessori

-Catholic Education and Montessori Principles.

The Catholic Church, being founded by Our Lord and guided by the Holy Spirit, possesses within herself infallible standards by which she is enabled to pass judgments on the various persons, events and movements which from time to time pass across the stage of history and influence the minds of men. What is bad she rejects; what is good she eventually incorporates into Her own life, thereby preserving it for future generations- as she once preserved what was best in the ancient world after the collapse of the Roman Empire.

Every new idea, whatever the sphere in which it operates, takes time to unfold the possibilities- whether for good or evil - which are latent within it. The greater the depths and originality of an idea the wider is the field over which, as the years pass it makes its influence felt. It is now over a generation since the Montessori Idea came into existence, sweeping like a comet across the sphere of education as the astonished world read of the almost incredible doings of those small slum children in the first " Casa dei Bambini " in the San Lorenzo quarter of Rome. There is nothing in the History of Education to compare with the sudden spread of the Montessori Method to all parts of the globe, where it was successfully put into practice irrespective of race, climate, culture or religion.

When Dr. Montessori died last May she left behind her a movement as extended and as active as ever it been. We may well ask ourselves the question at this juncture, What will become of the Movement now that its original Founder is no longer with us ? Is there something permanent in Dr. Montessori's contribution to Education, something that will survive the acid test of time ?

We can best answer this question by answering another. "What is the secret of the universal recognition which was given to Montessori's work, even in her own life time. ? Without a doubt the answer to this second question lies in the unparalleled insight with which Montessori looked into the soul of the child, and discerned therein the laws of its development. By treating the child as an indissoluble unity of soul and body - instead of an isolated mind to be instructed housed in a separate body ; and by giving this little " person " freedom (not licence) to develop according to those inner laws in a "specially prepared environment " she was able to reveal to us traits which we do not usually associate with small children. We now know, with scientific certainty, that if we treat children in the way that she has shown us, we shall see (not without astonishment if it is for the first time) children who love work even more deeply than play; who are capable of long periods of spontaneous intellectual concentration; who love order and silence; who are calm, serene and obedient yet at the same time showing an unusual degree of independence and initiative; children who have learnt to live freely, and happily with others in a common environment, "mutual aid " aid has replaced competition, where their attitude towards the things in that environment is " usare non possedere " and this because they are more interested in intellectually exploring that environment than owing anything in it .And finally most remarkable of all children who have acquired such a degree of self-discipline, that it is has to be seen in order to be believed. Yet all this and more- without losing the spontaneous charm of childhood. There is

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When Dr. Montessori Died last May she left behind her a movement as extended and as active as it ever had been. We may well ask ourselves the question at this juncture, What will become of the Movement now that its original founder is no longer with us? Is there something permanent in Dr. Montessori's contribution to Education, something that will stand the acid test of time?

We can best answer this question by answering another. What is the secret to the universal recognition which was given to Dr. Montessori's work, even in her own life time? Without a doubt the answer to this second question lies in the

unparalleled insight with which Montessori looked into the soul of the child, and discerned therein the laws of its development. By treating the child as an indissoluble unity of soul and body; and by giving this little "person" freedom (not license) to develop according to those inner laws in a specially prepared environment, she was able to reveal to us traits which we do not usually associate with small children. We now know, with scientific certainty, that if we treat children in the way which she has shown us, we shall see, (not without astonishment if it is for the first time) children who love work even more deeply than play; who are capable of long periods of spontaneous intellectual concentration; who love order and silence; who are calm, serene and obedient yet at the same time showing an unusual degree of independence and initiative; children who have learnt to live freely, and happily with others in a common environment; mutual aid has replaced competition, where their attitude toward the things in that environment is "usare non possedere" and this because they are more interested in intellectually exploring that environment than owning anything in it; and finally, most remarkable of all, children who have acquired such a degree of self-discipline, that it has to be seen to be believed.. Yet all this and more - without losing the spontaneous charm of childhood. There is no doubt that all normal children potentially possess these virtues; they can be witnessed any day in any country where Montessori's principles are being faithfully put into practice.

Speaking theologically, these are natural virtues. They belong to human nature as such, like the power to create or the faculty to reason. The order and discipline which is revealed in these children is akin to that which presides over the affinities of the chemical elements or keeps the stars in their courses; it is in fact a part of the cosmic order.

But because they are natural virtues, we have no right to belittle them on that account. On the contrary, if these claims made by Dr. Montessori and her followers as to the true nature and possibilities of children can be substantiated, they are facts of the greatest significance. For a while it is true (as St. Thomas

tells us,) "That the good of a single grace is higher than the natural good of a whole universe" it is also true, and on the same authority, that the fullest development of the natural faculties is the best preparation for the supernatural life, since, "Grace builds on nature, not destroying it but perfecting it."

St. Thomas also says, "It is clearly a false opinion to say that, with regard to the truth of faith, it is completely indifferent what one thinks about created things, provided one has the right opinion about God; an error about creatures reacts in a false knowledge of God." Now, children are creatures; and if Montessori has illuminated certain basic truths with regard to their development, it is surely our duty as Catholics to study them; and this, not on the grounds mentioned above, but for the practical reason that we can thereby better help them to develop the potentialities, both natural and supernatural within them.

A Catholic Montessori Guild has recently been formed, whose chief aim is to study the dynamic principles of the Montessori Method, with the purpose of applying them to the teaching of the Catholic faith. It aims at accomplishing this first indirectly, by an all-round development of the natural faculties and virtues; and secondly by the direct application of Montessori's principles (such as guided activity, individual work, control of error, etc.) to the teaching of the Mass, Liturgical year, doctrine, ecclesiastical history and so forth.

The longer she lived the more clearly did Montessori realize the immense significance of the child as a factor in social development. It was the same in her work for the Catholic faith. Her labors were directed not only for the benefit of the individual child, but of the Church as a whole. The last thing that Dr. Montessori wrote - written on the very day of her death - was a message to the newly-formed Catholic Montessori Guild. In it she said;

"Never, as at this moment, has the Christian Faith needed the earnest endeavor of those who profess it. I would ask you who are gathered together in this meeting, to consider the great aid that children can give to the defense of our Faith.----

"Do not consider the child as a weakling, for it is he who builds the human personality, and whether this personality is going to be Christian or not depends on his environment, and on us who guide his religious formation... ..

"It is by you, who enjoy the great boon of belonging to the Catholic Faith, that the responsibility for the future generations should be more intensely felt, for among you are those who have renounced the world to bring the world to God. Take then, as an aid in your task, in all humility and faith, the "all powerful children" (Benedict XV.) take upon yourselves the task of seeing to it that their limpid light is not dimmed; and protect in their development those natural energies implanted in them by the guiding hand of God."