A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EDUCATIONAL METHOD OF MARIA MONTESSORI USING AN INVERSE CONSISTENCY PROTOCOL

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APPROVAL SHEET

A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EDUCATIONAL METHOD OF MARIA MONTESSORI USING AN INVERSE CONSISTENCY PROTOCOL

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To

Jared—thank you for being my best friend,

and to our children.

"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

Eph 3:20–21 ESV

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PREFACE

I am eternally grateful to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for leading me out of darkness and into the light of life (John 8:12). Thank you for taking my burden (Matt 11:28–30) and setting me free (John 8:32).

I would not have completed the Ed.D. if it were not for the constant encouragement and support from my gracious and loving husband, Jared. Thank you, Jared, for being my best friend and for being a wonderful father to our son Ransom who enjoyed his "Daddy days" while Mommy spent time on her schoolwork.

For Ransom, our Montessori child, this research was for you. You are a sweet reminder of how Jesus redeemed us and paid our ransom (Mark 10:45). Our prayer is that you will become a man of God who loves the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and that you would walk in the will, wisdom, and way of the Lord all your days.

To our little one on the way, we are so excited to meet you. You are truly a gift from God (Jas 1:17). We pray that you will know Jesus as your good shepherd who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 10:11, 14; 14:6).

Words cannot express my gratitude for my family, friends, and mentors who have graciously supported me on this journey. A huge thank you to Mom and Dad, Cailee, Megan, Lorrie, Deb, Dr. and Mrs. Cragoe, Evan and Becca, Josh, Sam, Todd, Dr. Clark, Dr. Trentham, Dr. Irving, Dr. Jones, and Dr. Tucker.

Allie August

Arlington, Vermont

May 2023

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many words describe the Montessori approach to education: holistic, sensory, hands-on, child-centered, self-directed, and active-independent learning. When people think of Montessori, some envision aesthetically pleasing classrooms with sensorial learning materials and child-sized furniture, while others think of phrases such as prepared environment and practical life. Although these concepts describe aspects of Montessori's approach, the core of her method was her holistic view of education, namely the education of children.[1] Montessori's holistic vision served as the foundation of her life's work which is commonly referred to as the Montessori method of education.[2]

Although Montessori is widely claimed by secular educators in the twenty-first century, what is often neglected are her own non-secular Catholic underpinnings. It is readily acknowledged that, as Susan Feez asserts, "There seems to have been no educational method, however, other than the Montessori method, which has been as comprehensive in its scope (from birth to fifteen years across all school subjects), as

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[1] Chloë Marshall states, "It should be noted that for Montessori the goal of education is to allow the child's optimal development (intellectual, physical, emotional and social) to unfold." Chloë Marshall, "Montessori Education: A Review of the Evidence Base," *NPJ Science of Learning* 2, no. 11 (2017): 1.

E. M. Standing provides an explanation of the Montessori method as more than a particular way of teaching or a general method of instruction. Standing states, "More fundamental than this, its object is to influence the whole life of the child: it aims, in short, at a total development of the personality, a harmonious growth of all the potentialities of the child, physical and mental, according to the law of its being." Maria Montessori, *The Child in the Church*, ed. E. M. Standing, in *Montessori: On Religious Education* (Lake Ariel, PA: Hillside Education, 2020), 140–41.

[2] There are other words besides method that are used interchangeably to describe Montessori education. These words include the following: system, form, model, movement, theory, practice, principles, and pedagogy, all which "came to be called by her [Maria Montessori's] surname." Angeline S. Lillard and Virginia McHugh, "Authentic Montessori: The Dottoressa's View at the End of Her Life Part 1: The Environment," *Journal of Montessori Research* 5, no. 1 (2019): 1.

widely used internationally, or as enduring."[3] For an educational method that has evoked such praise among a variety of cultures and backgrounds, it has received surprisingly little attention from evangelical Christians. As such, this thesis seeks to theologically analyze the educational method of Maria Montessori in an effort to discern what aspects can be appropriated in the Christian education of children. In so doing, it provides a theological analysis from an orthodox Christian perspective of the primary source writings of Maria Montessori.

Background of Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori (1870–1952) was a pioneer thinker, an educational reformer, and a children's advocate. Having first trained as a medical doctor at the University of Rome,[4] Montessori quickly turned her attention to the study of children's diseases. She frequently observed the children in Rome's insane asylums and was influenced by the pedagogical work of Jean Itard[5] and Edward Séguin.[6] Montessori carried out their educational methods for children with special needs and later implemented her own ideas

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[3] Susan Mary Feez, "Montessori's Mediation of Meaning: A Social Semiotic Perspective" (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2007), 45.

[4] Marshall states, "She initially resisted going into teaching—one of the few professions available to women in the late 19th century—and instead became one of the very first women to qualify as a medical doctor in Italy." Marshall, "Montessori Education," 1.

[5] About Jean Itard (1774–1838), Maria Montessori states, "After this study of the methods in use throughout Europe, I concluded my experiments upon the deficients of Rome, and taught them throughout two years. I followed Séguin's book, and also derived much help from the remarkable experiments of Itard. Guided by the work of these two men, I manufactured a great variety of didactic material. These materials, which I have never seen complete in any institution, became in the hands of those who knew how to apply them, a most remarkable and efficient means, but unless rightly presented, they failed to attract the attention of the deficients." Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002), 36.

[6] About Edward Séguin (1812–1880), Montessori writes, "I became conversant with the special method of education devised for these unhappy little ones by Edward Séguin, and was led to study thoroughly the idea, then beginning to be prevalent among the physicians, of the efficacy of 'pedagogical treatment' for various morbid forms of disease such as deafness, paralysis, idiocy, rickets, etc." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 31. Montessori held a different view from her colleagues and concluded, "mental deficiency presented chiefly a pedagogical, rather than mainly a medical, problem," (31). She continues, "But the merit of having completed a genuine educational system for deficient children was due to Edward Séguin, first a teacher and then a physician," (34).

in the State Orthophrenic School which she directed for more than two years.[7] After successfully educating children with special needs through her child-centered approach and unique didactic learning materials, Montessori began to contemplate whether her method could be used for children without physical or mental disabilities.[8] As a result, in 1907, Montessori opened and oversaw a school called Casa dei Bambini or "The Children's House," where she worked with disadvantaged children (ages 3-6) in the slums of Rome for two years.[9] The Children's House became the backdrop of the clinical observations that she documented in her book, *The Montessori Method*.[10] Throughout her life, Montessori continued to refine her views and ultimately developed her own unified system of education[11] that included her rationale, pedagogy, as well as her careful design

[7] Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 32.

[8] Montessori describes "the history of methods" in chapter 2 of *The Montessori Method*. Montessori writes, "From the very beginning of my work with deficient children (1898 to 1900) I felt that the methods which I used had in them nothing peculiarly limited to the instruction of idiots. I believed that they contained educational principles *more rational* than those in use, so much more so, indeed, that through their means an inferior mentality would be able to grow and develop. This feeling, so deep as to be in the nature of an intuition, became my controlling idea after I left the school for deficients, and little by little, I became convinced that similar methods applied to normal children would develop or set free their personality in a marvellous and surprising way." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 32–33.

[9] Montessori states, "This present study deals in part with the *method* used in experimental pedagogy, and is the result of my experiences during two years in the 'Children's Houses.' I offer only a beginning of the method, which I have applied to children between the ages of three and six. But I believe that these tentative experiments, because of the surprising results which they have given, will be the means of inspiring a continuation of the work thus undertaken." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 30.

[10] *The Montessori Method* is a translation of Montessori's earlier Italian edition, *Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica applicato all' educazione infantile nelle Case dei Bambini*, published in 1909.

[11] Henry W. Holmes asserts, "But before Montessori, no one had produced a system in which the elements named above were combined. She conceived it, elaborated it into practice, and established it in schools." Henry W. Holmes, introduction to *The Montessori Method* by Maria Montessori (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1912), xix. Holmes continues, "We have no other example of an educational system—original at least in its systematic wholeness and in its practical application—worked out and inaugurated by the feminine mind and hand," (xvii–xviii).

of learning materials.[12] Her model proved effective in the Children's House[13] and her method quickly gained popularity.[14]

After her years of observation and experimentation in the Children's House, Montessori combined several ideas to create a unified system that she referred to as the Montessori method, in her book by the same title.[15] The Montessori method is unique because it encapsulates the work of one woman who embedded her philosophy into her practice;[16] she herself "was her method."[17] Montessori's view of children, their acute stages of development,[18] and how they best learn was cultivated over many years. Montessori sought to promote the holistic education of children, and in so doing, began a new era of education that helped children reach their full potential in many areas of life.[19]

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[12] These learning materials became known as the "Didactic Apparatus." Montessori preferred the phrase "Material for Development." Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 113.

[13] Montessori writes, "The 'Children's House' has a twofold importance: the social importance which it assumes through its peculiarity of being a school within the house, and its purely pedagogic importance gained through its methods for the education of very young children, of which I now made a trial." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 44.

[14] Angeline S. Lillard states, "Montessori's method quickly spread to serve different populations of children. In just five years, Montessori classrooms had opened round the world." Angeline S. Lillard, "Playful Learning and Montessori Education," *American Journal of Play* 5, no. 2 (2013): 158.

[15] Renato Foschi states, "The central point of Montessori's 'Method' was essentially to use educational material scaled to the level of the child to educate the senses in a natural manner without constraint of coercion." Renato Foschi, "Science and Culture around the Montessori's First 'Children's Houses' in Rome (1907–1915)," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 44, no. 3 (2008): 239.

[16] About this, Jaeuk Jeong states, "The genius of Montessori lies in her unified system knitting her philosophy into each of her principles and practices altogether." Jaeuk Jeong, "Montessori as a School Reform Alternative Reflecting Biblical Anthropology," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 29, no. 3 (2020): 311.

[17] Jerome W. Berryman, "Montessori and Religious Education," *Religious Education* 75, no. 3 (1980): 299.

[18] Montessori believed that the life of the child consists of a series of different stages. Also referred to as "period of special sensibility," where each stage has its particular physical and mental characteristics. Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 123. Montessori developed the idea of "sensitive periods" in children based on her research of Hugo de Vries who proposed that, "certain determining conditions in the environment are able to bring about different results if applied at different states in the individual's development," (89).

[19] Ian Moll states, "Montessori insisted that the method must lead to the realization of a child's full potential in all areas of life ('the whole child'), including health, social skills, physical coordination and all mental aspects (cognitive and emotive)." Ian Moll, "Towards a Constructivist Montessori Education," *Perspectives in Education* 22, no. 2 (2004): 39.

Educators have evaluated Montessori's epistemology,[20] metaphysics,[21] leadership style,[22] and religion[23] to gain a broader understanding of the Montessori method—which she viewed as a unified whole. Some of Montessori's pedagogical principles have proved universal in scope whereas others have been limited to specific contexts.[24]

Montessori was a strong advocate for the holistic education of children regardless of the child's socio-economic background.[25] With Montessori's emphasis on child-centered learning, she challenged the traditional classroom model[26] that pervaded the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[27] Despite the challenges for women in the academy,[28] Montessori created a progressive system for child-directed education with

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[20] Emel Ültanır, "An Epistemological Glance at the Constructivist Approach: Constructivist Learning in Dewey, Piaget, and Montessori," *International Journal of Instruction* 5, no. 2 (2012): 195–212.

[21] Patrick Frierson, "Maria Montessori's Metaphysics of Life," *European Journal of Philosophy* 26, no. 3 (2018): 991–1011.

[22] Karen Bennetts and Jane Bone, "Montessori Literature through the Lens of Leadership," *Journal of Montessori Research* 6, no. 2 (2020): 1–12.

[23] Berryman, "Montessori and Religious Education," 294–307.

[24] David Elkind asserts that the reception of Montessori's work has been met by two extremes: rejection and unquestioned acceptance. Elkind evaluates Montessori's contributions to the field of early childhood education and proposes change for some practices to reflect the current cultural context of contemporary children. David Elkind, "Montessori Education: Abiding Contributions and Contemporary Challenges," *Young Children* 38, no. 2 (1983): 3–10.

[25] Priya Darshini Baligadoo states, "Her passion, enthusiasm, and dedication to help the needy stemmed from the habits she developed at a young age to help her poor neighbors. . . . Similarly, since her graduation from medical school in 1896, she was an ardent defendant of rights for women and children. She voiced her concern for the problems of women's education, the widespread illiteracy among the poor, and encouraged young girls to pursue their education." Priya Darshini Baligadoo, "Peace Profile: Maria Montessori—Peace through Education," *Peace Review* 26, no. 3 (2014): 428.

[26] Marshall, states, "These two aspects—the learning materials themselves, and the nature of learning—make Montessori classrooms look strikingly different to conventional classrooms." Marshall, "Montessori Education," 1.

[27] Barbara Thayer-Bacon argued that even though Montessori was a contemporary with John Dewey (father of pragmatism) and she too, had much to add to the field of progressive/democratic education, her initial reception in America was short-lived after facing criticism from William H. Kilpatrick (student and colleague of Dewey), who claimed that Montessori's view of the child, role of the teacher, and curriculum proved "inadequate and unduly restrictive." Barbara Thayer-Bacon, "Maria Montessori, John Dewey, and William H. Kilpatrick," *Education and Culture* 28, no. 1 (2012): 15.

[28] Baligadoo states, "Within such a culture, Maria broke the traditional barriers between male and female and established herself as a woman of character with an indomitable will to effect change and reform the society." Baligadoo, "Peace Profile," 427.

an emphasis on leading the child toward independence.[29] She trained others to carry out her method, which ultimately led to the development of Montessori schools and the acceptance of her approach as a viable educational model around the world.[30]

Regarding Montessori's holistic vision of education, her method is built on the premise of the liberty of the child[31] and that if given the correct environment and proper encouragement, the student will learn.[32] As Thayer-Bacon summarizes, "Montessori discovered that preschool-age children have a strong desire to learn, and that they can learn on their own if placed in an environment that allows them the opportunity to do so."[33] Montessori's holistic vision of education[34] was to nurture the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual[35] development of children by providing opportunities for them to

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[29] Montessori states, "An educational method that shall have *liberty* as its basis must intervene to help the child to a conquest of these various obstacles. In other words, his training must be such as shall help him to diminish, in a rational manner, the *social bonds*, which limit his activity. Little by little, as the child grows in such an atmosphere, his spontaneous manifestations will become more *clear, with the clearness of truth*, revealing his nature. For all these reasons, the first form of educational intervention must tend to lead the child toward independence." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 95. She continues, "Any pedagogical action, if it is to be efficacious in the training of little children, must tend to *help* the children to advance upon this road of independence," (97).

[30] According to Thayer-Bacon, "In January 1913, Montessori ran her first international teacher training program with students from all over the world (Germany, Switzerland, Ireland, Australia, Africa, India, and England, including 67 students from the U.S.), who went back to their home countries to start Montessori schools." Thayer-Bacon, "Maria Montessori, John Dewey, and William H. Kilpatrick," 8.

[31] Montessori states, "The fundamental principle of scientific pedagogy must be, indeed, the liberty of the pupil;—such liberty as shall permit a development of individual, spontaneous manifestations of the child's nature." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 28.

[32] Montessori states, "Even so those who teach little children too often have the idea that they are educating babies and seek to place themselves on the child's level by approaching him with games, and often with foolish stories. Instead of all this, we must know how to call to the *man* which lies dormant within the soul of the child. I felt this, intuitively, and believed that not the didactic material, but my voice which called to them, *awakened* the children, and encouraged them to use the didactic material, and through it, to educate themselves." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 37. She continues, "The pedagogical method of *observation* has for its base the *liberty* of the child; the *liberty is activity*," (86).

[33] Thayer-Bacon, "Maria Montessori, John Dewey, and William H. Kilpatrick," 7.

[34] Baligadoo states, "Montessori laid emphasis on the holistic development of the child and not simply on academic achievement." Baligadoo, "Peace Profile" 432.

[35] Baligadoo states, "For the child to develop, not only is it necessary to answer its needs for physical health, but also it is equally important to promote its spiritual life." Baligadoo, "Peace Profile," 431.

engage in a prepared environment[36] that supports their natural curiosity and instinctive desire to learn.[37] Angeline S. Lillard and Virginia McHugh describe Montessori's system of education as "a trinity composed of the environment, the teacher, and the child."[38] These three facets of *child*, *teacher*, and *environment* each play a key role in Montessori's educational principles and practices.[39]

The legacy of Maria Montessori lives on today through her educational method that continues to be applied in Montessori schools around the world.[40] Feez writes, "By the end of her life she had designed a detailed educational method and had founded a movement to support its dissemination. The method and the movement bear her name."[41] About the Montessori legacy, Feez continues, "Despite intermittent waves of misinterpretation, indifference, and even hostility, the Montessori legacy has qualities

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[36] Marshall writes, "One of the teacher's roles is to guide the child through what Montessori termed the 'prepared environment, i.e., a classroom and a way of learning that are designed to support the child's intellectual, physical, emotional and social development through active exploration, choice and independent learning." Marshall, "Montessori Education," 1.

[37] Montessori states, "The child is a body which grows, and a soul which develops,—these two forms, physiological and psychic, have one eternal font, life itself." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 104. Montessori later writes, "Certainly here is the key to all pedagogy: To know how to recognize the precious instinct of concentration in order to make use of it in the teaching of reading, writing and counting and, later on, of grammar, arithmetic, foreign languages, science, etc. After all, every psychologist is of the opinion that there is only one way of teaching, that of arousing in the student the deepest interest and at the same time a constant and vivacious attention." Maria Montessori, *The Child* (Adyar, Madras, India: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1961), 24.

[38] Angeline S. Lillard and Virginia McHugh, "Authentic Montessori: The Dottoressa's View at the End of Her Life Part II: The Teacher and the Child," *Journal of Montessori Research* 5, no. 1 (2019): 19.

[39] For a detailed article concerning the role of the Montessori teacher, see University of Bucharest, Romania and Izabela T. C. Barbieru, "The Role of the Educator in a Montessori Classroom," *Revista Romaneasca Pentru Educatie Multidimensionala* VIII, no. 1 (2016): 107–23.

Marshall states, "Central to Montessori's method of education is the dynamic triad of child, teacher and environment." Marshall, "Montessori Education," 1.

[40] Lillard and McHugh state, "Tens of thousands of Montessori schools exist worldwide, including the world's largest school (in Lucknow, India), and they have educated well-known people ranging from Anne Frank and Sean "Diddy" Combs to Julia Childs and Jeff Bezos." Lillard and McHugh, "Authentic Montessori: The Dottoressa's View at the End of Her Life Part I: The Environment," 2.

[41] Feez, "Montessori's Mediation of Meaning," 4.

which defy obsolescence."[42] Montessori's educational reform movement that focused on the holistic education of children continues to influence educators today.

The Research Problem

Since its genesis, Montessori education has been the object of speculation amongst educators. Given its worldwide popularity, Montessori education has proven to be a viable alternative system of education. However, there are polarizing viewpoints due to the presumed inconsistencies of Maria Montessori's writings[43] and the confusion of multiple adaptations and variations of how the method is applied.[44] There are many complex layers to wade through as researchers consider why Montessori education seems to be effective to some yet remains on the fringes for others.[45] In the words of Lillard, Montessori is "shunned" by some, yet "admired" by others.[46] With these mixed reviews, it is no wonder why Montessori education is perplexing.[47] Understanding Montessori education at its core is like putting together a complex jig-saw puzzle.[48] There are many pieces, all of which are important, that fit precisely into certain positions to form a

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[42] Feez, "Montessori's Mediation of Meaning," 384.

[43] Jacqueline M. Cossentino writes, "Hailed by some for its emphatic, developmental emphasis on 'the universal child' and reviled by others for its rigidity and cultishness, the phenomenon of Montessori education has been chronically plagued by paradox." Jacqueline M. Cossentino, "Culture, Craft, & Coherence: The Unexpected Vitality of Montessori Teacher Training," *Journal of Teacher Education* 60, no. 5 (2009): 520.

[44] Lillard and McHugh state, "Because the Montessori name is not protected by copyright, Montessori implementation can vary widely." Lillard and McHugh, "Authentic Montessori: The Dottoressa's View at the End of Her Life Part II," 2.

[45] Jane Bone states, "The focus is on her status as an educator who is both significant and marginalized in the early childhood context." Jane Bone, "Maria Montessori as Domestic Goddess: Iconic Early Childhood Educator and Material Girl," *Gender and Education* 31, no. 6 (2019): 673.

[46] Angeline S. Lillard, "Shunned and Admired: Montessori, Self-Determination, and a Case for Radical School Reform," *Educational Psychology Review* 31, no. 4 (2019): 939–65.

[47] Feez states, "Despite its scope and endurance, however, the Montessori method has not generated a robust evaluative literature and thus retains all the hallmarks of a closed oral tradition defending itself in a hostile world." Feez, "Montessori's Mediation of Meaning," 45.

[48] Cossentino summarizes this dilemma: "To mainstream American educational eyes, the method presents a puzzle of inconsistencies." Cossentino, "Culture, Craft, & Coherence," 520.

complete picture. Many educators have sought to put these pieces of the Montessori puzzle together, however for the most part, these paradoxes have left Montessori education "almost entirely unstudied by scholars and policy makers."[49]

As educators have sifted through the Montessori literature, they have found that Montessori did not always present her ideas with clarity or consistency; they are often replete with "romanticized anecdotes, impassioned polemic, and philosophical, literary and Biblical references."[50] Since Montessori's vision of education was developed over a lifetime—a period of about fifty years—the primary source literature provides fertile ground for further study. Due to the breadth and depth of Montessori literature,[51] Bennetts and Bone conclude that it "offers an open field of exploration, interpretation, and connection to the other pedagogies and wider disciplines."[52] Although, a plethora of work has been conducted by a variety of researchers regarding Montessori and various aspects of her method, there is a notable gap in the literature from an orthodox Christian perspective.

Among the research conducted by evangelical Christians, Jaeuk Jeong's work serves as a starting point demonstrating how "the Montessori system was built upon the Christian theological anthropology" and how this has implications for teacher training[53]

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[49] Cossentino continues, "The paradoxes—independent but scripted, revolutionary but old, peace oriented but exclusive—have confounded Americans for decades, leaving Montessori education almost entirely unstudied by scholars and policy makers." Cossentino, "Culture, Craft, & Coherence," 520.

[50] Feez, "Montessori's Mediation of Meaning," 38. Bennetts and Bone note, "Feez (2007) confirmed that Dr. Montessori did not outline her key principles with clarity, and trawling through the mix of anecdotes, philosophy, opinion, and loosely described theoretical positions in her books is required to fully grasp the nuances." Bennetts and Bone, "Montessori Literature through the Lens of Leadership," 3.

[51] Feez describes three strands of Montessori literature as "Montessori's published work, the sources used by Montessori teachers to support their practice and the secondary literature of interpretation and criticism of Montessori." Feez, "Montessori's Mediation of Meaning," 35.

[52] Bennetts and Bone, "Montessori Literature through the Lens of Leadership," 4.

[53] Jaeuk Jeong, "An Exploration of the Experience of Teachers in Facilitating Meta-Learning Among Students in Christian Montessori Schools" (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2020).

and school reform.[54] Natalie Carnes, in her article, "We in Our Turmoil: Theological Anthropology through Maria Montessori and the Lives of Children," observes that Montessori is "a figure worthy of theological consideration,"[55] yet continues by noting that studies on Montessori's work have primarily been limited to secular research and has not been taken seriously by religious scholars. She states, "Montessori receives scant attention from scholars of religion. Her legacy is restricted to secular education, though her writing is at times overtly religious."[56] Carnes compares Montessori to Jerome Berryman who has received positive attention for his work in religious education for children, *Godly Play*,[57] which he based on the work of Maria Montessori.[58] Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi's *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* is another approach that has its roots in Montessorian educational philosophy.[59] Although Montessori's Catholic background is widely known and often cited (as by Jeong,[60] Carnes,[61] and Berryman,[62]

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[54] Jeong, "Montessori Reflecting Biblical Anthropology," 307–27.

[55] Natalie Carnes writes, "In what follows, I continue the work of feminist and liberationist theologians by noting the importance of children to theological reflection. I do so, in particular, by establishing Montessori as a figure worthy of theological consideration." Natalie Carnes, "We in Our Turmoil: Theological Anthropology through Maria Montessori and the Lives of Children," *The Journal of Religion* 95, no. 3 (2015): 319.

[56] Carnes, "We in Our Turmoil," 320.

[57] Jerome W. Berryman, *Godly Play: A Way of Religious Education* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

[58] For a closer examination of Berryman's approach to religious education compared to that of Maria Montessori, see Brendan Hyde, "Montessori and Jerome W. Berryman: Work, Play, Religious Education and the Art of Using the Christian Language System." *British Journal of Religious Education* 33, no. 3 (2011): 341–53.

[59] Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983); Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi, *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy: The Montessori Approach* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1964); Gianna Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children: The Montessori Method Applied to the Catechesis of Children*, trans. Rebekah Rojcewicz (Loveland, OH: Treehaus Communications Inc., 2002).

[60] Jeong states, "Though Montessori's worldview is devout Catholic Christian, she counterpoises her languages so deftly as to be acceptable to those with other religious backgrounds." Jeong, "Montessori Reflecting Biblical Anthropology," 312.

[61] Carnes states, "In Montessori's view, the form and approach to teaching children was Catholic, but the content of the teaching material need not be." Carnes, "We in Our Turmoil," 322.

[62] Berryman writes, "Maria Montessori (1870–1952) is much more interesting and important as a person than as an educational saint. Her contribution to religious education has been ironically

among others), to date, there has been no comprehensive analysis of Montessori's writings and their viability for appropriation from an orthodox Christian perspective.

This being recognized, Montessori's approach has been found widely applicable on a universal scale for various people from different faith backgrounds. Berryman recognizes that Montessori's contribution to religious education has been "ironically overlooked by many religious educators and Montessorians."[63] Under these conditions, the present researcher is in a prime position to contribute to this growing body of knowledge by analyzing the primary source literature of Maria Montessori, in her own words, from a theological Christian perspective. The goal of this study is to provide a theological analysis of Montessori's work documented in her own writings to determine what can be appropriated for Christian education. By using the Inverse Consistency Protocol,[64] this study proposes to examine the primary literature of Maria Montessori, from an understanding of what she articulated herself and offer a theological analysis of her work.

The Inverse Consistency Protocol is a hermeneutical framework developed by John David Trentham, Associate Professor of Leadership and Discipleship at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. This framework assists Christians as they responsibly engage and interpret the social sciences with biblical discernment. The purpose of using the Inverse Consistency Protocol is to faithfully and constructively appropriate social scientific and human development models.

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overlooked by many religious educators and Montessorians. It was at the core of her life and work." Berryman, "Montessori and Religious Education," 294.

[63] Berryman, "Montessori and Religious Education," 294.

[64] The Inverse Consistency Protocol is a framework developed by John David Trentham in his series of articles: "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 1): Approaching and Qualifying Models of Human Development," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 458–75; "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2): Engaging the Appropriating Models of Human Development," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 476–94.

Research Purpose

By surveying Montessori's works, this study attempts to use the Inverse Consistency Protocol to examine which aspects of Montessori's educational method can be appropriated by the Christian educator. The goal is to be able to use the four-phase protocol to envision redemptive maturity, read for receptivity, employ reflective discernment, and identify appropriative outlets.[65]

Delimitations of the Proposed Research

This study is initially limited to the primary source writings of Maria Montessori (chapter 2), though past Christian critiques of her method are subsequently surveyed and analyzed (chapter 3). Since the purpose of this study is to consider Maria Montessori in her own terms, it does not deal with Christian appropriations or adaptations of her method in school or church contexts.

Terminology

Over the last century, researchers have often found Montessori's writings difficult to interpret. A significant reason for this confusion is attributed to (what Cossentino refers to as) her "deliberate creation of a unique lexicon."[66] About this, Feez notes that Montessori's style of writing is occasionally "romantic" and often "mystical" in its approach.[67] Feez continues by observing, "Montessori's style is not easy to penetrate, especially for the contemporary reader seeking generalizable principles and an overarching theoretical position . . . to some outside of the Montessori tradition, [her

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[65] Trentham states, "These four phases outline and annotate a process of reading the social sciences theologically, in order to guide the practical task of appropriation." Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2)," 488.

[66] Jacqueline M. Cossentino notes, "Cued by Montessori's deliberate creation of a unique lexicon, Montessorians routinely bring language into the service of educational practice." Jacqueline M. Cossentino, "Big Work: Goodness, Vocation, and Engagement in the Montessori Method," *Curriculum Inquiry* 36, no. 1 (2006): 88.

[67] Feez, "Montessori's Mediation of Meaning," 40–41.

terminology seems] arcane and cultish."[68] Although not exhaustive, the Association Montessori Internationale compiled a "Glossary of Montessori Terms," having stated, "The Montessori approach, much like any science, has its own set of vocabulary and terminology. Montessorians share a very specific set of brief references that evoke the world of the child as described by Maria Montessori."[69] In addition to Montessori's lexicon, other concepts that are important for this research include the following:

The Principle of Inverse Consistency. The principle of inverse consistency is a conceptual tool and hermeneutical posture proposed by John David Trentham for Christians to theologically discern the differences between secular social sciences and orthodox Christian thought. Trentham states, "Inverse consistency thus attempts to identify a faithful and discerning ethic of reading for Christians, so that they may interpret the social sciences with theological fidelity."[70] Since Montessori education has largely not been claimed by Christians, Montessori education typically falls within the realm of the secular social sciences.[71] One of the goals of this research is to employ the principle of inverse consistency using the Inverse Consistency Protocol on the educational method of Maria Montessori to determine how her method is consistent with historic, orthodox Christian thought and how it diverges from historic, orthodox Christian thought. The researcher aims to charitably evaluate the Montessori method with

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[68] Feez, "Montessori's Meditation of Meaning," 38, 40.

[69] A Glossary of Montessori Terms compiled by Annette Haines can be accessed at "Glossary of Montessori Terms," Association Montessori Internationale, accessed February 16, 2022, https://montessori-ami.org/resource-library/facts/glossary-montessori-terms.

[70] Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 1)," 474.

[71] According to Karen Bennetts and Jane Bone, "The spirituality to which Montessori most often referred was universal and secular." Karen Bennetts and Jane Bone, "Adult Leadership and the Development of Children's Spirituality: Exploring Montessori's Concept of the Prepared Environment," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 24, no. 4 (2019): 357.

"theological conviction, clarity, and wisdom," for the purpose of thoughtful engagement and appropriation.[72]

Inverse Consistency Protocol. The Inverse Consistency Protocol includes four phases for the Christian to evaluate human development models. The interpretive steps and aims are as follows:

> Step one: Envision redemptive maturity. *Develop a thoroughgoing confessional-doctrinal vision and imagination for human development unto Christlikeness.*
>
> Step two: Read for receptivity. *Gain a deep and thorough understanding of the proposed paradigm, with intellectual honesty and precision.*
>
> Step three: Employ reflective discernment. *Interpret the paradigm from a critically-reflective and charitably-reflective perspective.*
>
> Step four: Identify appropriative outlets. *Carefully identify the various contexts and processes in which the model may be utilized to inform or enhance the practice and administration of Christian education.*[73]

Research Questions

There are four questions that guide the research for this thesis, considering the relationship between the Montessori Method and historic, orthodox Christian thought.

1. In what ways is the educational model of Maria Montessori, as expressed in her writings, congruent with historic, orthodox Christian thought?

2. In what ways is the educational model of Maria Montessori, as expressed in her writings, incongruent with historic, orthodox Christian thought?

3. What aspects of the educational perspective of Maria Montessori, as expressed in her writings, are useful in Christian contexts?

4. What aspects of the educational perspective of Maria Montessori, as expressed in her writings, are not useful in Christian contexts?

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[72] Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 1)," 474.

[73] See table 2, Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2)," 488.

Research Methodology

This study is a text-based thesis, based on the primary source writings of Maria Montessori and other pertinent literature.

In chapter 2, the present researcher attempts to articulate Montessori's key principles and assertions from her published works (books, articles, and lectures), giving special attention to how her Catholic faith influenced her view of the spiritual nature of children. In so doing, the goal is to arrive at a fair reading of Montessori education, based on what Montessori herself had advocated. At this point, the present researcher does not make a claim as to how a Montessori education should or could be implemented by orthodox, Christian educators.

Chapter 3 interacts with past Christian sources that have sought to provide analyses of what Montessori said in her writings. Some of these include individuals such as Sofia Cavalletti, Gianna Gobbi, Jerome Berryman, Sonja Stewart, Catherine Stonehouse, and Scottie May. The goal of this chapter is to consider how Montessori's works have been received by broadly Christian (evangelical to Catholic) perspectives of past educators.

Chapter 4 builds upon the prior two chapters by employing the Inverse Consistency Protocol as a method to analyze and evaluate the final iteration of Montessori's writings from an orthodox, Christian perspective.

Chapter 5 concludes this study by considering implications for Christian educators and suggests potential avenues for further study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In chapter two, the researcher attempts to articulate Montessori's key principles and assertions from her published works (books, articles, and lectures), giving special attention to how her Catholic faith influenced her view of the spiritual nature of children. In so doing, the goal is to arrive at a fair reading of Montessori education, based on what Montessori herself had advocated. At this point, the present researcher does not make a claim as to how a Montessori education should or could be implemented by orthodox, Christian educators. The chapter is divided into two main sections: The Montessori Method, where the triad of the child, the environment, and the teacher is examined; and Montessori's Catholic Christian Foundations, where important Christian themes throughout Montessori's writings are discussed.

The Montessori Method

Many of Maria Montessori's books retell the account of how she first observed specific characteristics in children which eventually became the basis of her educational method. She did not intentionally seek out these observations, rather she notes that she was a simply a witness who observed this phenomenon unfold.[1] She claims, "At the most

[1] Maria Montessori recounts, "People insist that I made the method, but this is not so. Certainly I had my part in it, but allow me to illustrate the picture of an external object that is impressed. Obviously, there must be a certain sensitiveness in the plate in order that this image may remain impressed, but the image is not created by the plate. It is the image of an object which has its own form. Its own characteristics. I was the plate. My preparation had made me receptive, and I will admit that in me there was also a camera prepared. In myself, I may say, there was a certain mechanism which was prepared, a scientific mechanism. But the fact remains that the psychological picture, which may be permanently registered or not has nothing to do with the machine. It is not the machine that creates the object, it registers its image. This image formed in the plate is but a photography of something that exists. In this case it was the hidden nature of the child. I mean to say that while this deeper nature of the child might not have been visible to everyone, this does not mean that the deeper nature came to me, because I, who happened to be the machine, registered it. It is a complete whole which has its own spontaneous existence. The phenomena

I have been the child's interpreter."[2] At first to her disbelief,[3] she was later convinced that these principles worked together in such as a way as to form what she termed "a new child."[4] What she observed of the children in her children's houses[5] was a sense of calm and peace. These children were serene, silent, and had an ability to concentrate, that had not been typically observed in children ages 3 to 6.[6] Montessori exclaimed:

> One day, in great emotion, I took my heart in my two hands as though to encourage it to rise to the heights of faith, and I stood respectfully before the children, saying to myself: "Who are you then? Have I perhaps met with the children who were held in Christ's arms and to whom divine words were spoken? . . . I will follow you, to enter with you into the Kingdom of Heaven."[7]

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therefore does not depend for their existence upon the one who discovers them. It is only the recognition of the facts that depends upon the discoverer's power of perceiving them." Maria Montessori, *Citizen of the World* (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2019), 5.

[2] Maria Montessori, *Education for a New World* (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2007), 3.

[3] In *The Secret of Childhood*, Montessori recounts how it took time to convince herself that what she had seen in the children was not an illusion. Maria Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood* (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2017), 103.

[4] E. M. Standing states, "It is of course absurd to imagine that Dr. Montessori's method—or any method could *make* a new child, since human nature always remains the same. But what she has done has been to show that, when treated in the right way, the child reveals itself as possessing higher capabilities, both intellectually and morally, than those with it is usually credited." Maria Montessori, *The Child in the* Church, ed. E. M. Standing, in *Montessori: On Religious Education* (Lake Ariel, PA: Hillside Education, 2020), 141.

[5] Montessori reflects on the first children's house, "I should like to tell you the conditions in which its manifestations first took place. This first institution housed about 40 children of poor illiterate parents: itinerary sellers of flowers, for example, or porters, etc. These parents were nearly always away from their homes in search of work, so that during the day the children were abandoned to themselves. When we first gathered them together, they had all the characteristics of children in similar conditions: they were timid, afraid of everyone, liable to hide themselves as soon as they saw a stranger. Their ages ran from three to six years. The aim of collecting them was not for purposes of instruction. They were gathered together to stop them from soiling and spoiling the walls of the house. They were entrusted to me not as a teacher, but as a doctor, for the children appeared in need of medical care for malnutrition and similar ailments. However, I was free to educate them also if I so inclined. Moreover, I had been given the means for doing this." Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 7.

[6] Montessori stated, "But in our specially prepared environments we see them all at once fix themselves upon some task, and then their excited fantasies and their restless movements disappear together; a calm, serene child, attached to reality, begins to work out his elevation through work." Montessori*, Secret of Childhood*, 140.

[7] Montessori, *Secret of Childhood,* 103.

The children had revealed themselves to be different from adults, possessing "pure" qualities and without sin.[8] Montessori quotes Jesus Christ from whom the evangelists recorded his words as saying, "Unless ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."[9] Montessori develops the idea of a different type of child, whom she refers to as the "converted child" that displays characteristics of a love for work, concentration, and order. Montessori saw that the children who exemplified this "converted nature" would also behave differently and display a calm demeanor.[10] These children were not fatigued by their work, rather they demonstrated a sense of joy and satisfaction in their learning.[11] Montessori argued that the key to unlocking the child's true potential or "converted nature" was a spiritual matter. In

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[8] Montessori writes, "We have within our souls numerous bad tendencies which develop like weeds in a meadow—the result of original sin. These tendencies are manifold: let us say they can be summed up in seven groups—the seven deadly sins. A child is more or less free from sin: not only is a child, compared with ourselves, purer, but it has certain pure, occult and mysterious qualities, generally invisible to grown-up people, in which however we must faithfully believe because Our Lord spoke of them with such clearness and insistence that all the evangelists wrote, 'Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.'" Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 52.

Montessori continues, "All deadly sins tend to separate us from the child; for the child, compared to us, is not only purer but has mysterious qualities, which we adults as a rule cannot perceive, but in which we must believe with faith; for Jesus spoke of them so clearly and insistently that all the Evangelists recorded His words: 'Unless ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.'" Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 93.

[9] Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 93.

[10] Montessori asserts, "We, Montessorians, state that in childhood another and more profound nature exists. It is the one shown by the 'converted child'. The characteristics of his nature are quite different. Among them there is love of work upon which the child's mind concentrates. The concentration takes the form of repeating again and again the same exercises. And there is order in movement. The two go together, for one sees there is meticulous exactness in this movement, which is exerted in actions which are not only continued but repeated. There is one added peculiarity in the fact that this orderly activity, long as it may last, seems to take place without causing the child any fatigue. Another characteristic of this nature is the independence from the adult; the capacity of the child of acting for himself with research for exactness in what he does." Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 3.

[11] Montessori states, "Other phenomena are respect for belongings of others and a love and interest in external objects, so intense that we have called it 'love of the environment'. It is a love inspired by knowledge, however, and not by desire of possession. As a result of this there is no strife among children. On the contrary, they develop a calm and loving disposition and thus the possibility of mutual association. The fact which created great astonishment when it was first witnessed and still does now is that as long as these conditions prevail the children refuse toys, sweetmeats and prizes. Also they never ask for the help of the adult or for an excessive number of stories or feel the continuous need of asking questions." Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 3.

witnessing the formation of the child's personality and watching it unfold, she was convinced that children are spiritual beings whose spiritual development was necessary.

What became known as the Montessori method of education was Maria Montessori's life work that was developed over the course of around 40 years. After opening the first *Casa dei Bambini* or the Children's House in 1907, Montessori developed not only a method of education but a philosophy that centered on three primary components. These primary components were the child, the environment, and the teacher. Montessori describes her method of education as the following:

> And so we discovered that education is not something which the teacher does, but that it is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being. It is not acquired by listening to words, but in virtue of experiences in which the child acts on his environment. The teacher's task is not to talk, but to prepare and arrange a series of motives for cultural activity in a special environment made for the child.[12]

These three facets of child, environment, and teacher guided her approach and served as parts of a whole. With these components working in tandem, one could in fact, successfully implement the Montessori method to arrive at a fundamentally alternative form of education that focused on the holistic development of the child.[13] It is the aim of the researcher to outline below key aspects of each of these core elements using Montessori's own words.

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[12] Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2007), 5.

[13] Montessori writes, "It will be seen from the foregoing pages that the Montessori method claims to be much more than a particular way of teaching this or that special subject, more than a general method of instruction. More fundamental than this, its object is to influence the whole life of the child: it aims, in short, at a total development of the personality, a harmonious growth of all the potentialities of the child, physical and mental, according to the law of its being." Montessori, *Child in the Church,* 140–41.

The Child

It was Montessori's view of the child that stood in contrast to the cultural understanding of children in her day. Having begun her work in the early 1900s,[14] Montessori spoke of the time-period as a new era: the century of the child. In *The Secret of Childhood*, Montessori writes, "Not only is there an increasing concern for child health—it began in the last decade of the 19th century—but also a new awareness of the personality of the child as something of the highest importance."[15] Montessori was on the cusp of leadership in this new epoch of child development.[16] She described this as a "revolution" for she believed that "every normal child can develop mind and character as well as an individual personality if he is given a chance to do it for himself in his own way."[17] She exclaimed, "The discovery that the child has a mind able to absorb on its own account produces a revolution in education."[18] Montessori asserts a sense of urgency by stating, "Today it is necessary that society as a whole should become aware of the child and his importance."[19] Montessori saw that there was an alternative way to care for

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[14] Montessori recollects, "It was January 6th (1907), when the first school was opened for small normal children between three and six years of age. In the first children's house, there were about fifty children born to mostly all illiterate parents. In her inauguration speech she quoted the Scriptures which seemed to her an omen and a prophecy: "For behold darkness shall cover the earth . . . but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and the Gentiles shall walk in thy light." She recounts having discovered a fertile field and before turning over the clods of field, she found gold instead of wheat. Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 101–102.

[15] Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 3.

[16] Montessori reflects, "From all this it follows that the adult should try to interpret the child's needs and meet them as best as he can by preparing a really suitable environment. This may be the beginning of a new epoch in education, which will consider how it can *assist the life* of the child. We must finish with the idea that the child is an object to be picked up and carried anywhere when he is small, and that when he is bigger he must simply obey and imitate the adult. This idea is an impassable obstacle to any endeavour to make the child's life more rational. The adult must recognize that he must take second place, endeavour all he can to understand the child, and to follow and help him in the development of his life. This should be the aim of mother and teacher. If the child's personality is to be helped to develop, since the child is weaker, the adult with his stronger personality must hold himself in check, and, taking his lead from the child, feel proud if he can understand and follow him." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 63.

[17] Maria Montessori, *Maria Montessori Speaks to Parents: A Selection of Articles* (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2017), 39.

[18] Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 23.

[19] Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 193.

a child which was not solely taking care of the child's physical health. She recognized that the life of the child's psyche (soul)[20] needs nourishment as well.[21] In regard to education, Montessori saw education not as teaching but the practice of "assisting the psychological development of the child."[22] Montessori declared, "For my part, I believe that the child himself must be the pivot of his own education—not the child as people ordinarily think of him, but rather his innermost soul."[23] Out of this understanding that the child has two natures—the physical and the psychic,[24] came Montessori's need for a special school and special method of education.[25] Hence, the creation of Montessori schools and the development of the Montessori method through means of observation[26] and discovery.[27]

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[20] Montessori refers to this as the child's psychic life. "We must face the startling fact that the child has a psychic life of which the delicate manifestations pass unperceived and of which the adult may inadvertently damage the pattern or hinder the development." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 91.

[21] Montessori concludes, "Yet the child, like all human beings, has a personality of his own. He carries within himself the beauty and dignity of a creativity that can never be erased and for which his spirit, pure and sensitive, requires our most delicate care. We must not only be occupied with his body, so tiny and fragile, and we must not only think of feeding him, washing him and dressing him with the greatest of care. That no man lives on bread alone is never so apparent as in childhood; material things are the least important in that period and can be used for degrading purposes at any age." Maria Montessori, *The Child in the Family* (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2007), 25.

[22] Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 23.

[23] Maria Montessori, *Education and Peace* (Amsterdam: Montessori–Pierson Publishing Company, 2007), 71.

[24] Montessori observes, "The root reason for this similarity of method [between the Catholic Church and the Montessori School] is not far to seek. It is simply this, that they are both based on the same psychology, viz.—that man is a twofold being, made up of body and spirit." Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 154.

[25] Montessori writes, "It would be a great mistake to believe that by casually observing children we were led to frame such a bold idea as that of the existence of a hidden nature in the child, and that such an intuition in its turn gave rise to the idea of a special school and a special method of education." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 100.

[26] Maria Montessori, *What You Should Know About Your Child* (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2007), 93.

[27] Montessori defines discovery as: "Discovery concerns something which, though already in existence, for one reason or another has remained hidden from human consciousness." Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 4.

Montessori placed a high priority on the child and viewed children as separate from adults.[28] She compared the child to a caterpillar and the adult to a butterfly when she writes, "In the same way, the caterpillar and the butterfly are two creatures very different to look at and in the way they behave, yet the beauty of the butterfly comes from its life in the larval form, and not through any efforts it may make to imitate another butterfly."[29] This view was especially unique to Montessori during the age of industrialization. In this way, she went against the dominant culture's perspective of children and viewed them not merely as "little adults" but those who were in their own specific stage of development. In a time when little attention was given to the formal study of early childhood education, she viewed this specific stage in a child's life crucial for their present and long-term growth.[30] She advocated for children to be able to develop on their own and to see life as a child would, untainted by the norms of traditional school.[31]

Observations of Children

While reflecting on the first Children's House, Montessori notes how she witnessed an extraordinary transformation in the children through the liberation of the

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[28] Maria Montessori states, "The child was only a 'future-being'. He was not envisaged except as one 'who is to become,' and therefore he was of no account until he had reached the stage in which he had become a man. Yet the child, like all other human beings, has a personality of his own." Maria Montessori, *The Child* (Adyar, Madras, India: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1961), 7.

[29] Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 194.

[30] Montessori states, "We all know that the age of development is the most important period of the whole life. Moral malnutrition and intoxication of the spirit as fatal for the soul of man as physical malnutrition is for the health of his body. Therefore, child-education is the most important problem of humanity." Montessori, *The Child*, 10. In *The Child*, she continues, "We must now be content with a much more modest role, that required by the interpretation that Emerson gave of the message of Jesus Christ: Infancy is the eternal Messiah, which continuously comes back to the arms of degraded humanity in order to entice it back to heaven. If we consider the child in this light, we shall be forced to recognize, as an absolute and urgent necessity, that care must be given to childhood, creating for it a suitable world and suitable environment," (10).

[31] Maria Montessori describes public school education during her time, "In such a school, the children, like butterflies mounted on pins, are fastened each to his place, the desk, spreading the useless wings of barren and meaningless knowledge which they have acquired." Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002), 14.

soul of the child.[32] In addition to liberation in learning, other common elements known to the Montessori method include: the importance of the environment, the teacher as a passive guide, and specially designed learning materials. Although, these are major features of Montessori education, to Montessori—these are external features.[33] The internal manifestation within the child was her main focus. Before Montessori created her method, the children in the original Children's House taught her various lessons. These lessons enhanced Montessori's understanding of children that ultimately formed her view of child development and human formation.[34] She concluded, "Their behaviour led us to become aware of a fundamental truth, namely that the child works for his own inner development and not to reach an exterior aim and that when he has done this work he has not really developed a special ability but he has developed something in himself."[35] The child builds himself through working[36] in order to build his inner being.[37] The child engages with work differently than adults, for his work is the work of producing man.[38]

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[32] Montessori asserts, "It would be interesting to know the original circumstances that enabled these children to undergo such an extraordinary transformation, or rather, that brought about the appearance of new children, whose souls revealed themselves with such radiance as to spread a light through the whole world. These circumstances must have been singularly favourable to enable the 'liberation of the soul of the child.'" Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 104.

[33] Montessori writes, "So far we have a suitable environment, humility in the teacher, and scientific materials. Here are the three external features of the method." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 124.

[34] In *The Secret of Childhood*, Montessori describes what she witnessed in the children under these subheadings: repetition of the exercise, their feeling for order, free choice, they never chose the toys, rewards and punishments, silence exercise, they refused sweets, their sense of dignity, spontaneous discipline, 'I've written! I've written!', reading came later, new children." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 106–22.

[35] Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 8.

[36] Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 165.

[37] Montessori observes, "The child feels the need to repeat this exercise not in order to perfect his performance but in order to build up his own inner being, and the time taken, the number of repetitions required, the hidden law inherent in the spiritual embryo is one of the child's secrets." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 172.

[38] Montessori states, "But the child is a worker and a producer. If he cannot take part in the adult's work, he has his own, a great important, difficult work indeed: The work of producing man." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 169.

The Absorbent Mind

In *The Absorbent Mind*, one of Montessori's later books written near the end of her life, Montessori provides the details of the child's development within the first years of his or her life.[39] She affirms, "The study of child psychology in the first years of life opens to our eyes such wonders that no one seeing them with understanding can fail to be deeply stirred."[40] The concept of the absorbent mind is developed by Montessori as she recognizes, "The child has a mind able to absorb knowledge. He has the power to teach himself."[41] She continues to explain this as an ability that is only found in children:

> It may be said that we acquire knowledge by using our minds; but the child absorbs knowledge directly into his psychic life. Simply by continuing to live, the child learns to speak his native tongue. A kind of mental chemistry goes on within him. We, by contrast, are recipients. Impressions pour into us and we store them in our minds; but we ourselves remain apart from them, just as a vase keeps separate from the water it contains. Instead, the child undergoes a transformation. Impressions do not merely enter his mind; they form it. They incarnate themselves in him. The child creates his own "mental muscles," using for this what he finds in the world about him. We have named this type of mentality, *The Absorbent Mind*.[42]

With this ability to absorb and acquire knowledge, children have a vast capacity for learning. Montessori concludes that adults, in humility, can in fact learn from the child,

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[39] Montessori writes, "It is with this first period that our book is to deal." Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 23.

[40] Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 23.

[41] Montessori, *Absorbent Mind,* 3.

[42] Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 21.

especially in regard to the child's ability to love.[43] The gift of the child's love will then lead to a salvation and union of mankind.[44]

Liberty

Before deriving her principles for the Montessori method, Montessori had identified key areas which characterized the children that she observed in the Children's House.[45] The children had taught Montessori many things, of this she writes, "I took almost a vow to become a follower of the child as my teacher."[46] The children demonstrated these peculiar tendencies when given liberty[47] and freedom.[48] Throughout

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[43] Montessori states, "I would like to say a word about this reality, and also about the sayings of the poets and the prophets. This force that we call love is the greatest energy of the universe. But I am using an inadequate expression, for it is more than an energy: it is creation itself. I should put it better if I were to say: 'God is love.' I should like to be able to quote from all the poets, the prophets and the saints, but they are not all known to me, nor could I do so in their various tongues. But perhaps I may quote one that I do know, and who, in speaking of love, expresses himself so strongly that today, after two thousand years, his words still echo emphatically in Christian hearts." Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 264. She continues, "It is a long list of facts, a description of mental pictures, but all these pictures remind one strangely of the qualities of childhood. They seem to be describing the *Absorbent Mind* of the child!" (265).

Montessori writes, "But this love, which is the gift of every tiny child who is brought into our midst—if this were realized in its potentialities, or if the fullness of its values were developed, our achievements, already so vast, would become immeasurable. Grown-ups and children must join their forces. In order to become great, the grown-up must become humble and learn from the child. Strange, it is not, that among all the wonders man has worked, and the discoveries he has made, there is only one field to which he has paid no attention; it is that of the miracle that God has worked from the first: the miracle of children," (266).

[44] Montessori describes, "The study of love and its utilization will lead us to the source from which it springs, The Child. This is the path that man must follow in his anguish and his cares if, as his aspirations direct, he wishes to reach salvation and the union of mankind." Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 268.

[45] Montessori writes, "The first list shows us: Individual work. Repetition of the exercise. Free choice. Control of error. Analysis of movements. Silence exercises. Good manners in social contacts. Order in the environment. Meticulous personal cleanliness. Sense education. Writing isolated from reading. Writing prior to reading. Reading without books. Discipline in free activity. And then the second list: Elimination of rewards and punishments. Elimination of A. B. C. Elimination of collective lessons. Elimination of programmes and examinations. Elimination of toys and greediness. Elimination of a special high desk for the teacher. Undoubtedly, in this double list we find the outline of an educational method. In short, practical and positive, or rather experimental guidelines have been provided by the child himself for the construction of a method of education, in which his choice guides its shaping and his vital eagerness acts as a control of error." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 125.

[46] Montessori, *Education and Peace*, 113.

[47] Montessori asserts, "Here is the aim of a truly new education; first of all to discover the child and effect his liberation." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 92.

[48] To read more about what Montessori's idea of freedom is and is not, see Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 185. Montessori states, "'To let the child do as he likes,' when he has not yet developed any powers of control, is to betray the idea of freedom," (185). "Real freedom, instead, is a consequence of

her writings, Montessori writes about these tendencies which were unlike that of children that she had been originally accustomed to. She states:

> For instance, the children were never attracted to objects, such as toys, which were supposed to please them, nor were they interested in fairy tales. Instead they sought to free themselves from adults and do everything themselves, manifesting clearly the desire not to be helped unless such help was absolutely necessary. They were tranquil, absorbed and intensely interested in their work, achieving an amazing level of serenity.[49]

She observed that children who were before considered "naughty,"[50] displayed undesirable outward characteristics because they were placed in a world of adults, in need of liberation.[51] She compares this to the account in Matthew 8:20 and Luke 9:58, as she relates the child to the Messiah, "whom the prophets said that He had no place to lay His head or move His feet."[52] Underlying this idea that the child is in the process of building himself and desiring independence, Montessori discovered a hidden child who must be liberated.[53] Montessori calls this the child's secret and states, "For all practical purposes,

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development; it is the development of latent guides, aided by education. Development is active. It is the construction of the personality, reached by effort and one's own experiences; it is the long road, which every child must travel to attain maturity," (185).

[49] Montessori, *Child in the Family*, 1.

[50] According to Montessori, "Naughtiness is the expression of an inner disturbance and unsatisfied need, a state of tension; the child's soul is crying out for what it needs, seeking to defend itself." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 32.

[51] Montessori states, "There exist, therefore, two psychic states in the child: one that is natural and creative, therefore normal and superior, and one that is forced and inferior and that results from the battle in which the weak are attacked by the strong. A new image of the child has emerged from this discovery, which has been a beam of light to guide us on the road to a new education. The child demonstrates, along with his innocence, courage and faith in himself and is endowed with a moral force that also has a social direction. At the same time, those defects that one struggled in vain to discourage with education—that is misbehaviour, destructiveness, lying, shyness, fear and, in general, all those that are contingent upon the posture of defence—have disappeared. The adult who is in communication with the new child, that is, the teacher, has a whole new orientation: he is no longer the powerful adult but the adult made humble, serving the new life. Since this fundamental change has taken place, we can only discuss education if we first decide the basis: either we speak of the child under the powerful adult—when he is in a permanently defensive state, if he has not already been completely repressed—or we speak of the liberated child whose condition of life is normal and who is permitted to manifest his creative capacities." Montessori, *Child in the Family*, 68.

[52] Montessori writes, "The child struggling to build up the man in him is like the Messiah, whom the prophets said that He had no place to lay His head or move His feet." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 66.

[53] Montessori states, "There is a hidden man, a hidden child, a buried living being, who must be *liberated*." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 91.

the child spirit is a secret from the adults; it appears to them as a mystery; for they judge of it merely from practical impotence in reaction and not from the psychical energy that is potent in it."[54] In order for the child to reach their fullest potential, Montessori sought for the child to act in accordance with its true nature, freed from obstacles.[55] Montessori concludes, "The child is the spiritual builder of mankind, and obstacles to his free development are the stones in the wall by which the soul of man has become imprisoned."[56]

Human Development

Throughout her writings, Montessori focuses on the child between the ages of 3 to 7.[57] In *the Formation of Man*, Montessori states, "Another strange fact about this Method is that though originally worked out for pre-primary education, it has now infiltrated into the primary and secondary stages—even into the University."[58] Although, the majority of Montessori's work focuses on the stages of infancy and early childhood, Montessori provides some reflections and guidance regarding other stages of development including later childhood (6–12), adolescence (ages 12–18) and maturity in adults (ages 18–24+).[59] Montessori expands her view of human development through her

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[54] Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 55.

[55] Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 123.

[56] Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 199.

[57] Montessori's book, *The Absorbent Mind* deals with the first period of life (birth to six years). Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 15.

[58] Maria Montessori, *The Formation of Man*, (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2007), 4.

[59] For more details regarding these stages, see "Four Planes of Education" in Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 28–36, "Erkinder" and "Functions of the University," in Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence* (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2007), 56–67, 78–89. Montessori develops this in *The Absorbent Mind*. In the first period, "there are two sub phases, from birth to three and three to six." Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 15. "The next period goes from six to twelve." "The third period goes from twelve to eighteen." "Man, after eighteen, is fully developed and no further marked changes will occur in him. He grows only in age," (16).

model of the Four Planes of Development.[60] In addition, Montessori makes a comparison between the life of a human being to the three stages of the life of Christ:

> Behold at first the miraculous and sublime Child. This epoch is the period of "creative sensibilities," of mental construction, of such an intense activity that it is necessary to sow in this period of life all the seeds of culture. Then comes the epoch of adolescence, an epoch of inner revelations and of social sensibilities. Christ as a boy, forgetful of His family, is heard to discuss with the doctors. He does not talk as a pupil, but as a Teacher, dazzling by the flashes of His light. But later He devotes Himself to manual work and exercises a craft. He shows that the adolescent should be able to manifest his hidden treasures and at the same time work and be initiated into a craft. At last, comes the Man Who prepares Himself for His mission in this world.[61]

While considering the fact that all adults were once children, Montessori sees this as a remaining constant of the human personality, no matter the particular life stage. She concludes:

> According to the *Old Testament* man was created as an adult; in the *New Testament* it is the Infant Jesus who appears. The human personality is essentially one during the successive stages of its development. Yet, whatever human being we consider, and at whatever age, whether children in the primary school, adolescents, youths or adults, all start by being children, all then grow from childhood to manhood or womanhood without changing the unity of their persons. If the human personality is one at all stages of its development we must conceive of a principle of education, which has, regard to all stages.[62]

Because of this factor, even though her method was primarily focused on the development of young children, the Montessori method of education could be applied to humans across all stages of development.[63] The formation of the human personality—what Montessori refers to as the "formation of man"—became a driving force behind her

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[60] Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 28–36.

[61] Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 88.

[62] Montessori, *Formation of Man*, 7.

[63] Montessori exclaims, "What exactly, then, is this Method, which begins with newborn babies and extends to undergraduates? Other methods have not so wide a function." Montessori, *Formation of Man*, 5.

educational model.[64] Montessori held the position that "any reform of education must be based on the personality of man."[65]

Sensitive Periods

Montessori's vision of education was shaped through her eyes as a scientist. In many ways, her classroom served as her laboratory. There she was able to observe the children and their various developmental stages which she later termed "sensitive periods."[66] During these "periods of sensibility" or "sensitive periods," the child develops rapidly, and if given the right opportunities, can accomplish age-appropriate activities.[67] In order to accomplish this, Montessori asserts, "Two factors must be present if the child is to develop. It is necessary to create surroundings for the child that answers his needs not only from the point of view of his physical health but also from the point of view of his spiritual life."[68] The holistic nature of Montessori's view of human development centered around recognizing and meeting both the child's physical and spiritual needs. Montessori writes, "To understand the needs of the child and to supply these so that his life develops fully, that is the aim underlying my method."[69]

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[64] Montessori states, "If 'the formation of man' becomes the basis of education, then the coordination of all schools from infancy to maturity, from nursery to university, arises as a first necessity: for man is a unity, and individuality that passes through interdependent phases of development." Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 80.

[65] Montessori writes, "Man himself must be the centre of education and we must never forget that man does not develop only at the university, but begins his mental growth at birth, and pursues it with the greatest intensity during the first three years of his life." Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 5.

[66] See Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 96; Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 27; and Montessori, *Education and Peace*, 104. Montessori states, "Man's mind does not spring from nothing; it is built up on the foundations laid by the child in his sensitive periods." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 44.

[67] Montessori notes, "When children are in their sensitive periods they have a great enthusiasm, a remarkable burst of activity. When the sensitive period is over, the child becomes indifferent." Montessori, *What You Should Know About Your Child*, 32.

[68] Montessori, *Education and Peace*, 72.

[69] Montessori, *Maria Montessori Speaks to Parents*, 7.

The Environment

In a Montessori school—specifically in the classroom—the setting plays a significant role of assisting the child to become an active and independent learner. Montessori refers to this setting as the "prepared environment," about which, Montessori writes, "The first aim of the environment is, as far as it is possible, to render the growing child independent of the adult."[70] She continues,

> This is the mission of education. Let us therefore unite our efforts to construct an environment that will allow the child and the adolescent to live an independent, individual life in order to fulfil the goal that all of us are pursuing—the development of personality, the formation of a supernatural order, and the creation of a better society.[71]

For the child to grow in his independence and develop his personality, the environment must be carefully prepared. The original Montessori school was intentionally designed as a home for children[72] that was complete with child-sized furniture[73] and practical life materials.[74] There were a number of didactic learning materials[75] to encourage a progression of learning. Children developed a sense of autonomy because they were

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[70] Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 267.

[71] Montessori, *Education and Peace*, 102.

[72] Maria Montessori claims, "We call our schools 'Children's House' and in them the children are the masters of the house." Maria Montessori, *The Child, Society and the World* (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2016), 6.

[73] Montessori asserts, "A school, a place for children, must have furniture." *Child in the Family*, 41. She continues, "The environments and contents of the Houses of Children, sometimes call Montessori Schools, have been so prepared as to embody the principle stated in the previous chapters. The buildings, furniture, apparatus and other requisites are designed to suit the age and size of the children concerned. The institution provides for self-activity and spontaneous development of children." Montessori *What You Should Know About Your Child*, 90. Montessori describes the original children's house: "Those children who had come from wretched hovels must have found their new environment very pleasant indeed: the clean, white room, the new little tables, the new little chairs, and armchairs, made on purpose for them, and the little lawns of the sunny courtyard." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 124. Montessori comments, "The principal modification in the matter of school furnishings is the abolition of desks, and benches or stationary chairs." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 81.

[74] Montessori exclaims, "And what do the children do? It is what one does in one's own house. They carry out work which has a practical aim, they sweep, dust, dress themselves, etc." Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 29.

[75] Montessori states, "Another notable circumstance was the provision of suitable and alluring scientific materials for the children, perfected with a view to sensorial education, of such things as the lacing frames, which allowed an analysis and refinement of movements. All these were such as to awaken concentrated attention." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 124.

given the freedom to choose materials within the didactic learning apparatus according to their interests. These materials were intentionally developed by Montessori to enhance the child's fine and gross motor skills while simultaneously providing the opportunity to gain sensory and practical life experiences. Montessori prioritized the prepared environment to foster the child's independence, creativity, and love for learning.[76]

Purposefully Prepared

Montessori placed special emphasis on the school environment to include outdoor spaces in nature. She advocated for the environment to be a place of beauty[77] that could, in turn, help children raise their thoughts to their Creator.[78] Another importance of the prepared environment was for the spiritual preparation of the child. Montessori states, "We have seen that to make possible this inner growth the child is placed in a special environment, so prepared as to meet its inner needs; and that *in* this environment the child is given an unusual degree of liberty. Further, that as a result, the personality of the child is developed and strengthened in a remarkable way."[79] Montessori desired for the children to have freedom within this specially created environment where the children felt no constraint.[80] She regarded this with such great importance that she concluded, if

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[76] Montessori asserts, "Let us therefore discard our role of prison warden, and let us instead preoccupy ourselves with preparing an environment in which as far as possible we shall try not to harass him by our supervision and by our teaching. We must become persuaded that the more the environment corresponds to the needs of the child, the more limited becomes the activity of the teacher." Montessori, *The Child*, 11.

[77] Montessori notes, "The child should live in an environment of beauty." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 183.

[78] Montessori writes, "One of our aims was to help the child, by making him observe created things, to raise his thoughts to their Creator." *Child in the Church*, 22.

[79] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 141.

[80] Montessori writes, "To this end it is enough to *remove obstacles*; this is the first step and the foundation of education. . . . One is the provision of a pleasant environment, where the children felt no constraint." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 123).

one were to compress the principles of the Montessori method into one phrase, it would be "Liberty in a Prepared Environment."[81]

Montessori's prepared environment should be beautiful, orderly, and intentionally designed to meet the needs of the children. About this, she states, "The child should love everything that he learns, for his mental and emotional growths are linked. Whatever is presented to him must be made beautiful and clear, striking his imagination. Once this love has been kindled, all problems confronting the educationalist will disappear."[82] According to Montessori, a specially prepared and detailed educational environment seems to have been specific to her method during the time. When compared to the traditional model,[83] Montessori writes, "Montessori education, unlike the old education, is not education mainly in words or through words. Montessori education is education mainly in things and through things."[84] The things placed in the Montessori classroom were of natural-made materials and exhibited a sense of quality.[85] The reasoning for this was as follows: "This intellectual possessiveness shows itself when the child is so strongly attracted by his environment that we may almost say he is 'in love'

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[81] Montessori, "If it were necessary to compress the description of the principles of the Montessori method into a single phrase, perhaps the most comprehensive would be that it was a method based on 'Liberty in a Prepared Environment.'" Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 109.

[82] Maria Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential* (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2007), 14.

[83] Montessori states, "The 'hygienic houses' of today with their bare walls and white washable furniture, look like hospitals; while the schools seem like veritable tombs, with their desks ranged in rows like black catafalques – black, merely because they have to be of the same colour as ink to hide the stains which are looked upon as a necessity, just as certain sins and certain crimes are still considered to be inevitable in the world; the alternative of avoiding them has never occurred to anyone. Classrooms have black desks, and bare, gray walls, more devoid of ornament than those of a mortuary chamber; this is to the end that the starved and famishing spirit of the child may 'accept' the indigestible intellectual food which the teacher bestows upon it. In other words, every distracting element has to be removed from the environment, so that the teacher, by his oratorical art, and with the help of his laborious expedients, may succeed in fixing the rebellious attention of his pupils on himself." Maria Montessori, *The Advanced Montessori Method*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2016), 110.

[84] Montessori, *What Should You Know About Your Child*, 93.

[85] Montessori writes, "We may say that the place best adapted to the life of man is an artistic environment; and that, therefore, if we want the school to become 'a laboratory for the observation of human life,' we must gather within it things of *beauty*." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori* Method, 110.

with it. This love for his environment makes the child treat it with great care and handle everything in it with utmost delicacy."[86] In turn, children within the Montessori classroom, were taught to tend to their environment by quietly moving the furniture and handling the practical life materials such as glass or porcelain containers with care.[87] Montessori prioritized order and made sure that the items within the environment were prepared for a purpose. She writes,

> The items of material objects and apparatus have been devised, collected, graded and placed in the room or in the environment of the child for a set purpose and according to a purposeful design. The plan, structure and contents of a good Montessori House of Children are based on a knowledge of the developmental requirements of various stages of childhood.[88]

Concentration

When consulting with architects, artists, and psychologists who were intrigued by the prepared environment of the Montessori classroom, Montessori stated that the value "did not depend entirely on dimensions and colouring—which are not enough in themselves, but it depended on the things which to focus his [the child's] attention."[89] To Montessori, the child must be able to choose for himself the activities that interest him,[90] for "a child chooses what helps him to construct himself."[91] Through the activities that

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[86] Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 198.

[87] Montessori exclaims, "What is above all essential is, that it be 'artistically beautiful.' In this case beauty is not produced by superfluity or luxury, but by grace and harmony of the line and colour, combined with that absolute simplicity necessitated by the lightness of the furniture." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 108–109.

[88] Montessori, *What You Should Know About Your Child*, 93.

[89] Montessori states, "When I first pointed out the great value of an environment specially adapted in this way to the needs of little children, this idea aroused great interest in architects, artists, and psychologists, some of whom collaborated with me to settle the ideal size and height of the rooms, and the decorations desirable in a school where concentration was to be favoured. Yet its value did not depend entirely on dimensions and colouring—which are not enough in themselves—but it depended on the things on which to focus his attention." Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 201.

[90] Montessori writes, "We started by equipping the child's environment with a little of everything, and left the children to choose those things they preferred." Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 201.

[91] Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 201.

the child chooses, he is constructing and acquiring knowledge for himself. Montessori describes this as:

> This development takes place because the child has been able to work and to be in direct contact with reality. It does not come from anything we teach the child; it is a definite, constructive process, a natural phenomenon that results when the child is given the chance to make his own efforts and do his own work without intermediaries. We think the child is happiest when he is playing; but the truth is that the child is happiest when he is working.[92]

The child who is able to work freely within his environment does not benefit from direct teaching but his own interest guides the learning process. About this, Montessori reflects:

> One is that the child must learn by his own individual activity, being given a mental freedom to take what he needs, and not to be questioned in his choice. Our teaching must only answer the mental needs of the child, never dictate them. . . . The task of teaching becomes easy, since we do not need to choose what we shall teach, but should place all before him for the satisfaction of his mental appetite. He must have absolute freedom of choice, and then he requires nothing but repeated experiences, which will become interestingly marked by interest and serious attention, during his acquisition of some desired knowledge.[93]

Montessori proposed a self-directed learning model of "auto-education" where "the child should as far as possible be guided into discovering things for himself."[94] Montessori held to the belief that the child has the capacity to repeat an action which will hold their interest for a concentrated amount of time. Concerning concentration, Montessori divides this into a series of stages:

> Concentration consists of three distinct periods: preparation, the great work itself that involves some physical object, and a third period of inner activity in which the child achieves great contentment and clarity. A glimmer of this clarity is reflected externally, for the child sees things he has never seen before. There is an attendant phenomenon: the child becomes extraordinarily obedient and develops an almost inconceivable patience, which is rather surprising since he has received little formal instruction in obedience or patience.[95]

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[92] Montessori, *Education and Peace*, 73.

[93] Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential*, 3.

[94] Montessori, *Child in the Church,* 156.

[95] Montessori, *Child in the Family*, 38.

Through the child's concentrated efforts and repetition of action, a Montessori education provides a specially prepared environment for the child to discover things on his own and construct his own knowledge.

The Teacher

Whereas traditional educational philosophies centered on the teacher's role as the sole dispenser of knowledge, Montessori proposed an alternative role for the teacher.[96] In Montessori classrooms, the teacher was referred to as the directress or maestra who served as a guide to assist the children in their own innately driven quest for knowledge.[97] Montessori states her reasoning for the difference in her terminology: "She is called a directress, not a teacher, because it is her business, not so much to teach, as to direct the spontaneous energies of the child into useful and formative channels."[98] To Montessori, the directress was not to interrupt the children in their work, rather, she was to be a joyous observer. [99] Not only is the directress considered a key part of the child's environment, the directress is responsible to make preparations in the environment so that the children can succeed on their own.[100] Montessori states,

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[96] Montessori writes, "Actual training and practice are necessary to fit for this method teachers who have not been prepared for scientific observation, and such training is especially necessary to those who have been accustomed to the old domineering methods of the common school." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 88.

[97] About the directress in a Montessori classroom, Montessori states, "In our system, she must become a passive, much more than an active, influence, and her passivity shall be composed of anxious scientific curiosity, and of absolute *respect* for the phenomenon which she wishes to observe. The teacher must understand and *feel* her position of *observer*: the *activity* must lie in the *phenomenon*." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 87.

[98] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 149.

[99] Montessori writes, "In the advanced as in the primary stage, the first step to take in order to become a Montessori teacher is to shed omnipotence and to become a joyous observer." Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential,* 76.

[100] Montessori describes the directress, "She can not understand that her new task is apparently *passive*, like that of the astronomer who sits immovable before the telescope while the worlds whirl through space. This idea, that *life acts of itself*, and that in order to study it, to divine its secrets or to direct its activity, it is necessary to observe it and to understand it without intervening." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 88. She continues, "The teacher has thus become a *director* of the spontaneous work of the children. She is not a *passive* force, a *silent* presence," (371).

> Montessori teachers are not servants of the child's body, to wash, dress and feed him—they know that he needs to do these things for himself in developing independence. We must help the child to act for himself, will for himself, think for himself; this is the art of those who aspire to serve the spirit. It is the teacher's joy to welcome the manifestations of the spirit, answering her faith. Here is the child as he should be: the worker who never tires, the calm child who seeks the maximum of effort, who tries to help the weak while knowing how to respect the independence of others, in reality, the true child. Our teachers thus penetrate the secret of childhood, and have knowledge far superior to that of the ordinary teacher who becomes acquainted only with the superficial facts of the children's lives.[101]

The directress is not a dispassionate observer[102] or one who merely supervises the child, rather she facilitates learning by means of guiding, helping, and encouraging the child according to their needs.[103]

Characteristics

Montessori had high expectations for her teachers. She preferred that the teachers in her schools would come to her untrained—having not been taught in the traditional model of teaching, for Montessori believed that the teacher must first prepare herself to experience this new way of teaching.[104] Montessori states, "The teacher, when she begins to work in our schools, must have a kind of faith that *the child will reveal himself* through work. She must free herself from all preconceived ideas concerning the levels at which the children may be."[105] The child's mind was compared to fertile ground

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[101] Montessori, *Education for a New World*, 67.

[102] About the role of the directress, Montessori states, "But here a very important principle must not be forgotten—giving freedom to the child does not mean to abandon him to his own resources and perhaps to neglect him. The help that we give to the soul of the child must not be passive indifference to all the difficulties of its development. Rather we must second it with prudence and affectionate care. However, even by merely preparing with great care the environment of children, we shall have already done a great task, because the creation of a new world, a world of the children, is no easy accomplishment." Montessori, *The Child*, 11.

[103] Montessori exclaims, "Another innovation that has aroused much interest and controversy has been the role of the educator—the passive educator— who suspends his own activities and authority, lest they should be an obstacle preventing the child from acting for himself, and who is glad when he sees the child acting, making progress on his own, and seeks no credit for it. He applies to himself the words of St. John the Baptist: 'He must increase: but I must decrease.'" Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 99.

[104] Montessori writes, "The first step an intending Montessori teacher must take is to prepare herself." Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 251.

[105] Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 251.

where children displayed eagerness to learn.[106] It was Montessori's goal for the teachers to cultivate this field and sow life by helping the child in his physical, mental, and emotional growth.[107] Montessori also compared the role of the teacher to a valet. She reflects upon the relationship between the teacher and the child when she writes:

> In the psychological realm of relationship between teacher and child, the teacher's part and its techniques are analogous to those of the valet; they are to serve, and to serve well: to serve the spirit. This is something new, especially in the educational field. It is not a question of washing the child when he is dirty, or mending or cleaning his clothes. We do not serve the child's body, because we know that if he is to develop he must do these things for himself. The basis of our teaching is that he should *not* be served in this sense. The child has to acquire physical independence by being self-sufficient; he must become of independent will by using in freedom his own power of choice; he must become capable of independent thought by working alone without interruption. The child's development follows a path of successive stages of independence, and our knowledge of this must guide us in our behaviour towards him.[108]

The act of serving the child did not mean that the adult was to do things for the child. On the contrary, the teacher was to serve the child by assisting him to do things on his own. Montessori clarifies the preparation of the teacher by stating, "This does not imply that we should approve of everything the child does, or abstain from criticizing it, or do nothing to help the development of its intelligence and feelings. On the contrary, we must never forget that the whole point of the argument is to educate, to become the real masters ('*maestri*') of the child."[109]

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[106] Montessori notes, "Knowledge can be best given where there is eagerness to learn, so this is the period when the seed of everything can be sown, the child's mind being like a fertile field, ready to receive what will germinate into culture. . . . If asked how many seeds may be sown, my answer is: 'As many as possible!'" Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential*, 1.

[107] Montessori states, "The secret of good teaching is to regard the child's intelligence as a fertile field in which seeds may be sown, to grow under the heat of flaming imagination. Our aim therefore is not merely to make the child understand, and still less to force him to memorize, but so to touch his imagination as to enthuse him to his inmost core. We do not want complacent pupils, but eager ones; we seek to sow life in the child rather than theories, to help him in his growth, mental and emotional as well as physical, and for that we must offer grand and lofty ideas to the human mind, which we find ever ready to receive them, demanding more and more." Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential*, 8–9.

[108] Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 255–56

[109] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 59.

In order to do this well, teachers underwent three stages in their practice. The stages are as follows:

> *First Stage*. The teacher becomes the keeper and custodian of the environment. The teacher's first duty is therefore to watch over the environment, and this takes precedence over all the rest. Its influence is indirect, but unless it is well done there will be no effective or permanent results of any kind, physical, intellectual or spiritual.[110]
>
> *Second Stage*. Having considered the environment, we must ask how the teacher shall behave toward the children.[111]
>
> *Third Stage*. Finally, the time comes in which the children begin to take an interest in something: usually, in the exercises of practical life, for experience shows that it is useless and harmful to give the children sensorial and cultural apparatus before they are ready to benefit from it.[112]

Not only were Montessori teachers to have ample knowledge of the psychology of the child, but they were also to have meticulous oversight of the child's environment.[113] Montessori states, "The directress must not simply content herself with having prepared a suitable and agreeable environment for her class; but this environment must remain the object of her unceasing care, because the great amount of her success will depend on this."[114] The teacher was to keep the material for development in perfect order and easily accessible to the children for "it is the order in which the objects in the environment are kept which teaches the child the idea of order."[115] Through the careful preparation of the materials and the environment, the teacher is indirectly teaching the child what he or she

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[110] Montessori, *Absorbent Mind,* 251–52.

[111] Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 252.

[112] Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 253.

[113] Montessori states, "As a wife supervises the arrangement of her husband's house so as to make it pleasant and attractive to him, so must the mistress busy herself about the child's surroundings. Constant attention is needed, and even this is not enough; she must know all the child's needs. More still, she will work with her own hands to embellish the cradle of the new-born soul." Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 77. She continues, "In addition to the perfect presentation of the material, in addition to this fundamental psychological knowledge of the environment, she must take the most minute care of the smallest details in the environment, keeping a continual watch over the objects it contains," (77).

[114] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 79, 81.

[115] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 81.

ought to learn. Directresses accomplish this by letting the child complete the work on his own "without a word, or any other assistance—even a glance—from the directress."[116] Montessori teachers were instructed to "not to interfere *in any way*,"[117] and to remember this principle: "*as soon as concentration has begun, act as if the child does not exist*."[118] Montessori concluded, "She must give her lesson; plant the seed in the soil, and then slip away; observe and wait expectantly, but not interfere."[119] This does not mean that the directress is not allowed to intervene at all. When necessary, the directress "should intervene and correct the children every time the latter commit impolite and disorderly actions, i.e., actions which do not spring from a good impulse or lead toward perfection."[120] Montessori asserts, "The directress should not only intervene when there is disorder, but also beforehand to prevent it coming."[121]

Montessori also placed a high emphasis on the character development of the teacher for she saw the adult as the protector of the children who were entrusted to her care.[122] The mission of the teacher was of great importance for her mission was to direct the development of the child's soul.[123] In order to do this, the teacher must be prepared

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[116] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 83.

[117] Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 254.

[118] Montessori writes, "The great principle, which brings success to the teacher, is this: *as soon as concentration has begun, act as if the child does not exist*." Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 254.

[119] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 83.

[120] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 87–88.

[121] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 88.

[122] Montessori claims, "This is the treasure we need today—helping the child become independent of us and make his way by himself and receiving in return his gifts of hope and light. In this new picture, the adult will appear not only as the builder of the external world, but, even more importantly, as the protector of the moral and spiritual forces that appear anew in every human being born." Montessori, *Education and Peace*, 55.

[123] Montessori provides more information on the spiritual training of a teacher in Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 51, 75, and 79.

inwardly, and she must remove any obstacles from her character[124] including any sins.[125] Montessori observes, "We have in ourselves tendencies that are not good and which flourish like weeds in a field (Original sin). These tendencies are many; they fall into seven groups, known of old as the Seven Deadly Sins."[126] She continues:

> All deadly sins tend to separate us from the child; for the child, compared to us, is not only purer but has mysterious qualities, which we adults as a rule cannot perceive, but in which we must believe with faith; for Jesus spoke of them so clearly and insistently that all the Evangelists recorded His words: "Unless ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."[127]

To Montessori, it was not necessary for the educator to become perfect or free from every weakness, rather, they ought to be humble and teachable.[128] Montessori recounts the necessity for teachers to "see the child as Jesus saw him."[129] Teachers ought to serve as examples for the children to look up to, knowing how to discern good from evil.[130] Since

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[124] Montessori states, "Here we must insist on the fact that an instructor must be prepared inwardly, and must consider his own character methodically with a view to discovering any defects within himself which might prove obstacles in his treatment of the child." Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 51.

[125] Montessori writes, "Analogous to the way of spiritual perfection is the path the mistress has to follow. It is not the trifling venial sin overcome leads straight to perfection. It is rather that the soul, freed from these trifles, is capable of rising. The overcoming of the trifles has brought into play all the energies of life; by the overcoming of the little difficulty an obstacle is removed from the path to perfect order. It is not the child himself that we must take into consideration, it is the error that we have to track down. Our work is dealing, not with the sinner, but with the sin." Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 78.

[126] Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 93.

[127] Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 93.

[128] Montessori writes, "It is not necessary to become 'perfect', free from every weakness, in order to become an educator. Indeed it is possible for those continually concerned with the perfection of their inner life to remain unconscious of the defects that prevent them from understanding the child. That is why it is necessary to learn, to be guided, and to be trained to become educators." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 93.

[129] Montessori states, "The teacher must be able to 'see the child as Jesus saw him.'" Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 52. She reiterates this point in *The Secret of Childhood* and states, "That which the educator must seek is to be able to see the child as Jesus saw him." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 94.

[130] Montessori asserts, "As a fundamental thing, therefore, in her knowledge of the method, the mistress must learn to distinguish between good and evil. By Good, we mean—in this connection—the psychological states favourable to the child's development, to his health of mind. By Evil, we mean the psychological states void of formative influence or actually unfavourable to his development, since they lead merely to a useless scattering of his forces." Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 77.

children are impressionable, desire to obey,[131] and have a love for the adult,[132] the teacher must carefully monitor their actions and words.[133] As a last word to teachers, Montessori records the following in *The Absorbent Mind*:

> Permit me to repeat, as a form of farewell, words which have helped us to keep in mind all the things of which I have been speaking. It is not a prayer, but rather a reminder, and for our teachers, an invocation, a kind of syllabus, our only syllabus: "Help us, o God, to enter into the secret of childhood, so that we may know, love and serve the child in accordance with the laws of thy justice and following thy holy will."[134]

Summary of Child, Environment, and Teacher

Montessori discovered that under certain circumstances ("a prepared environment") and nurturing guidance and care from the teacher (whom she referred to as the "directress"), the child could realize his or her true potential. In this way, Montessori advocated a holistic education that was based firmly upon her empirical classroom observation.[135] In *What You Should Know About Your Child,* Montessori states, "The old education laid emphasis on teaching by the teacher and learning by the learner. The Montessori Method lays emphasis on observation and discovery by the child. It lays emphasis on the provision of facilities and protection for the child by the directress."[136]

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[131] Montessori claims, "Obedience is nothing more than a form of spiritual dexterity that presupposes internal equilibrium. . . . Because of this, children must be thoroughly strong beings and must possess spiritual equilibrium in order to be able to obey." Montessori, *Child in the Family*, 38–39.

[132] Montessori writes, "The child is disposed to obey the adult, in the very roots of his spirit." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 85. She continues, "We must indeed realise that the child wants to obey us and loves us." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 85. Montessori adds, "But, for the child, the grown-up is God Himself." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 97.

[133] Montessori states, "The child is sensitive and impressionable to such a degree that the adult ought to monitor everything he says and does, for everything is literally engraved in the child's mind." Montessori, *Child in the Family*, 15.

[134] Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 259–60.

[135] Montessori writes, "The method of observation is established upon one fundamental base —*the liberty of the pupils in their spontaneous manifestations*." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 80.

[136] Montessori, *What You Should Know About Your Child*, 93.

Through her unique perspective on the child, the role of the directress, and her approach regarding the classroom as a prepared environment, Montessori sought to nurture the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects of children.[137] Montessori sought to build her own structure for the education of children. Based on her vision of the spirituality of children and the triad (child, teacher, and environment), the Montessori puzzle fits together to form a beautiful picture of child development and education. Montessori concluded, "Your little sons and daughters are men and women in the making. Let them keep their childish secret and you will have the satisfaction of having them turn to you for help when they need it, and you will see over the years how the secret of their childhood grows into adult firmness of character and a fine independence."[138]

Catholic Christian Foundations

The core of Montessori's method was her holistic educational vision of the child,[139] but what is not as commonly discussed is that this vision primary focused on the spiritual development of children. In *The Child in the Church*, Montessori writes, "The Montessori method was furnished with a long desired opportunity of penetrating deeper into the life of the child's soul, and of thus fulfilling its true educational mission."[140] The aim of Montessori education was not solely the child's physical development but also the child's spiritual development. Montessori writes, "We give the child nourishing food so that his little body may grow, and in just the same way we must provide him with suitable

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[137] Montessori states, "Humanity shows itself in all its intellectual splendour during this tender age as the sun shows itself at the dawn, and the flower in the first unfolding of the petals; and we must *respect* religiously, reverently, these first indications of individuality. If any educational act is to be efficacious, it will be only that which tends to *help* toward the complete unfolding of this life." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 87–88.

[138] Montessori, *Maria Montessori Speaks to Parents*, 24.

[139] Montessori notes, "One cannot see the method; *one sees the child*. One sees the child soul, freed from obstacles, acting in accordance with its true nature." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 123.

[140] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 5.

nourishment for his mental and moral growth."[141] She continues, "Man is by nature an intellectual being, and needs mental food even more than physical."[142] Having been trained as a medical doctor, Montessori connected physical health with psychological wellbeing—when psychological needs are met, the child's physical health showed improvement. Montessori recounts,

> It was as if health and happiness of children were closely linked with the circumstances in which their personality and their intelligence developed. The children's enthusiasm for activity and for study when fulfilled not only gave them joy but also bettered their physical conditions. So it became clear that it was not play, but the work connected with developing to his inner needs which led the child to loftier levels both in the psychic and the physical realms.[143]

In order to nourish the whole child—physical and psychological—Montessori frequently wrote on topics such as the spiritual, intellectual as well as the moral development of children.

The Child in the Church

Although, Montessori's Catholic faith was not directly addressed by her in many of her writings, Montessori frequently mentioned her thoughts about God and the Bible.[144] So much so that leaders of the Catholic Church in the Balearic Isles and Barcelona observed the relationship between her method and how it could be applied in the Catholic church. She recounts, "Although these Fathers neither knew me, nor knew

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[141] Montessori, *Maria Montessori Speaks to Parents*, 7.

[142] Montessori, *Education for a New World*, 58.

[143] Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 10.

[144] In *The Child in the Church*, E. M. Standing notes, "It is a curious but undeniable fact that amongst the leading advocates of the Montessori method in America, England, Holland, Austria, Sweden, and Ireland, are to be found converts to Catholicism. It might be supposed that this circumstance was due to a proselytizing zeal on the part of Dr. Montessori. But this can hardly be the case because Dr. Montessori does not, as a rule, touch on the question of religion in her training courses for teachers. On these occasions she confines her lectures to the psychology and practice of her method in general—a procedure, both wise and politic, since her audiences usually consist of members of many different denominations, with no particular interest in religious education." Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 143.

that I was a Catholic, and, although in my book, I made no direct profession of religious faith, it seemed to them that in its very substance my method was Catholic."[145]

It was found that there were many connections between the Montessori method and Catholicism including:

> The humility and patience of the mistress; the superior value of deeds over words; the sensorial environment as the beginning of the life of the soul; the silence and recollection obtained from the children; the liberty left to the child soul in striving after perfection; the minute care in preventing and correcting all that is evil, even simple error, or slight imperfection; the control of error by means within the very material for development; the respect shown for the interior life of the child—all were pedagogical principles which seemed to them to emanate from, and to be directly inspired by Catholicism.[146]

It is stated in her book, *The Child in the Church*,

> But taking into consideration only purely natural causes, the important factor appears to us to lie in the fact that there is a *striking resemblance between the method of the Montessori school and the method of the Catholic Church, in the manner in which both institutions adapt themselves, in practice, to the psychological nature of man*.[147]

With these similarities, Montessori pointed out that the children accustomed and trained in the Montessori method were in fact prepared for religious education along Catholic lines.[148] Since the Montessori method focused on the spiritual development of the child's soul,[149] this preparation opened the door to another application—the church. About this, Montessori states, "The Church almost seemed to be the end of the education

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[145] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 2.

[146] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 2.

[147] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 144.

[148] Montessori states, "It only remains to point out that a method of education based upon so similar a view of the educative value of a prepared material environment would—*ipso facto*—lend itself most readily to religious education on Catholic lines." Montessori, *Child in the Church,* 157. For more information, see Ch. 10, "A Comparison Between the Montessori Method of the Catholic Church and the Montessori Method," in Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 143.

[149] Montessori writes, "No institution understands better than the Catholic Church the importance of a 'prepared environment' in assisting the development of the soul." Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 144.

which the method proposed to give,"[150] as "the means for its application."[151] Furthermore, she states, "The Montessori Method in the 'Children's Houses,' which prepares the children, in the daily life of the classroom, by exercises which are, in themselves, quite independent of the religious education, but which seems to be a preparation for it."[152] To Montessori, the church represented the spiritual station in which man could commune with God.[153] She concludes, "The Church is the earthly work instituted for us by Jesus Christ. She is not just a beautiful house in which we pray, but She is the spiritual institution on earth for the salvation of mankind."[154] Perhaps more than any others, it is this book—*The Child in the Church*—that provides insight to Montessori's value of the Catholic church as the ultimate application of the religious education of children using her method.[155]

Since it was recognized that Montessori's educational approach was intrinsically built upon her Catholic Christian faith, she was asked if a Montessori education is complete and adequate for "full development" apart from its spiritual and theological foundation: "Would you consider a school like Miss __'s though it is equipped with all the usual Montessori didactic material, and in the hands of an expert directress, really incomplete as a means of helping a child to its full development?"[156] Her response:

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[150] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 6.

[151] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 7.

[152] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 6.

[153] Montessori writes, "The Church is the new construction, which in a tangible way represents the spiritual plane. She is not the divine Creator who maintains the world and who sanctifies man, but She is the 'station' through which man places himself in communication with God, and finds the road toward his faraway homeland: the Kingdom of Heaven." Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 224.

[154] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 224.

[155] This book, which was first published in 1929, and has been out of print for the past several decades. It was reprinted in 2020 by Hillside Education with permission from the Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company. When corresponding with the Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, it was confirmed: "We do not publish *The Child in the Church.* I do not think it is published anymore." October 9, 2022.

[156] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 30.

> It is complete enough from Miss __'s point of view. She is not a Catholic and has no clear conception of the Super-natural Order. She is busy with the development of the *natural* faculties of the child, and therefore she does not feel the need of another room for the "super-natural." People who spent their whole time sleeping would only need a room fitted with beds![157]

Here she confirms that it is possible to have a Montessori education that focuses only on the child's physical and intellectual development, though she makes clear that such an approach is fundamentally lacking. In pointed irony, Montessori compares those who avoid the reality of the supernatural order to those who spend "their whole time sleeping," un-awakened to spiritual realities. This perspective is evident throughout many of her writings. Based upon her Catholic faith, numerous important Christian themes surface throughout Montessori's writings. It is the researcher's aim to provide a brief overview of these themes in Montessori's own words.

Cosmic Education

In her book *To Educate the Human Potential*, Montessori outlines her plan of what she refers to as "cosmic education." This curriculum was originally explained in England in 1935 and was to serve as the foundation for the advanced method having stated that those in the primary level of Montessori schools would have already been indirectly prepared for it.[158] About this she writes,

> Truly it is no new idea, for it has been the natural plan wherever there has been education in the real sense of the word, though lately fallen into disuse, for children first to be taught the creation of the world and man's place in it, so far as these questions could be answered in the light of religion and philosophy. The answer was ever what it still is, "God has set you upon the earth to work and do your duty!"

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[157] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 30.

[158] Montessori states, "This plan of cosmic education as a foundation stone of the Advanced Method was first explained in England in 1935, and it has already proved itself to be the only path on which our feet can firmly tread in further educational research. It cannot be used with the wholly illiterate or ignorant, but is it received with joy by the child who has indirectly been prepared for it in the Montessori School." Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential*, 4.

> This principle can now, however, be developed on a scientific plan, and be made far more attractive.[159]

Montessori goes on to explain the beginning of the universe, how the earth was created,[160] man's role,[161] and the history of early civilizations. She thought that children should be educated in reality rather than fables, fairy tales, or myths.[162] Montessori regarded that humanity was God's chief agent[163] on earth for creation and concludes, "Man has gone far beyond nature in the work of creation, and he could not have done so unless he had accepted and felt a God with no hands or feet, who yet walks through the length and breadth of the universe, fashioned and still being wrought by Him, through human and other agents."[164] Humans are thus able to create, yet they are contingent upon a creator God. To Montessori, by outlining this shared history amongst humanity, humanity will then be able to fulfill its cosmic destiny.[165] According to Montessori, one of the keys to unlocking the gates to a healthy and happy education for children is through Montessori schools and her specific approach to education.[166]

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[159] Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential*, 4–5.

[160] Montessori writes, "Creation was no instantaneous act of God, but has unfolded itself continuously in time, and is still unfulfilled, the Sabbath of rest no reached." Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential*, 21.

[161] Montessori concludes, "Man is God's chief agent on earth for creation, and has not come merely to be its lord and enjoy himself, to be proud and boast, as do the foolish." Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential*, 42.

[162] Montessori describes, "On the other hand, by offering the child the story of the universe, we give him something a thousand times more infinite and mysterious to reconstruct with his imagination, a drama no fable can reveal." Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential*, 9.

[163] Montessori writes, "Humanity is "God's prime agent." Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential*, 15.

[164] Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential*, 51.

[165] Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential*, 71.

[166] Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential*, 74.

Creation of Humans

Montessori's account of the creation of humans aligns closely with the creation narrative recorded in Genesis 1. She states, "It is thus we imagine the thought of God; all creation is the divine thought, which has the property of realizing itself. God thought: and behold! Light, the order of creation, living things appear."[167] Montessori continues to point to God as Creator by referring to Mark 10:18, when she writes, "He who, seized with doubt, should ask concerning these mothers and nurses: 'Are they really good?' might get an idea from the reply of Christ: 'None is good save God', that is, the Creator. Goodness is the attribute of God. He who creates is good, only creation is good."[168] Regarding the true nature of humans, she states, "Modern man, by the method of positive science, seems to have found the secret trace of thought which puts him in the divine path, which gives him the revelation of his true nature, as indicated in the words of Scripture: 'Let us make man in our image and likeness.'"[169] Montessori recognized that there is a God of the Universe[170] and attributes the creation of humans[171]—with the capacity to reflect divine attributes—to this God.[172]

Science and Nature

In *The Advanced Montessori Method*, Montessori personifies Science and Nature as separate entities that are at work. Science is portrayed as having secured the

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[167] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 179.

[168] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 226.

[169] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 179.

[170] Maria Montessori writes, "The Providence of human labour rules over our entire life; it gives us everything that is necessary. The God of the Universe, in whose train come cataclysms, is not more terrible than the god, Humanity, that can give us War and Famine." Maria Montessori, *Pedagogical Anthropology* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1913), 126.

[171] Montessori notes, "What weighs upon it is the fact that, without knowing it, we are ignoring the creation of man, and trampling on the treasures which God himself has placed in every child." Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 217.

[172] Montessori exclaims, "What weighs upon it is the fact that, without knowing it, we are ignoring the creation of man, and trampling on the treasures which God himself has placed in every child." Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 217.

advancement of the physical health of humans through hygiene and the intervention of medicine.[173] Throughout *The Advanced Montessori Method*, Montessori discusses the tension between Science and the mystery of Nature. The work of Science can only assist Nature, but is it Nature, not Science, that brings forth the physical and internal development of humans. Montessori uses the example of mothers trying to perfect their infants' physical development through the practice of straightening their noses and ears. She concludes that these methods, in turn, were futile, for "Nature itself will determine the shape of heads, noses, and ears . . . and requires no intervention."[174] An emphasis is given to the creativity[175] and omnipotence[176] of Nature as the natural force which directs internal formation. Montessori determines, "It is Nature, 'creation', which regulates all these things."[177] Nature is seen as the control behind the physical and internal development and growth of humans.[178] She relates Matthew 6:27 in stating, "Who, as the Gospel says, can by taking thought add one cubit to his stature."[179] Humans cannot directly control one's physical development, likewise, humans cannot solely control or manipulate the spiritual aspects of their souls. Montessori advocated for letting Nature do

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[173] Montessori states, "It was Science which came to the rescue and created nurseries, cradles, rooms for babies, suitable clothes for them, alimentary substances specially prepared for them by great industries devoted to the hygienic sustenance of infants after weaning, and medical specialists for their ailments; in short, an entirely new world, clean, intelligent, and full of amenity." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 5.

[174] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 3.

[175] Montessori, "When we say that in like manner the baby should be left at liberty spiritually, because creative Nature can also fashion its spirit better than we can, we do not mean that it should be neglected and abandoned." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 7.

[176] Montessori states, "Omnipotent Nature asks only for peace for the creature in process of formation. All the rest she gives herself. Then the childish spirit should also find a warm nest where its nutrition is secure, and after this we should await the revelations of its development." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 126.

[177] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 4.

[178] Montessori writes, "Only Nature accomplishes such miracles. If then, psychical manifestations have their root in Nature." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 117.

[179] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 8.

the work—making sure as to not disrupt the process or introduce obstacles—and watching the miracle unfold.[180]

Spiritual Characteristics of Children

Montessori's view of children was unique for her time and antithetical to that of the traditional and industrial models of education.[181] She wrote, "We wish to look upon them [children] as machines, to be driven and guided by us, when in reality they are the most sensitive and the most superb creation of nature."[182] Rather than focusing on what the child will become to benefit society, Montessori emphasized the child in their current state of development as an individual with physical and spiritual potential.[183] Montessori recounts the dissimilarity between adults and children:

> Even so did people think at the time of Christ, when the children approached the divine Master, the adult drew them back. So much so that Jesus was obliged to admonish them, saying, "Let the little ones come unto Me." Moreover our Lord was moved by this action to one of His moments of severity, and made of it the occasion for one of His divine revelations, "Verily I say unto you, that unless ye be converted and become as one of these little ones, ye shall not be able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Jesus perceived in children something which the adult of 2,000 years ago—like the adult of today—does not perceive, while in the Gospels it is clearly affirmed that there are many mysteries which will be revealed to babes and sucklings. The teachings of Jesus with regard to children touched on a point which is central for their education; viz., that the child has a personality different from ours, and in him are to be found spiritual tendencies which, in the adult, have now been hidden under a hardened crust.[184]

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[180] Montessori asserts the means of liberty "will lead to the maximum development of character, intelligence, and sentiment; and will give to us, the educators, peace, and the possiblity of contemplating the miracle of growth." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 4.

[181] Montessori describes the school as "the place where the 'social sentiment' is develped; it is the child's scoiety." Montessori rejects this "system of regimentation in which the children do everything at the same moment." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 231.

[182] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 144.

[183] Montessori states, "Now comes the embryo, which may be called the new individual in a *potential* state; then the foetus, in which the human form is at last attained; and lastly the child, which will proceed onward toward the physical and spiritual conquests of human life." Montessori, *Pedagogical Anthropology*, 355–56.

[184] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 60–70.

To Montessori, children were not fully formed little adults. Infants are seen as their own man,[185] with a life common with all humanity.[186] She concludes, "A living man who incarnates supreme beauty, supreme health, supreme strength: almost as though it were Christ himself whom humanity was striving to emulate, through a most intimate brotherhood of all the people on earth."[187] According to Montessori, this living man within the child is not yet perfected[188] and has to form himself,[189] for he is not yet an adult.[190] In like manner, although children are born frail creatures,[191] she distinguishes them apart from animals[192] with the human capacity to love.[193] Montessori uses the example of living among a race of giants to compare how children operate within the

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[185] Montessori writes, "The infant as a *man*—such is the figure we ought to keep in view. We must behold him amidst our tumultuous human society, and see how with heroic vigour he aspires to life." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 8.

[186] Montessori states, "The lofty manifestations of art, of love, of holiness, are the characteristic manifestations of that life which she is not only about to observe but to serve, and which is her 'own life'; not a thing strange to her, and therefore cold and arid; but the intimate life she has in common with all men, the trust and only real life of Man." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 106.

[187] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 468–69.

[188] Montessori states "'Really, we are not children.' If we refrain from prolonging the child's immaturity in order to be able to contemplate his inferior state of immobility, and would, on the contrary, allow free growth, admiring the marvels of his progression ever on the road of higher conquests, we should say of him with Christ: 'He who would be perfect must become as a little child.'" Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 196.

[189] Montessori asserts, "This is the first contest of the man who enters the world: he has to struggle with his parents with those who have given him life. And this occurs because his infantile is 'different'; from that of his parents; the child has to form himself, whereas his parents are already formed." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 221.

[190] Montessori concludes, "All this may be translated in this way: 'The child is different from the adult.'" Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 222.

[191] Montessori describes children as "born more fragile and helpless than an animal" and possessing "nothing but potentialities." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 9.

[192] Montessori explains, "Our moral conscience is, like our intelligence, capable of perfection, of elevation; this is one of the most fundamental of its differences from the instincts of animals." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 253.

[193] Montessori compares maternal love as a force that existed before and accompanies creation, like the existence of wisdom. She references this wisdom of Solomon selections from Proverbs 8:8:22–35 reflecting on the original force of creation. She writes, "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. . . . When there were no depths, I was brought forth. . . . Then I was by him as a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him. . . . Whoso findeth me findeth life." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 244.

world of adults as ones trapped within a world not created for them.[194] Given the proper environment[195] and encouragement from adults,[196] not only the physical life of the child will unfold but the spiritual life will flourish.[197]

Composition of Humans

Throughout her writing, Montessori draws numerous parallels between the physical life of the body and the inner spiritual life of the soul.[198] According to Montessori, "The child is a body which grows, and a soul which develops,—these two forms, physiological and psychic, have one eternal font, life itself."[199] Montessori also recognized the two natures in man, "man as he was created, and man as fallen, the fall being attributed to an original error affecting all mankind: original sin."[200] Montessori asserts that children are spiritual creatures[201] and the spiritual aspect of a child's soul is

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[194] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 13–14.

[195] Montessori states, "We offer a very simple suggestion: give the child an environment in which everything is constructed in proportion to himself, and let him live therein. Then there will develop within the child that 'active life' which has caused so many to marvel, because they see in it not only a simple exercise performed with pleasure, but the revelation of a spiritual life." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 15.

[196] Montessori writes, "If the struggle between the adult and the child could be brought to an end in 'peace', and the adult, accepting the conditions of infant life, would seek to help the child, the former would be able to advance towards one of the most sublime enjoyments which Nature can bestow: that of following the natural development of the child, and seeing the man evolved." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 223.

[197] Montessori declares, "Let us learn to know *man*, sublime in his true reality! Let us learn to know him in the tenderest little child; we have shown by experiment that he develops *through work, through liberty, and through love;* hitherto, in place of these, we have stifled the splendid possibilities of his nature with irrational toys with the slavery of discipline, with contempt for his spontaneous manifestations." Montessori, *Pedagogical Anthropology*, 144.

[198] When Montessori referring to the inner or internal life of the child, the terms psychical, spirit, and soul are used interchangeably. Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 115.

[199] Maria Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 104.

[200] Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 135.

[201] Montessori states, "The characteristics of the creature who is to be his particular subject of observation is spiritual." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 104.

inextricably connected to the life of the body.[202] Thus, Montessori claims that her educational method is spiritual in nature: "My experimental work with little children from three to six years old has been, in fact, a practical contribution to research which has for its aim the discovery of the treatment required by the soul of the child, a treatment analogous to that which hygiene prescribes for its body."[203] Montessori proposed a new way forward that opened an alternative pathway for all education[204]—an education that focused on the entire development of the child.[205] Having lived in an era of infectious disease and societal moral decline, Montessori recognized the deprivation of "spiritual health" and advocated for nourishing the spiritual needs of children through her system of education.[206]

Children Do Not Live by Bread Alone

Montessori frequently refers to the statement, "Man does not live by bread alone,"[207] which is recorded in Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4, and Luke 4:4. About this, she writes, "While we give bread to the child, let us remember that man does not live by

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[202] Montessori writes, "All the suffering, all the struggles, all the claims of society in the past with regard to bodily needs are repeated here with amazing clarity in connection with spiritual needs." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 240.

[203] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 51.

[204] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 54.

[205] Montessori states, "If the whole structure of our educative method starts from an act of concentrated attention to a sensory stimulus, and builds itself up on the education of the senses limiting itself to this, it would evidently not take the whole man into consideration. For if man does not live by material bread alone, neither does he live solely by intellectual bread." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 242.

[206] Montessori asserts, "Accordingly we find ourselves in the epoch of *hospitals* for the morally diseased, the century of their treatment and cure; we have initiated a social movement toward the triumph of *morality*. We educators must not forget that we have inaugurated the *epoch* of *spiritual health*; because I believe that it is we who are destined to be the true *physicians* and *nurses* of this new *cure*." Montessori, *Pedagogical Anthropology,* 9.

[207] See Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 16–20, 240–42 and Montessori, *Pedagogical Anthropology*, 126–27.

bread alone: because bread is only the material of his fleeting substance."[208] Her premise is that children need not only physical bread for sustenance—they also need spiritual bread to nourish the soul.[209] Montessori concludes, "With man the life of the body depends on the life of the spirit."[210] Just as humans seek other nourishment such as food and water to survive and be satisfied,[211] so too, a child should not be deprived of spiritual food. Alternatively, Montessori describes that the pleasures of life that are necessary for human existence include more than *bread*[212]—they include characteristics of the spirit, such as patience, perseverance, activity, and joy.[213] That which nourishes the spirit, and the intelligence is not often observed like that of physical growth, but it is necessary.[214] Montessori suggests, "We ought to tend and nourish the internal child, and *await* his

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[208] Montessori, *Pedagogical Anthropology*, 126–27. Also Montessori states, "But, in the case of man, in addition to these widely different factors, there is still another distinctly human factor that we must take into consideration and that we may call the *psychic stimulus of life*: We may scientifically affirm the Bible statement that 'man does not live by bread alone,'" (140).

[209] Montessori uses the example of a criminal imprisoned. His physical needs (food, shelter, and oxygen) is provided but "all spiritual sustenance is withheld." Montessori, *The Advanced Montessori Method*, 19. In correlation to children, Montessori entreaties, "If a robust and brutal criminal can perish from starvation of the soul, what will be the fate of the infant if we take no account of his spiritual needs?" Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 20.

[210] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 18.

[211] Montessori states, "To quench thirst, it is not sufficient to see or to sip water; the thirsty man must drink his fill; that is to say, must take in the quantity his organism requires; so, to satisfy this kind of psychical hunger and thirst, it is not sufficient to see things cursorily, much less 'to hear them described'; it is necessary to possess them and to use them to the full for the satisfaction of the needs of the inner life." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 115.

[212] Montessori, *Pedagogical Anthropology*, 141.

[213] Montessori writes, "The same concomitant phenomena of 'patience' and 'perseverance' then manifest themselves, together with those of vivacity, activity and joy, characteristic of the spirit when the internal energies have found their *keyboard*, the gymnasium in which they exercise themselves freely and tranquilly." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 62.

[214] Montessori affirms, "Labour, love, and sensations apt to stimulate ideas, that is, to nourish the intelligence, are necessities of human life." Montessori, *Pedagogical Anthropology*, 141.

manifestations."[215] In order to do this, Montessori's system of education focuses primarily on indirectly awakening the spirit of the child by giving liberty to the child.[216]

Freedom and Responsibility

A major facet of Montessori's method of education is the liberty of the child which is described in depth throughout *The Montessori Method.*[217] In comparing the traditional model of education with her own method, Montessori equates the traditional form of teaching with slavery.[218] Montessori describes the traditional classroom and compares children restricted at their desks to butterflies mounted on pins; neither has the freedom to move.[219] Her method advocates the principle of liberty of the pupil, which permits "a development of individual, spontaneous manifestations of the child's nature."[220] This liberty is described as activity[221] and the means of education.[222] Montessori calls for educational reform that sets the child free from the societal bonds that limit his activity.[223] The societal bonds that Montessori refers to include the physical

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[215] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 204.

[216] Montessori describes observing the psychical phenomena of growth. She states, "In order that the phenomena should come to pass it is *necessary* that the spontaneous development of the child should be accorded *perfect liberty;* that is to say, that its calm and peaceful expansion should not be disturbed by the intervention of an untimely and disturbing influence; just as the body of the newborn infant should be left in peace to assimilate its nourishment and grow properly." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 54.

[217] Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002).

[218] Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 14–22.

[219] Montessori writes, "In such a school the children, like butterflies mounted on pins, are fastened each to his place, the desk, spreading the useless wings of barren and meaningless knowledge which they have acquired." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 14.

[220] Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 28.

[221] Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 86.

[222] Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 84.

[223] Montessori states, "I foresee, in a radical reform of pedagogic methods, the practical possibility of taking as guiding principles the *individual liberty of the pupil* and a *reverential regard for life*." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 123.

classroom environment that prohibits children from moving about,[224] as well as the adults and teachers who restrict children from exercising their own freedom to learn.[225] Montessori advocated that in place of a teacher should be a "directress"[226] who does not interfere or hinder the learning process. She writes, "We habitually *serve* children; and this is not only an act of servility toward them, but it is dangerous, since it tends to suffocate their useful, spontaneous activity."[227] The directress does not serve[228] the children in such a way that prohibits their independence,[229] rather it is the role of the directress to observe[230] the child's growth as it naturally unfolds.[231]

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[224] Montessori writes, "The principle of slavery still pervades pedagogy, and, therefore, the same principle pervades the school. I need only give one proof—the stationary desks and chairs." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 16.

[225] Montessori asserts, "To stimulate life, —leaving it then free to develop, to unfold,—herein lies the first task of the educator." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 115.

[226] Montessori uses the term "directress" to describe the teacher. Montessori states her reason for this as, "Indeed, with my methods, the teacher teaches *little* and observes *much*, and, above all, it is her function to direct the psychic activity of the children and their psychological development. For this reason I have changed the name of teacher into that of directress." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 173. She also states, "The teacher has thus become a *director* of the spontaneous work of the children. She is not a *passive* force, a *silent* presence," (371).

[227] Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 97.

Montessori continues in *The Advanced Montessori Method*, "The adult hems him in ever more closely: he does everything for the child, dresses him, even feeds him. But the child's desire is not to be dressed and materially nourished: his deep desire is to 'do', to exercise his own powers intelligently and thus to rise to his higher level." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 225.

[228] Montessori argues, "*He who is served is limited* in his independence." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 97. She continues, "Any pedagogical action, if it is to be efficacious in the training of little children, must tend to *help* the children to advance upon this road of independence. We must help them to learn to walk without assistance, to run, to go up and down stairs, to life up fallen objects, to dress and undress themselves, to bathe themselves, to speak distinctly, and to express their own needs clearly. We must give such help as shall make it possible for children to achieve the satisfaction of their own individual aims and desires. All this is a part of education for independence," (97).

[229] Montessori describes the duty of the directress as, "*helping him* to make a conquest of such useful acts as nature intended he should perform for himself." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 98.

[230] Montessori states, "In our system, she [the directress] must become a passive, much more than an active, influence, and her passivity shall be composed of anxious scientific curiosity, and of absolute *respect* for the phenomenon which she wishes to observe. The teacher must understand and *feel* her position of *observer*: the *activity* must lie in the *phenomenon*." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 87.

[231] Montessori asserts, "The educator must be as one inspired by a deep *worship of life*, and must, through this reverence, *respect*, while he observes with human interest, the *development* of the child life." Montessori*, Montessori Method*, 104.

Order and Chaos

Montessori's focus was the internal formation of the child where she emphasized order and considered the biblical account of creation. She states, "Creation finds its expansions in *order.* We find this conception in the Genesis of Scripture. God did not begin to create without preparation; and this preparation was the introduction of order into chaos."[232] Montessori defines order as "things in their place. It means a knowledge of the arrangement of objects in the child's surroundings, a recollection of the place where each belongs."[233] Montessori believed children capable of constructing their own wills,[234] not out of nothing,[235] but from a known reality—truth.[236] Montessori found that "children preferred readings which dealt with fact."[237] She also believed children could perfect or master themselves.[238] Montessori believed that if left unhindered—yet guided—a child by the age of three, "should have been able to render himself to a great extent independent and free."[239] But even at a young age of three, she notes, "The little

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[232] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 150.

[233] Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 41. Montessori describes the concept of order in children in more detail (37–44).

[234] Montessori writes, "Our little children are constructing their own wills when, by a process of self-education, they put in motion complex internal activities of comparison and judgment, and in this wise make their intellectual acquisitions with order and clarity." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 137.

[235] Montessori states, "Yet no one can say that man *creates* artistic products out of nothing. What is called *creation* is in reality a composition, a construction raised upon a *primitive material* of the mind, which must be collected from the environment by means of the senses." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 182.

[236] Montessori states, "The imagination has created when it has started from creation: that is when it has first taken in existing truth." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 180. She continues, "Man is guilty of like sin against the intelligence when he employs his creative activity of thought for its own sake, without basing it upon truth; by so doing he creates an unreal world, full of error and destroys the possibility of creating in reality, like a god, producing external works," (180).

[237] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 187.

[238] Montessori comments, "We call an individual disciplined when he is a master of himself, and can, therefore, regulate his own conduct when it shall be necessary to follow some rule of life." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 86.

[239] Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 96.

child of three years old carries within him a heavy *chaos*."[240] She observed that children placed within a prepared environment specially designed to encourage auto-education without the direct intervention of a teacher, would begin to set order and organize their internal chaos to make sense of the world around them.[241] Montessori claimed to have witnessed this phenomena of internal formation among children and that her contribution for the education of young children remains the form of liberty in internal development.[242] She states, "All that was disorderly and fluctuating in the consciousness of the child seemed to be organizing itself into a spiritual creation." In the Children's House,[243] Montessori found that children could concentrate and perform tasks with fixed attention. About this, she wrote, "The child began to be completely transformed, to become calmer, more intelligent, and more expansive; it showed extraordinary spiritual qualities, recalling the phenomena of higher consciousness, such as those of conversion."[244] With a deep respect for the child, Montessori described to her readers how children are not naughty,[245] however, they are curious creatures who are seeking to make sense and order of the world around them. She concludes:

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[240] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 151.

[241] Montessori describes, "The child who is 'free to move about', and who perfects himself by so doing, is he who has an 'intelligent object' in his movements; the child who is free to develop his inner personality, who perseveres in a task for a considerable time, and organizes himself upon such a fundamental phenomenon, is sustained and guided by an intelligent purpose. Without this his persistence, his inner formation, and his progress would not be possible." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 145.

[242] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 52–53.

[243] In 1907, Montessori opened a school called *Case dei Bambini* or "The Children's House," where she worked with disadvantaged children (ages 3–6) in the slums of Rome for two years. This served as the backdrop for her research in the observation of children.

[244] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 52. Montessori discusses conversion (258–61). Montessori writes about conversion in *The Montessori Method*, "If we try to think of parallels in the life of adults, we are reminded of the phenomenon of conversion, of the superhuman heightening of the strength of martyrs and apostles, of the constancy of missionaries, of the obedience of monks. Nothing else in the world, except such things, is on a spiritual height equal to the discipline of the 'Children's Houses.'" Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 349.

[245] Montessori states, "It is very easy to be convinced that the so-called 'naughtiness' of children is the expression of a 'struggle for spiritual existence'; they want to make the man within them live and we try to hinder them; we offer them the poisons of darkness and error. They fight for their spiritual bread as the poor fight for material bread." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 240.

> Children want to grow, to perfect themselves, to nourish their intelligence, to develop their internal energies, to form their characters and to these ends they need to be liberated from slavery and to conquer "the means of life". It is not enough to nourish their bodies: they are hungry for intellectual food; the clothes, which protect their limbs from the cold are not enough for children: they demand the garments of strength and the ornaments of grace to protect and adorn the spirit.[246]

To summarize, Montessori was concerned about the physical nourishment of children, however, placed greater emphasis on the nourishment of their souls.[247]

Fall and Redemption of Humans

In her early work *Pedagogical Anthropology,* Montessori addresses the morality of man when she states, "Unquestionably, we are *immoral* when we disobey the laws of life; for the triumphant rule of life throughout the universe is what constitutes our conception of beauty and goodness and truth—in short, of divinity."[248] It is this moral

[246] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 240.

[247] Montessori describes, "What shall it profit a man to discover by means of science the laws of physical self-preservation in its most minute details, if he has no care for that which corresponds in man to the 'instinct' of his own salvation? If an individual has a perfect knowledge of hygienic feeding, of the manner in which to weigh himself in order to follow the course of his own health, of bathing and of massage, but should lose his instinct of humanity and kill a fellowcreature, or take his own life, what would be the use of all his care? And if he feels nothing more in his heart? If the void draws him to it, plunging him into melancholy, what does his well-nourished and well-washed body avail him?" Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 253.

[248] Montessori, *Pedagogical Anthropology*, 27.

conscience that distinguishes humans from animals.[249] Montessori frequently refers to the themes of good,[250] evil,[251] sin,[252] death,[253] life,[254] and love.[255] Montessori writes:

> Nothing escapes God's justice, which takes account of every good deed we do, and compensates us for every ill done us by others. If one really thinks that the only justice which exists is the gloomy justice of this world, and if all hope of heavenly justice were lost, then the soul would feel like something heavy which sinks into hell. Hell is the loss of God.[256]

Concerning morality, Montessori likens a moral, self-satisfied man without a heart to the tomb of a corpse.[257] Montessori declares, "What is the use of knowing all the moral laws and even practicing them, if the heart be dead?"[258] She declares that all is vanity apart from love which was demonstrated by Christ.[259] Montessori states:

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[249] Montessori states, "Our moral conscience is, like our intelligence, capable of perfection, of elevation; this is one of the most fundamental of its differences from the instincts of animals." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 253.

[250] Montessori writes, "Good springs therefrom naturally, as sunbeams radiate from the sun. Creation itself has been given in charge of this well-spring of love, and it is love which maintains it, as the contribution of the creature to the provident forces of nature." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 243. She asserts, "Good is life; evil is death; the real distinction is as clear as the words," (253).

[251] Montessori states, "When Christ showed the way of salvation to men He pointed to those who were rejected by society, in whom the obvious effects of evil could be seen, because the causes of evil are too subtle and are not always directly visible: 'You hear with your ears and do not understand; you behold with your eyes and do not see.'" Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 212.

[252] Montessori summarizes, "But the devil, too, is patient after this fashion: he too can contemplate the agonies and impotent rebellions of the souls which are in his power, which are prostrate among vanities, oppressed by a great quantity of means, the ends of which they have lost, souls in which the consciousness of sin is extinguished and which are gradually sinking into an abyss of moral error." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 226.

[253] See *Advanced Montessori Method*, p. 256–57 for discussion on the death of the soul.

[254] Montessori concludes, "But religion is simple and precise: it calls this internal sense, which lies at the root of life, Love." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 242. She clarifies, "But long before biologists perceived that love is the powerful force which protects the species and explains its survival, religion had pointed to love as the force which preserves life. In order to live, it is not enough to be created; the creature must also be loved," (245).

[255] Montessori defines love as, "Love is the contact between the soul and God; and when this exists, all the rest is vanity." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 243.

[256] Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 67.

[257] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 246.

[258] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 246.

[259] See *The Advanced Montessori Method*, p. 245–56 for Montessori's discussion on how Christ does not subtract from the law of Moses but fulfills it (Matt 5:17–18).

> "Love", said Christ, "even as I have loved you", that is to say, not as you are capable of loving but as I am capable of loving. There is a deep gulf between the manner in which men are able to love themselves and that in which Christ can love men. Men often rush headlong to their own perdition; they are capable of confounding good with evil, life with death, food with poison. Little confidence can therefore be felt in the injunction "Love thy neighbour as thyself". And it was in truth a new commandment that Jesus gave, when He said: "Love even as I have loved you."[260]

Montessori makes a clear distinction between the essence of human nature and the love of Jesus Christ.

Physical and Spiritual Redemption

In describing what she refers to as "the secret of our life,"[261] Montessori asserts that this secret is not merely about hygiene for physical redemption or the betterment of material life. Rather, this secret is a life that is "more fragile than our physical life," "something more corruptible than our bodies" where "the peril of darkness" hangs over man.[262] This life that Montessori describes in detail throughout her writings is the spiritual life or the life of the soul. Montessori believed that man's inclination to evil leads to the death of the soul, stating that humans have suffered death, albeit unconscious of having died.[263] In order for man to "save" himself or to experience life, Montessori concludes, "Set yourselves free from all bonds and all measurements and lay hold of the one thing needful: to be alive, to feel; this was the revelation made by Christ."[264] She

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[260] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 245.

[261] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 256.

[262] Montessori asserts, "Here then, and not in hygiene, must we find the secret of our life. We have something more corruptible than our bodies, a life more fragile than our physical life; and the peril of darkness hangs over us. This is the secret of man." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 256.

[263] Montessori comments on two previous anecdotes, "Far indeed are we form the delicate sensibility to evil of Saint Teresa, or the keenness of spiritual vision, which enabled the man of God to see the white dove beneath the soiled feathers of the sinful woman. The difference is not as that between the taste of a peasant and that of an artist, but as that between a corpse and a living man. It is evident that we have suffered death, albeit we are unconscious of having died." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 256.

[264] Montessori describes the beatitudes given in Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:3–12), "Set yourselves free from all bonds and all measurements and lay hold of the one thing needful: to be alive, to feel; this was the revelation made by Christ when, like Moses, He went up into the mountain, but without hiding Himself from the people, calling the crowd indeed to follow Him, and openly expounding all the secrets of truth: Blessed are those who feel, even if they suffer, for to suffer is to feel, to live. Blessed are

continues, "He, who is alive, however, is not only capable of reacting to a stimulus very much less intense than a red-hot iron; he who lives and feels may perfect himself—and this is life.[265] Montessori believed that children had the capacity within to perfect or "save" themselves.[266] Montessori writes:

> It is characteristic of "life" to purge the environment and the soul of substances injurious to health. Christ was called "the Lamb that taketh away the sin of the world", not the Master who preaches, but He who purifies. And this is the morality that springs from sensibility: the action of purifying the world, of removing the obstacles that beset life, of liberating the spirit from the darkness of death. . . . These purifying merits, like progress, have no limits. "Leave all ties and follow Me", said Christ to those who asked him what they should do. For man can reinforce his own strength by other powers, which will urge him on upwards towards the infinite; before him who sleeps is the invisible ladder of Jacob, trodden by angels who call him heavenwards, that is towards the supernatural life. Yes, to be *more* than man. This is a *dream* to him who lacks faith; but it is a realizable goal, the aim of life, to him who has faith.[267]

For the man who has faith, Montessori declared that setting the spirit free from the darkness of death was not only attainable but also available in Christ, "the Lamb that taketh away the sin of the world."[268] Montessori's emphasis was on spiritual and inner

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those who weep, blessed are those who hunger for righteousness, blessed are the persecuted, blessed are those whose hearts are pure and free from darkness. For he who feels shall be satisfied; but he who cannot feel is lost; woe to those who lie down in comfort, woe to those who are full, woe to those who laugh—they have lost their 'sensibility.'" Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 245–46.

[265] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 256.

[266] Montessori writes, "But is there not within the child himself a power which enables him to save himself? The child loves us with his heart and follows us with all the devotion of his little soul is capable; nevertheless, he has something within himself which governs his inner life: it is the force of his own expansion." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 143. Montessori states, "It was thus that he 'willed, willed perpetually, with all his strength', and so left the man within him free to expand; it was thus he saved himself from futility and perdition, and worked for his own immortality. And it is something of the same sort that we desire to bring about in our children by the education of the will; we wish them to learn to save themselves from the vanities that destroy man, and concentrate on work which causes the inner life to expand, and leads to great undertakings; we wish them to work for their own immortality," (143). Montessori asserts, "I believe that the work of the educator consists primarily in protecting the powers and directing them without disturbing them in their expansion; and in the bringing of man into contact with the spirit which is within him and which should operate through him," (144).

[267] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 257.

[268] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 257.

life growth.[269] As such, she saw a blend of both physical and moral redemption[270] which she believed could be brought about by education.[271]

The Trinity and the Bible

Montessori makes mention of the three persons of the holy Trinity throughout her writings. She refers to God as Creator and Father,[272] Jesus as the Son of God and the example to follow,[273] and the Holy Spirit as highest Comforter.[274] Montessori does not explicitly state the gospel message; however, she outlines the storyline of Scripture as: "The Bible tells us that man was made in the image of God and that Original Sin disturbed the Divine Plan. However, with education, we must help the child to be ready

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[269] Montessori summarizes, "Hence it is not the whole of life to obey the laws of hygiene, physical and psychical; but it is only life which can draw from its environment the means of its own purification and salvation; that life, however, which is supernatural, asks of love and divine light the strength necessary for its transformation." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 257–58.

[270] Montessori describes, "As everything in the physical and moral world is one and indivisible, bound together in closest union." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 31.

[271] Montessori states, "It may be that pedagogy is destined to solve the great problem of human redemption." Montessori, *Pedagogical Anthropology*, 30. She continues, "Hence it will be necessary not to limit ourselves, as has been done in the past, to admiring the man who is born good, but to educate him so as to render him thoughtful, strong and useful; not to condemn the sinner, but to redeem him through education and through a sense of fellowship in the common fault, which is the scientific form of pardon," (359–60).

[272] Montessori writes, "When this preparation has been made the child finds in the Church the means for its application which are attractive, varied and deeply significative, and he receives, as a result, a sense of dignity and satisfaction. Moreover, the very fact of performing, for different purposes, acts, which, though similar, are capable of diverse application and signification constitutes already in itself another source of intellectual development. The child of four is not ignorant of the difference between the holy water stoup into which he puts his tiny hand, before blessing himself, and the basins in the next room where he washes his hands. Not just this appreciation of the difference between like things is real, intellectual labour which the little creature initiates when he begins to realize that he is a child of God, lovingly received in the house of the great Heavenly Father, though hitherto he has been considered almost incapable of rising to any idea or concept." Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 7.

[273] Montessori notes, "Something parallel can be conceived in the spiritual world and in the sphere of divinity. In the mission of Jesus, there also is something apparently small: a Baby that is born. But this Baby is also the Man who, by living, loving, suffering, and dying, accomplishes an ineffable miracle: He re-establishes a bond between man and the Supreme Creator." Montessori, *Child in the Church*, 224. She continues, "When Jesus was teaching us about love, he pointed to the child as an example for us, and as a guide to the Kingdom of Heaven," (67).

[274] Montessori writes, "Indeed, the two things are implied among the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He is called: 'highest Comforter, sweet refreshment, rest in labour, comfort in weeping. He purges what is ugly, waters what is dry, heals what is wounded, bends what is rigid, straightens crooked, and gives health and perpetual joy. There is nothing in man without His aid, nothing without Him that is not harmful." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 128.

to receive the grace that restores man in the image of God in the original plan."[275] Many have been skeptical of Montessori education, in which the results "have led some to believe that our optimism has been exaggerated, and that according to us, there is only good in man."[276] Montessori affirms the effect of original sin, stating, "Already in the days of Moses it was recognized that there was an error at the very origin of mankind, an original sin indicating that all mankind was infected and lost.[277] The line that she draws concerning sin in the child and the adult is less defined. She writes:

> That does not mean that we must make the child in our image or offer ourselves as an example of perfection. Between us and the baptized child, there is the distance created by our sin; therefore the child is better than we are. "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:3). It is evident that we must help the child *to go to Jesus*, which does not mean that he must *come to us*.[278]

Conclusion

In summary, Montessori's Catholic Christian foundations were evident throughout her writings. Although she was not always explicit in stating her beliefs, there were remnants that one can follow to trace her beliefs concerning important Christian themes regarding God and humanity. The Montessori system derived from Montessori's own view of human development was ultimately shaped by her understanding of what she witnessed in children concerning not only their physical development but their spiritual development as well. With the holistic development of the child in mind, Montessori concludes by stating, "Let us have more charity and show him more justice. Let us give him what he needs for the development of his whole being, and let us give

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[275] Maria Montessori, *The Holy Mass,* in *Montessori: On Religious Education*, (Lake Ariel, PA: Hillside Education, 2020), 295.

[276] Montessori, *Holy Mass*, 295.

[277] Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 164.

[278] Montessori, *Holy Mass*, 295.

him the freedom to follow those laws which are inscribed in the deepest part of his soul: to perfect oneself, to work, to love."[279]

[279] Montessori, *Holy Mass*, 295.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS OF MONTESSORI FROM CHRISTIAN SOURCES

In chapter three, the researcher interacts with past Christian sources that have sought to provide analyses of what Montessori advocated in her writings. Some of these include individuals such as Sofia Cavalletti, Gianna Gobbi, Jerome Berryman, Sonja Stewart, Catherine Stonehouse, and Scottie May. The goal of this chapter is to consider how Montessori's works have been received by broadly Christian (evangelical to Catholic) perspectives of past educators.

In this chapter, the researcher provides an analysis of Montessori principles as expressed in various Christian sources. This chapter is not meant to be exhaustive but aims to provide a thorough understanding of the proposed models of Sofia Cavalletti's "Catechesis of the Good Shepherd" and Jerome Berryman's "Godly Play," in relation to various aspects where they draw from Montessori. The researcher also discusses the proposed term, "Reflective Engagement" by Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May as well as The Contemplative–Reflective Model of children's ministry. In so doing, the scope of research in this chapter is limited to focus on what these authors—especially Sofia Cavalletti and Jerome Berryman—have written specifically about Montessori education as it considers the implications Montessori had on their approaches to the religious education of children. By examining Cavalletti and Berryman's approaches, the researcher seeks to identify aspects of the Montessori's perspective that are potentially useful within Christian contexts, namely the religious education of children within the church.

Sofia Cavalletti's "Catechesis of the Good Shepherd"

Like the Montessori method of education, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd developed by Sofia Cavalletti has been implemented worldwide.[1] Catechesis of the Good Shepherd has been developed across six continents in a variety of countries.[2] Similar to the Montessori method, its reach has been expansive amongst a variety of cultural settings and socio-economic backgrounds.[3] Cavalletti's experience resembles Montessori in that she also asserts that over the course of forty-five years of working with children, she observed certain "constants" in the children's spiritual development and response to the Christian message.[4] The universal truths witnessed in the children across cultures has confirmed her belief that it is not the response of particular children from particular backgrounds, rather it is the "response of 'the child' to the Christian message."[5] Like that of the Montessori method, Cavalletti describes various developmental stages of children in regards to religious education.[6] She describes the stage of the younger child (2 ½ to 3 years to six years old) as "the 'golden age' of his or her relationship with God,

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[1] Jerome W. Berryman comments, "As Catechesis expanded world-wide, it became more ecumenical under Cavalletti's leadership. In 1983 the Level 1 Course in the United State was the first to officially welcome those who were not Roman Catholic. This went a step beyond the first two generations of Montessori religious education." Jerome W. Berryman, *The Spiritual Guidance of Children: Montessori, Godly Play, and the Future* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2013), 71.

[2] Sofia Cavalletti writes, "Catechesis of the Good Shepherd has developed in North America (Canada, the United States, Mexico), in South America (Columbia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Panama, Brazil, Chile), in Europe (Italy, Germany, Austria, Croatia, Poland), in Africa (Chad, Tanzania), in Asia (Japan), and Australia." Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years Old: A Description of an Experience* (Chicago: Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Publications, 2002), viii.

[3] For example, Cavalletti notes, "The cultural settings for the catechesis have been urban, rural, and nomadic. The catechesis has been done with children of working, middle and upper-class families, with gypsies, and with 'street children.'" Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years,* viii.

[4] These "constants" represent vital needs in the child which transcend geographical and cultural differences. Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years*, viii.

[5] Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years*, ix.

[6] In Cavalletti's "The Spirit of the Catechesis: 32 Points of Reflection," she references Montessori and states, "With this aim in mind, the catechist embraces Maria Montessori's vision of the human being and thus the attitude of the adult regarding the child; and prepares and environment called the atrium, which aids the development of the religious life." Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years*, 133.

which is an intense, all-engaging experience of enjoyment."[7] The older child of 6 to 12 years of age experiences similarities to that of an adult, yet still "seems to be in a period in which children experience the presence of God with their very own hands."[8] In comparing the younger and the older child, Cavalletti recounts, "The religious needs and capacities of older children are no less great or essential than those of younger children. Their religious potential is no less strong; rather, it is expressed through the new capacities of their own stage of development."[9] Cavalletti offers this framework based on her observations of children and provides documentation from children's artwork and verbal responses.[10]

Cavalletti's Background and Books

Sofia Cavalletti (1917–2011) is the creator of the religious education model known as the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. Along with her colleague Gianna Gobbi, Cavalletti developed this approach which was built on children's intrinsic spirituality and the assumptions of children outlined in the Montessori method.[11] Cavalletti was a biblical scholar and wrote multiple books on the topic of children and religious education.[12] For

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[7] Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years*, ix.

[8] Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years*, ix.

[9] Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years*, x.

[10] Cavalletti notes, "The documentation offered in this book of the religious experience of older children consists largely in their verbal comments, whereas in the first volume of this book the religious life of the younger child was documented more through artwork." Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years*, x.

[11] Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi are commended to "have applied and developed the intuitions of Dr. Montessori," as two of her disciples. Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi, *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy: The Montessori Approach* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1964), 16. Cyprian Vagaggini writes, "We can salute the experience which Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi share with us, as an excellent contribution which, with its Montessorian background, illustrates and demonstrates its comparable merit in the religious education of children." Cyprian Vagaggini, preface to *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy: The Montessori Approach*, by Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi (Staten Island: Alba House, 1964), 17.

[12] Rebekah Rojcewicz, one of Cavalletti's translators, writes this about Cavalletti, "How remarkable that a person of noble birth, a noted biblical scholar, writer and educator who sits on the Vatican Council for Jewish-Christian relations (the SIDIC) would choose children and their relationship with God as the centerpiece of her life's work. Yet, for almost fifty years Sofia has considered her weekly

the purpose of this study, the books that are considered are *The Religious Potential of the Child: The Description of an Experience with Children from Ages Three to Six*,[13] *The Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years Old: A Description of an Experience*,[14] and *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy*,[15] which she co-wrote with Gianna Gobbi. In *The Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years Old*, Cavalletti gives her primary intention for writing, which was "not to propose this program but to share what we have glimpsed of the relationships between God and his creatures in the stage of life we refer to as 'older childhood (ages 6-12)."[16] Rebekah Rojcewicz, one of Cavalletti's translators discusses this "glimpse," and states:

> Sofia's own "joyful journey" with children and the corresponding development of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd began with such a "glimpse," an unexpected and unsolicited encounter with the deep religious nature of the child. As a biblical scholar with little experience with children, Sofia reluctantly said yes to a friend who asked that she do some Bible studies with her nephew and two other children. The interest and joy she witnessed in those three children in reading and pondering the scriptures changed her life and set her course for the next 48 (and still counting) years. That "glimpse" of the child's relationship with God and, thus, the child's rich religious potential was powerful enough to begin a lifelong journey of patient observation and deep listening, along with tireless work, to understand and nurture the child's relationship with God.[17]

The themes of the child's religious potential and the child's relationship with God are expanded and explored throughout Cavalletti's writings.[18]

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session with the children in the atrium to be the most important and engaging work that she does." Rebekah Rojcewicz, foreword to *The Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years Old: A Description of an Experience*, by Sofia Cavalletti (Chicago: Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Publications, 2002), vi.

[13] Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child: The Description of an Experience with Children from Ages Three to Six* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1973).

[14] Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years Old: A Description of an Experience* (Chicago: Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Publications, 2002).

[15] Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi, *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy: The Montessori Approach* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1964).

[16] Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years*, xii.

[17] Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years*, v.

[18] Berryman adds, "It was decided not to publish the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd as a curriculum but to move forward in the classical Montessori way of putting the theory in books and keeping the training in an oral tradition. This was because the spiritual formation of teachers is deeply personal.

In *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy: The Montessori Approach*, Cavalletti and Gobbi outline a brief history of the Montessori method as applied to religious education. They conclude with a description of their own experience which began in 1954 of using the Montessori method in the teaching of liturgy and doctrine at the Maria Montessori School of Religion.[19] In this book, the authors further describe the fundamental principles of the Montessori method that they have applied to the needs of religious education. Of all the Montessori principles, Cavalletti and Gobbi mention some that they have sought to incorporate.[20] These are described as the following: the use of a prepared environment[21] also known as the atrium,[22] the child as a being in development,[23] and the teacher as directress.[24] Throughout the book, Cavalletti and Gobbi include various anecdotes to show that children are profoundly spiritual beings. Regarding the role of the teacher, they

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They make their own notebooks (as in Montessori) and construct their own materials (unlike Montessori)." Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance of Children*, 65–66.

[19] To read this brief history see Cavalletti and Gobbi, *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy*, 23–33.

[20] Their reasoning for this is stated as such, "It is impossible here to make a complete exposition of the Montessori Method. We shall limit ourselves to a few principal points, choosing those which seem to answer in a particular way the needs of religious instruction." Cavalletti and Gobbi, *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy*, 35.

[21] Cavalletti and Gobbi write, "Perhaps one of the most ingenious ideas of Dr. Montessori was exactly that of creating an environment in which little children could freely unfold their potentialities." Cavalletti and Gobbi, *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy*, 36. They continue, "The necessity of a prepared environment is all the greater when it is a question of religious instruction," (37).

[22] Cavalletti defines the atrium as the prepared environment of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years*, vi. Cavalletti writes, "The atrium is, above all, a place of prayer and celebration," (xii). Cavalletti also states, "The atrium is the prepared environment for the religious formation of the child. The term has its origins in the architectural design of the ancient basilica and was first applied to the space prepared for the religious education of children by Maria Montessori," (12).

[23] Cavalletti and Gobbi assert, "The child, like all other living things, is a being in development, and this development can be warped or helped, depending on the understanding and attitude of the teacher." Cavalletti and Gobbi, *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy*, 38). The authors refer to Montessori's view of "sensitive periods" in a child's life as well as various stages of development, (45).

[24] Cavalletti and Gobbi write, "The instructor must, like all educators, direct the activity of the child in a discreet manner, allowing him to act alone every time he is able to do so, intervening only when the child indicates that he is not able to continue without help, and then only with the awareness of the interior exigencies of the child. The teacher, whom Dr. Montessori preferred to call 'directress,' must answer the silent petition of each child: 'Help me to do it alone.'" Cavalletti and Gobbi, *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy*, 39.

assert, "The greatest care of the educator must consist in permitting this spirituality to grow and manifest itself."[25] Educators can do this by assisting children to recognize their own capacity to have a relationship with God.[26] Cavalletti writes, "In helping the child's religious life, far from imposing something that is foreign to him, we are responding to the child's silent request: 'Help me to come closer to God by myself.'"[27] In order to awaken the child's greatest need for God, the door of transcendent reality is thus opened to children.

Cavalletti's Opinion of Montessori's Faith

Since Sofia Cavalletti's unique approach to religious education in the Catholic church was heavily influenced by the teachings of Maria Montessori, it is worth briefly mentioning what Cavalletti wrote about Montessori's Catholic faith. Although Cavalletti never met Montessori in person, her work, along with her Montessorian collaborator and colleague, Gianna Gobbi relied on Montessori's view of the child, the teacher, and the environment.[28] Throughout her books, Cavalletti points out a few instances where Montessori has received some critique regarding the lack of references to Catholicism and her faith. Cavalletti responds with the following statements:

> Some have noted that explicit references to the Catholic faith are missing from the writings of Maria Montessori. The reason is perhaps found in the innate religious spirit of the Method itself. Who would think of explicitly mentioning the air one

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[25] Cavalletti and Gobbi, *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy*, 57.

[26] Cavalletti asserts, "All religious education programs would be constructed and implemented in vain if the human creature were not able to be in relationship with God. It is this relationship between God and the child, both the younger child and the older child, that has pushed us or, better, that has attracted and drawn us, to continue pondering the Mystery with the 'little ones,' those who are among the least in the kingdom.'" *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years*, xii.

[27] Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child*, 45.

[28] Berryman states, "Maria Montessori's experiments focused on the Mass and other liturgical practices. Cavalletti added the Bible. It was her interest and training in scripture combined with Gianna's observations of children that convinced them that children needed to encounter and respond to God through the Bible as well as the liturgy." Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance of Children,* 68.

> breathes? Everything Montessorian is so saturated with the religious outlook that any concrete expression of it would be superfluous.[29]
>
> We can only reply that all that is good and true, all that is psychologically sound and valid, fits into the Catholic ideal of pedagogy. The great pioneer and innovator was *naturaliter catholica*, and her method is impregnated with the faith—which transforms and regenerates man. Those who have read even her booklet on the Mass cannot but be convinced that the author was a woman of great faith.[30]
>
> Although religion is never formally mentioned in courses for Montessori teachers, the whole Method rests on principles which can only be described as religious.[31]
>
> It is not insignificant that Maria Montessori—whose capacity to see children cannot be denied, whether one is a Montessorian or not—observed (during the time of her first experiment in this field in Barcelona, in 1915) that the children not only showed a 'pleasing sense of joy' in contact with the religious reality, but a 'new dignity' as well.[32]

Cavalletti describes *Children Living in the Church*, *The Child in the Church*, *Life of Christ*, *The Mass Explained to Children*, and *The Missal* as the various books and articles where Montessori specifically refers to the religious education and spirituality of children.[33] It is evident that Montessori had a profound impact on Cavalletti and her work in developing the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

Cavalletti's Collaborator, Gianna Gobbi

Sofia Cavalletti worked closely with Gianna Gobbi, about whom she writes, "My dearest friend among dearest friends, who, from our earliest beginnings in 1954, has brought to our common work her knowledge of the child, particularly her understanding of the younger child, and her personal wisdom, the strength of her intuition and intelligence."[34] Along with Cavalletti, Gobbi co-wrote, *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy*

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[29] Cavalletti and Gobbi, *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy*, 25.

[30] Cavalletti and Gobbi, *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy*, 125.

[31] Cavalletti and Gobbi, *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy*, 50.

[32] Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child*, 177–78.

[33] To see these books/article described in more detail, see Cavalletti and Gobbi, *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy*, 27–29.

[34] Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years*, xiv.

and authored *Listening to God with Children: The Montessori Approach Applied to the Catechesis of Children*, whose aim was to "set afire the Montessori principles which have guided us in our ongoing quest to 'know, love, and serve the child,' especially in regard to his or her relationship with God."[35] Montessori principles and quotations are incorporated throughout the book as a continuous thread.[36] This was not to discourage the reader from considering Montessori on her own terms but rather to provide an introduction to Montessori education that is readily accessible for readers.[37]

Gobbi's Use of the Montessori Method in Religious Education

Gianna Gobbi studied under Montessori and worked at various children's houses throughout Italy. Following a fruitful career of working with children in Montessori schools, Gobbi would go on to apply the principles she learned from the Montessori method to aid the religious formation of children through catechesis. About catechesis Gobbi writes, "Catechesis should be a religious experience which is shared by adults and children. Children and adults listen to God's Word together."[38] Gobbi continues, "In proclaiming the Word of God, the catechist needs a method which allows the child to come into direct contact with that Word."[39] The remaining content of the book outlines details of how the teacher (the catechist)[40] uses learning materials

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[35] Gianna Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children: The Montessori Approach Applied to the Catechesis of Children* (Loveland, OH: Treehaus Communications, Inc., 2002), viii.

[36] Sofia Cavalletti, introduction to *Listening to God with Children: The Montessori Method Applied to the Catechesis of Children*, by Gianna Gobbi (Loveland, OH: Treehaus Communications Inc., 2002), xi.

[37] Cavalletti, introduction to *Listening to God with Children*, xi.

[38] Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children*, 16.

[39] Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children*, 16.

[40] For more information on the adult's task as catechist, see Gobbi*, Listening to God with Children*, 11–17.

(catechetical materials)[41] within a prepared environment (catechetical centers)[42] to proclaim the Good News. Gobbi asserts, "Christianity is a religion which requires a proclamation, an announcement of the Good News. Besides preparing the environment, the task of the catechist is to proclaim the Good News. Moreover, it is the catechist who, in effect, brings the environment and the materials to life."[43] To Montessori, the role of the directress is to serve as a guide or passive observer. Gobbi clarifies:

> We must be ready to intervene when the child truly needs our help. . . . In regard to religious education, the first moment necessarily involves proclaiming the Word. Then the catechist must know how to step aside and allow the Word, itself, to do its work in the child. It is the Holy Spirit, present in God's Word, who engages the child in a personal dialogue and is, thus, the true teacher.[44]

In addition to the triad of child, teacher, and environment, Gobbi also highlights other Montessori theories such as the planes of development,[45] sensitive periods,[46] freedom, independence, discipline,[47] the significance of work,[48] cosmic education,[49] and the practice of silence.[50] All of this she sums up with a chapter on prayer. According to Gobbi, "Prayer is, first of all, listening to God."[51] She also notes, "As Christians we pray

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[41] Gobbi discusses the importance of the catechist to make his or her own catechetical material in order to slow down and match the rhythm of the child. In addition, she writes, "In the catechetical materials themselves, unlike Montessori sensorial or didactic materials, there are actually very few instances of control of error. Rather, the catechetical materials are simply faithful to the doctrinal content being proclaimed." Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children*, 28.

[42] For more information on the prepared environment and the organization of a catechetical center, see Gobbi*, Listening to God with Children*, 1–10 and 37–44.

[43] Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children*, 12.

[44] Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children*, 15–16.

[45] Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children*, 71–76.

[46] Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children*, 77–92.

[47] Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children*, 93–102.

[48] Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children*, 103–108.

[49] Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children*, 109–16.

[50] Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children*, 121–25.

[51] Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children*, 117.

through the mediation of Jesus Christ. . . . It is a means of knowing God."[52] Gobbi concludes, "As we have said, all of Montessori pedagogy, if properly interpreted and applied, prepares the child a fertile ground for prayer."[53] To Gobbi, the one true teacher is Jesus Christ. However, the role of catechists is important as they seek to engage with tasks such as "carefully preparing the environment, presenting the Christian Proclamation, and guiding the children in their use of the environment."[54] Furthermore, she concludes that the most important task of the catechist is to be "patiently observing the children and learning to listen to them and with them" in order to experience the joy of a relationship with God.[55]

Jerome W. Berryman's "Godly Play"

Another adaptation of religious education that has roots in Montessori perspective is Jerome W. Berryman's "Godly Play." Berryman and his wife Thea created Godly Play, "a well-developed way to provide spiritual guidance for children and adults *together*."[56] In his book, *The Spiritual Guidance of Children: Montessori, Godly Play, and the Future*, Berryman reframes Christian education for children as spiritual guidance. He states, "It [spiritual guidance] explores how best to transfer the whole Christian language system, which implies a way of life and spiritual development, from one generation to another."[57] Berryman asserts that the means for spiritual guidance come in a toolbox called "classical, Christian language," which contains "sacred stories, parables,

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[52] Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children*, 117.

[53] Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children*, 130.

[54] Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children*, 130.

[55] Gobbi, *Listening to God with Children*, 130.

[56] Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance of Children*, 3.

[57] Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance of Children*, ix.

liturgical *action*, and contemplative silence."[58] With these tools, Godly Play invites children into Christian language which then helps them to learn the Christian faith in their early years. Berryman writes, "Godly Play helps children learn this art early, so they can become artists of the Christian life."[59]

In Godly Play, Berryman emphasizes playful orthodoxy. About this, he writes,

> This phrase, *playful orthodoxy*, sounds like an oxymoron only because *orthodoxy* and *play* are seldom associated. *Orthodoxy* usually stands for closure and *playful* nods toward openness. Together, however, they provide a safe place to venture out from and return to with the passion to know new people and ideas, as well as to meet the future in creative ways. Helping children get a feel for playful orthodoxy, as they learn to speak Christian, is more important than one might think, because Christian language needs to be absorbed and activated by the whole person, since our existential limits involve every bit of who we are."[60]

To Berryman, it was important for children to be shown how to grow closer to God so they could do this by themselves rather than for the adults to just explain it to them.[61] Berryman recognizes the importance of educating the whole person by allowing children to engage in the creative process. He concludes,

> We are psychological, social, biological, and spiritual creatures, so the creative process is at work in each of these dimensions, seeking to bring deep unity back to our lives to recreate us. This is because the creative process is not merely something we use to create ideas. It is who we are as Christians, created in the image of God.[62]

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[58] Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance of Children*, 4.

[59] Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance of Children*, 4.

[60] Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance of Children*, 5.

[61] Berryman describes his realization of this phenomenon, "In *The Religious Potential of the Child* Cavalletti wrote: 'In helping the child's religious life, far from imposing something that is foreign to him, we are responding to the child's silent request:' 'Help me to come closer to God by myself' I understood this intuitively from my own growing up, which pushed me towards theology, but when I took the required class in Christian education at Princeton I learned that I did not know *how* to help children come closer to God by themselves. What we were being taught to teach children was the opposite, which was to explain rather than show how. Explaining seemed to block self-discovery and take away children's spiritual integrity and initiative. This conflict stimulated a search for a better way, which began in 1960." Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance of Children*, 75.

[62] Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance of Children*, 123.

Berryman's approach that focused on "play with God and the community of children" was largely developed and built off the work of Maria Montessori and his mentor, Sofia Cavalletti.[63]

History and Development of Godly Play

Godly Play[64] is "what Jerome Berryman calls his interpretation of Montessori religious education."[65] Berryman describes Godly Play as a way to know God and see ourselves as godly creatures, created in the image of God.[66] In *The Spiritual Guidance of Children*, Berryman provides an overview of the generations of Montessorians who laid the foundation and then carried out religious education in the Montessori tradition. In describing the history of this educational perspective, Berryman states Maria Montessori as the first generation to experience this model. Subsequently, E. M. Standing[67] represents the second generation, Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi signify the third, and lastly, he categorizes himself as the fourth generation to carry out this work. Berryman comments, "Christian educators are usually not aware of Montessori's deep interest in

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[63] Berryman reflects, "As you know, Maria Montessori often spoke about the spiritual nature of the child and the teacher. At the end of her life she concluded in *The Absorbent Mind* that education is not so much teaching with love but participating, as one teaches, in the energy of God, who is love. . . . Sofia Cavalletti spoke of 'joy.' . . . Godly Play was about *play* with God and the community of children." Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance of Children*, 88.

[64] In addition to these definitions, Berryman states, "Godly Play is an effort to give room and permission for existential questions to arise. I tis a way to give children the means to know God better amid the community of children and with caring adults as guides. The theology of childhood is about a kind of knowledge. Godly Play is about how to identify, name, and value it." Berryman, *Godly Play*, 137.

[65] Jerome W. Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play: The Sunday Morning Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 9.

[66] Jerome W. Berryman, *Godly Play: A Way of Religious Education* (San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 7.

[67] This study by no means intends to gloss over the work of E. M. Standing in conjunction with Montessori's religious education. As one of Maria Montessori's biographers, he was also the editor of Maria Montessori's book, *The Child and the Church*. His biography entitled, *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work* documents the life and work of Maria Montessori. E. M. Standing, *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work* (New York: Plume, 1998). Standing concludes, "This is Montessori's great achievement, the 'discovery of the child,'" (370). He continues noting the spiritual or supernatural life and states, "What a splendid hope for the future is the growth of these natural virtues in the child—precious preparation for those supernatural virtues that transform each individual into the likeness of Christ!" (370).

religion and many Montessorians have forgotten or never noticed this."[68] Having first encountered Montessori education through his daughters' Montessori school, the Berrymans decided to move to Bergamo, Italy. This trip to study at the Center of Advanced Montessori Studies began his journey of discovering more about the Montessori method.[69] In addition to his Montessori training in Bergamo, Berryman met Sofia Cavalletti, the creator of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, an adaptation of Montessori's work for the religious education of children. He discovered that his dream of shaping a kind of religious education with the Montessori method had already been realized by Cavalletti.[70] Cavalletti became a mentor to Berryman and although he was greatly influenced by her, they both realized that Berryman was going in a different direction. He writes about this realization:

> Sofia's letters and continuing example nourished and challenged me, but Thea's and my direct experience with children in Montessori schools, in churches, in hospitals, and in our research classes was moving us in a different direction. Sofia sensed this independence. One day, during one of my early visits to Rome, she remarked in passing that I was a "good Montessori child." By this she meant that I needed to find my own way.[71]

As Berryman continued to work with children, he developed his own style of religious education, Godly Play, which was his response to Scripture, children, and the presence of God in the Montessori tradition.[72]

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[68] Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance of Children*, 33.

[69] After the arrival of their two daughters, it turned his attention to the religious lives of children. Alyda and Coleen attended a Montessori school and as they observed the classroom, he commented, "That was it! That was the method for Christian education I was looking for!" Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance of Children*, 76.

[70] Berryman, *Godly Play*, 26.

[71] Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance of Children*, 78.

[72] Berryman, *Godly Play*, 26.

Comparison between Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and Godly Play

Godly Play resembled the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd because they both shared foundations from the Montessori method. In an effort to compare their differences, Berryman listed five likenesses and some key differences between the two:

> We both considered our work unfinished. We both shared a deep respect for the spirituality of children and were taking great care to support the child's relationship with God. We both arrived at our "common consciousness," coming from "different backgrounds, each having the child as our guide." We both followed "the principles of the Montessori method by providing an environment especially prepared for the religious life of the child. . . . Finally, for both of us "concrete materials are used to aid the child's work." . . . Some key differences were also listed. First, the parables were not treated in quite the same way. . . . The second difference noted was our respective approaches to "the Old Testament."[73]

In relation to the Montessori tradition, both Godly Play and Catechesis of the Good Shepherd followed the principles set forth by the Montessori method especially in regard to the intentionally prepared environment for the religious life of the child and the use of concrete learning materials to assist the child in his or her work.[74] However, the main likeness that Berryman reiterated was that both the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and Godly Play remain unfinished. He writes, "We continue to look towards finding better and better ways to help children help themselves to know God. Our church needs this and so does our world, because the capacity for redemptive healing expands as children's spirituality matures and there is much in our world, including ourselves, that needs healing."[75] According to Berryman, there is still more work to be done in the areas of spiritual guidance and the religious education of children.

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[73] Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance of Children*, 80–81.

[74] Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance of Children*, 80.

[75] Berryman, *Spiritual Guidance of Children*, 85.

Sonja M. Stewart and Young Children and Worship

It is worth briefly considering the work of Sonja M. Stewart, who continued Berryman's development of Montessori's approach toward children's spirituality in relation to worship. In 1985, Sonja Stewart, Professor at Western Theological Seminary, met Jerome Berryman at one of Berryman's training workshops at Christ Church Cathedral. From this first meeting, Stewart and Berryman collaborated and wrote a book entitled *Young Children and Worship*.[76] It was Berryman's desire that churches working alongside seminaries would be able to partner in the areas of child development and worship.[77] Stewart's students at Western Theological Seminary were trained in Berryman's approach, Godly Play, and their book, *Young Children and Worship* documents lessons and instructions for how this experience could be incorporated into a church setting. Stewart writes, "It is difficult to write about this approach because it is primarily visual, oral, and kinesthetic. It needs to be experienced."[78] Again, similar to Montessori's educational vision, the development of the whole child is emphasized.[79] It was Stewart's and Berryman's desire to "create an environment that enables young children to encounter and worship God,"[80] which significantly resembles Montessori's concept of the prepared environment. Perhaps, the work of Berryman and Stewart concludes the fourth generation of adaptations of Montessori's perspective. The next

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[76] Sonja M. Stewart and Jerome W. Berryman, *Young Children and Worship* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989). This book was formative for Stewart who taught this approach of "Young Children and Worship" to her seminary students pursuing M.Div. and M.R.E. degrees at Western Theological Seminary.

[77] Berryman comments, "It has been my dream to have clusters of churches working with seminaries of various traditions as research and development centers in this and other countries." Berryman, *Young Children and Worship*, 8.

[78] Stewart and Berryman, *Young Children and Worship*, 14.

[79] For more information on Montessori's holistic vision of education see, Allie August, "A Christian Appropriation of Montessori's Holistic Vision of Education," *The Journal of Ministry & Theology* 26, no. 2 (2022): 3–26.

[80] Stewart and Berryman, *Young Children and Worship*, 14.

section outlines the work of Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May, which represents what may be the fifth generation of Montessori's influence in the modern church.

Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May's Definition of "Reflective Engagement"

Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May share a passion for the spiritual potential and nurture of children. Both professors have made significant contributions in the field of Christian education especially in regard to children's spirituality. Stonehouse and May collaborated to write *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey: Guidance for Those Who Teach and Nurture*,[81] *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community*,[82] as well as contributed a chapter in *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives*.[83] In their book, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*, Stonehouse and May document their research building on the work of Sonja Stewart, Jerome Berryman, and Sofia Cavalletti, rooted in the Montessori approach.[84] At the conclusion of their research, Stonehouse and May state what they learned:

> What we discovered as we wove our research findings together was not a theory of childhood spirituality or even a definition of it, not a set of norms for what children should know or how they should think at a given age. Rather, the children gave us a glimpse of their spiritual potential, how they were at work putting together pieces of theological understandings, how they experienced God, and how their interactions with adults helped or hindered.[85]

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[81] Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey: Guidance for Those Who Teach and Nurture* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2010).

[82] Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005).

[83] Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May, "THE Story and the Spiritual Formation of Children in the Church and the Home," in *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives*, ed. Holly Catterton Allen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 366–79.

[84] See introduction for an overview of research conducted by Stonehouse and May including the Listening to Children Study, Adult Reflections Study, Good Shepherd Research, and Good Shepherd Family Research, Stonehouse and May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*, 11–18.

[85] Stonehouse and May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*, 15.

Although Stonehouse and May did not propose a new theory or paradigm of children's spirituality, they defined the modified approach of the Montessori method for religious education as refined by Cavalletti, Berryman and Stewart as "Reflective Engagement." About this proposed term, Stonehouse and May write,

> Reflective Engagement is the term we have chosen to describe approaches to ministry with children that flow from the work of Sofia Cavalletti. For decades she has worked with children, leading them into the Scripture and experiences with the symbols of their faith, and has learned from them what content and approaches grasp the heart of the child. Jerome Berryman's Godly Play, *Young Children and Worship*, and the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, which is used in many Catholic and Episcopal congregations, all flow from the work of Cavalletti. Rather than using a term related to one of these expressions, we are choosing the term *Reflective Engagement* to identify the approach more broadly.[86]

Reflective Engagement is a "calm, quiet, yet engaging place" where children and adults can listen to and be with God.[87] Children listen to a Bible story that is told with story materials. They are encouraged by their teacher to wonder, and subsequently have an opportunity to respond and reflect on the experience on their own through art or other creative exercises. As Stonehouse and May clarify, the term reflective engagement is a category for approaches to children's ministry that flow from the work of Cavalletti, Berryman, and Stewart, who each attempted to develop a Christian adaptation of Montessori's religious education of children. In particular, Cavalletti and Berryman attribute the basis of their approaches concerning the spiritual development of children to Maria Montessori.

The Contemplative-Reflective Model

In addition to the term "Reflective Engagement," Scottie May offers the perspective of "The Contemplative-Reflective Model" of children's ministry in *Perspectives on Children's Spiritual Formation: 4 Views* edited by Michael J. Anthony.

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[86] Stonehouse and May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*, 15–16.

[87] Stonehouse and May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*, 16.

The aim of the Contemplative-Reflective Model is "to help children encounter God in ways that result in a sense of awe and wonder, to help them consider things of God with continued attention."[88] In addition to encouraging contemplation among the children, May states, "The model seeks to assist them in finding the quiet place within themselves—a place that all children have—where they can sense the presence of God and hear his voice."[89] The Contemplative-Reflective Model is designed to "help children fall more and more in love with the Lord Jesus Christ—to develop disciples who want to obey and follow him the rest of their lives."[90] This view is very much centered on God's view of the child and the need for children's ministry to "approach Scripture with the child in mind."[91]

Historical development of the contemplative-reflective model. May documents the historical development of the Contemplative-Reflective Model. She connects this model to the work of Maria Montessori, whose books laid the groundwork for this contemplative approach to children's ministry. About this, May states,

> A devout Catholic, Montessori also believed that every child is a spiritual being, whole and complete—a belief that was in opposition to the popular position of that day. Her personal faith, her view of child, and the learning principles she was exploring led naturally into religious education. Though not known as a religious educator, she wrote *The Child in the Church* and *Spontaneous Activity in Education*, works that lay groundwork for a contemplative approach to ministry with children.[92]

May traces out the impact of Montessori education and what became the foundation for Cavalletti's Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, "a Montessori-based contemplative

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[88] Scottie May, "The Contemplative-Reflective Model," in *Perspectives on Children's Spiritual Formation: 4 Views*, ed. Michael J. Anthony (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 45–102.

[89] May, "The Contemplative-Reflective Model," 45–46.

[90] May, "The Contemplative-Reflective Model," 82.

[91] May, "The Contemplative-Reflective Model," 82.

[92] May, "The Contemplative-Reflective Model," 54.

approach that helps young children meet and fall in love with the good shepherd."[93] May further outlines the progression of the contemplative model, for from Catechesis of the Good Shepherd comes the development of "American-based adaptation of the Montessori-Cavalletti work" of Jerome Berryman's Godly Play and later Sonja Stewart's Young Children and Worship. In summary, May concludes, "The principles identified through the thorough work of Montessori, Cavalletti, Berryman, and Stewart enable children's ministers to draw on their insights and shape a contemplative-reflective approach appropriate for their setting."[94] In addition to Montessori's concept of the prepared environment and respect for the child, Montessori's perspective is evident and useful in Christian contexts which can now be categorized in terms such as Reflective Engagement and Contemplative-Reflective Models.[95]

Five metaphors of ministry with children. Among other terminology to describe approaches to children's ministry, Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell describe five metaphors of ministry with children in their book, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community*. The authors assert that typically, the dominant metaphor that underlies how one views the learner, teacher, and content will ultimately influence the direction of the church's entire ministry.[96] They break down these metaphors as the following: School, Gold Star/Win a

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[93] May, "The Contemplative-Reflective Model," 55.

[94] May, "The Contemplative-Reflective Model," 56–57.

[95] May states, "Montessori's work is directly reflected in some contemporary Christian education approaches such as Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, developed by Sofia Cavalletti, and Young Children and Worship (1989) by Sonja Stewart and Jerome Berryman." May, *Children Matter*, 106.

[96] May summarizes, "Micrometaphors represent the relationship between the teacher, the learners, and the materials in a small group or classroom setting. A macrometaphor is the primary or driving metaphor for the entire ministry. Through each of the metaphors may be used in appropriate ways within children's ministry, some macrometaphors are less effective than others. Even though many metaphors may be valid for ministry, it is essential that the accompanying methods or approaches be compatible with the goals and purposes of that particular setting." May, *Children Matter*, 24.

Prize, Carnival, Pilgrim's Journey, and Dance with God.[97] The authors note that the last two metaphors (Pilgrim's Journey and Dance with God) may be less familiar among churches today, however, they both exhibit qualities that make them viable options for children's ministry leaders to consider.[98] The Dance with God metaphor most closely resembles the Montessori method of religious education. Holly Allen, in her chapter "Curriculum and Children's Ministry" in *Mapping Out Curriculum in Your Church*, edited by James Estep, Roger White, and Karen Estep, makes the connection between the Dance with God metaphor and the Contemplative-Reflective Model. Allen writes about the contemplative model of Godly Play and although she states that she is quite enamored with Godly Play, she does not see it as a comprehensive approach to children's ministry.[99] This being recognized, Allen goes on to write that each method or approach to children's ministries[100] will contain "gaps and deficits" and all are "not complete in and of themselves."[101] Although the Dance with God metaphor and the Contemplative-Reflective Model has much to offer in the spiritual development of children, these approaches are not exhaustive and ought to be considered carefully.

Summary

Educational models are similar to many ministry models in that they are not yet complete. As Cavalletti and Berryman recognize, the work of children's spiritual

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[97] For a full description of these approaches as well as strengths and weaknesses, see May, *Children Matter*, 10–22.

[98] May asserts, "The children's ministry leader has the challenging but important responsibility to ensure that there is harmony between the metaphor for the ministry, the educational approach and methodology, and the ultimate purpose of the ministry—that there is congruity between purpose and methods." May, *Children Matter*, 24.

[99] Holly Allen, "Curriculum and Children's Ministry," in *Mapping Out Curriculum in Your Church: Cartography for Christian Pilgrims*, ed. James Estep, Roger White, and Karen Estep (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 243–46.

[100] Allen's categorizes children's ministry into four types which includes: school models, large/small group approaches, contemplative models, and intergenerational approaches." Allen, "Curriculum and Children's Ministry," 242.

[101] Allen, "Curriculum and Children's Ministry," 245–46.

development remains unfinished. The task of spiritual formation is an ongoing process that needs evaluation and improvement. As Berryman notes the generations of those who have built on Montessori's original method, it cannot be overlooked that these educators—Cavalletti, Gobbi, Berryman, Stewart, Stonehouse, and May—have laid the groundwork for the future of the spiritual development of children in the form of religious education and children's ministry models.

It appears that there is a gap left after Berryman as to a specific approach of religious education that carries out the Montessori tradition. What remains is the terms of Reflective Engagement, the Contemplative-Reflective Model, and the Dance with God metaphor that Stonehouse and May propose. These terms represent a broader category of adaptations of the Montessori method for the religious education of children that are meant to be adjusted to meet the needs of specific church contexts with the goal of transformation in mind. May concludes,

> Ultimately ministry is about *transforming*—the child's being transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. No model or ministry can do that. No person can do that. Transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit alone. All we can do is to help facilitate that process. Much of the time that means that we adults need to get out of the way so that the Spirit of God can do that work. Our responsibility is to create an environment in which the child can learn about and enter into God's story, respond to the Holy Spirit, and experience the presence and leading of God.[102]

There is value in studying the history of those who have gone before. By examining the work of those who have carried out the task of religious education and the spiritual guidance of children within the Montessori tradition, it is a confirmation that these individuals saw a connection between the Montessori method of education and the spiritual development of children. Not only was Montessori religious and a devout Catholic Christian herself, but her method also focused on the spiritual development of children. Therefore, as Cavalletti, Berryman, and others have recognized, Montessori's perspective is useful and applicable for the development of religious education and

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[102] May, *Children Matter*, 23–24.

spiritual formation of children today across various cultural settings and denominational backgrounds.

CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

This chapter builds upon the prior two chapters by employing the Inverse Consistency Protocol as a method to analyze and evaluate the final iteration of Montessori's writings from an orthodox, Christian perspective. The Inverse Consistency Protocol designed by John David Trentham, involves considering a social science model—in this case, the Montessori educational approach—through a series of four steps in order to analyze it from a theological perspective. The researcher will utilize this protocol to identify the ways the educational model of Maria Montessori is congruent and incongruent with historic, orthodox Christian thought. In addition, the researcher will seek to identify aspects of Montessori's educational perspective that are useful and not useful in Christian contexts. The four steps are again described below and applied to the analysis of the Montessori perspective.

Step one: *Envision redemptive maturity*. Articulate a confessional Christian view of children based on theological anthropology.

Step two: *Read for receptivity*. Summarize the findings of chapter 2 to articulate Montessori's view of children in her own words.

Step three: *Employ reflective discernment*. Critically and charitably reflect and evaluate Montessori's approach, including her Catholic views of original sin, conversion, redemption, and her hermeneutical approach to Scripture.

Step four: *Identify appropriative outlets*. Summarize findings in relation to a confessional Christian view of children as articulated in step 1, above, to identify where the Montessori perspective of education may be useful in Christian contexts.[1]

Step One: Envision Redemptive Maturity

Before considering the educational perspective of Maria Montessori and the Christian view of children, it is necessary to overview the biblical view of humanity in general through the lens of theological anthropology. The researcher will briefly articulate a confessional Christian view of humanity from Scripture. From the creation narrative recorded in Genesis 1–2, all humans were made in the image of God (*imago dei*; Gen 1:27). As created image bearers, humans were to mirror and represent God. However, this image was distorted with the fall of mankind (Gen 3) and as such, humans are not able to completely reflect God's image as had been intended. Ultimately, the way for the image of God to be fully redeemed is through the person and work of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:21). Through the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, the believer takes part in a continual process of renewal through the work of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18; 4:16). The full restoration and completion of the image of God will take place in the life to come (Rom 8:29–30; 1 John 3:2).[2]

Foundational to the many aspects of biblical anthropology is the concept of the individual as a holistic being made in the image of God.[3] Scripture describes humans as

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[1] For original wording of the steps of the Inverse Consistency Protocol, see table 2 in John David Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2): Engaging the Appropriating Models of Human Development," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 488.

[2] George R. Knight states, "As a result, part of the educative function of redemption is to restore individuals to health in each of these aspects and in their total being. Restoration of the image, therefore, has social, spiritual, mental, and physical ramifications, as does education." George R. Knight, *Philosophy & Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 208.

[3] Knight makes these assertions, "First, the Bible treats individuals as holistic units. . . . The whole person is important to God. Whatever affects one part of an individual affects the whole. Balance among the spiritual, social, physical, and mental aspects of a person is the ideal as it is seen in the development of Jesus (Luke 2:52)." Knight, *Philosophy & Education*, 208.

whole and unitary beings, complex yet one in personhood (e.g., Matt 10:28; 1 Cor 5:3; 3 John 2). As Anthony Hoekema states, "One of the most important aspects of the Christian view of man is that we must see him in his unity as a whole person."[4] Although the Bible does seem to draw a distinction between the physical and nonphysical aspects of humans, these are still understood as inseparable elements (Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37). Hoekema asserts that the human is best viewed as a unitary being and the human person must be understood as an "embodied soul" or a "besouled body."[5] Various theologians arrive at similar conclusions. For example, Lewis Sperry Chafer writes, "Divine revelation makes it clear that man is a unity—one being,"[6] and Charles Ryrie asserts that man is a bipartite unity or "material and immaterial combined to produce a single entity."[7] In a similar vein, Gregg R. Allison asserts:

> We human beings are not made in a piecemeal way and put together, like the many pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Rather, in our humanness, we are constructed holistically with a wholeness and completeness that does not allow us to be divided into this part or that part. We are human beings in our entirety . . . created in the image of God.[8]

These theologians point to the fact that humans are holistic beings. Humans are composed of both material and immaterial aspects; they have a physical as well as a spiritual side (John 4:23–24). Both aspects are important for human persons to interact with and relate to God, others, and the world around them.

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[4] Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 203.

[5] Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 216. Hoekema proposes psychosomatic unity where humans have both a physical and mental/spiritual side that cannot be separated. He states, "Though the Bible does see man as a whole, it also recognizes that the human being has two sides: physical and nonphysical," (217).

[6] Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology: Vol. 2—Angelology, Anthropology, Hamartiology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 146.

[7] Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 223.

[8] Gregg R. Allison, "Humanity, Sin, and Christian Education," in *A Theology for Christian Education*, edited by James Riley Estep, Jr., Michael J. Anthony, and Gregg R. Allison, (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 180.

A biblical understanding of humans is essential for the Christian when examining the various social sciences and their views of humanity. As George R. Knight astutely observes, "It makes a great deal of difference in education if a student is viewed as Desmond Morris's 'naked ape' or as a child of God."[9] The Christian view of children found in the Bible can be summarized as the following: Children are valued as individuals created in the image of God.[10] Children are holistic beings with both physical and nonphysical aspects (spiritual, emotional, cognitive, etc.). Children are created for relationship, with purpose, and intrinsically have potential (Ps 139:13–18; Eph 2:10). Jesus himself was quite clear about the value, dignity, and importance of children (Matt 18:2–5, 10, 14; 19:13–14).

Marcia J. Bunge provides six biblical perspectives on children with Scriptural support, which are outlined in a chart below.[11]

Table 1. Bunge's six biblical perspectives on children

#	Perspective	Scripture Reference(s)
1	First, the Bible and the Christian tradition often depict children as gifts of God, who ultimately come from God and belong to God, and are sources of joy and pleasure.[12]	Gen 30:20, 30:22, 1 Sam 1:11, 1:19, Gen 30:11, Ps 127:3
2	Second, the Christian tradition often describes children as sinful creatures and moral agents.[13]	Gen 8:21, Prov 22:15, Ps 51:5, 58:3, Rom 3:9-10

[9] Knight, *Philosophy & Education*, 20.

[10] Knight comments, "Therefore, although people are twisted and lost as a result of the Fall, they are still human. They still have godlike potentials and characteristics." Knight, *Philosophy & Education*, 205.

[11] Marcia J. Bunge, "Historical Perspectives in the Church: Resources for Spiritual Formation and a Theology of Childhood Today," in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, 2 ed., edited by Kevin E. Lawson and Scottie May, 34–46. Bunge's aim of her chapter is as follows, "The six ways of speaking about children could also deepen theological and ethical reflection on children and inform a strong theology of childhood," (44).

[12] Bunge, "Historical Perspectives in the Church," 37.

[13] Bunge, "Historical Perspectives in the Church," 38.

#	Perspective	Scripture Reference(s)
3	A third central perspective within church tradition is that children are developing beings who need instruction and guidance. The Bible encourages adults to guide and nurture children.[14]	Prov 22:6, Eph 6:4, Ps 78:4b, Deut 11:18–19, 31:12–13, Deut 6:5, Gen 18:19, Prov 2:9
4	Fourth, although children are developing, they, are, at the same time, whole and complete human beings made in the image of God. Thus, they are worthy of dignity and respect.[15]	Gen 1:27
5	Fifth, the New Testament depicts children in striking and even radical ways as moral witnesses, models of faith for adults, sources or vehicles of revelation, and representatives of Jesus. In the gospels Jesus blesses children, embraces them, rebukes those who turn them away, heals them, and even lifts them up as models of faith.[16]	Matt 18:2–5, Matt 19:4
6	Finally, in the sixth place, there are many biblical passages and examples in the tradition that reminds us that children are also orphans, neighbors, and strangers who need to be treated with justice and compassion. There are numerous biblical passages that explicitly command us to help widows and orphans—the most vulnerable in society.[17]	

According to Bunge:

> A solid and biblically informed approach to children must take into account all six perspectives on children outlined here. It must incorporate a complex view of the child that holds together the inherent tensions of being a child: being fully human and made in the image of God yet still developing and in need of instruction and guidance; gifts of God and sources of joy yet also capable of selfish and sinful

[14] Bunge, "Historical Perspectives in the Church," 40. Bunge writes, "Adults are to attend to the 'whole being' of children and provide them with emotional, intellectual, moral, and spiritual guidance. Thus, in addition to providing children with a good education and teaching them skills that are necessary to earn a living and raise a family, adults are to instruct children about the faith and help them develop moral sensibilities, character, and virtue so that they can love God and neighbor with justice and compassion," (41).

[15] Bunge, "Historical Perspectives in the Church," 41.

[16] Bunge, "Historical Perspectives in the Church," 41.

[17] Bunge, "Historical Perspectives in the Church," 42.

> actions; metaphors for immature faith and childish behavior and yet models of faith and sources of revelation.[18]

The present researcher will refer to Bunge's biblical perspectives when examining Maria Montessori's view of children which was closely connected to her Catholic Christian foundation.

Step Two: Read for Receptivity

As demonstrated in chapter 2, Maria Montessori's approach to education—namely her view of the child, the environment, and the teacher—was intrinsically connected to her Catholic faith. As she sought to develop the lives of the children she taught, she focused on their holistic development and spiritual growth. Ron Miller notes that Montessori's work, though resting on medical, psychological, and biological insight which was ahead of her time, is also "laced with Biblical imagery and religious fervor."[19] He states, "This respected physician/scientist would unflinchingly refer over and over again to God, Christ, Scripture, and various saints."[20] As such, Montessori's holistic vision of education was shaped through her eyes as a scientist and informed by her Catholic faith which was clearly demonstrated through her writings. In many ways, Montessori's anthropology or view of children was analogous to the biblical perspective of children. In the chart below, Montessori's view of children will be compared to Bunge's six biblical perspectives on children.

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[18] Bunge, "Historical Perspectives in the Church," 43.

[19] Ron Miller, "Nourishing the Spiritual Embryo: The Educational Vision of Maria Montessori," *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice* 17, no. 2 (2002): 15.

[20] Miller, "Nourishing the Spiritual Embryo," 15.

Table 2. Comparison of Bunge's six biblical perspectives on children and Montessori's view of children

Bunge's Six Biblical Perspectives on Children	Montessori's View of Children
First, the Bible and the Christian tradition often depict children as gifts of God, who ultimately come from God and belong to God, and are sources of joy and pleasure	God is viewed as creator and man's true nature is to reflect his image. God's creation, including children, is good.
Second, the Christian tradition often describes children as sinful creatures and moral agents.	Children have the capacity to love and have a moral conscience. Montessori recognized the two natures in man as created and fallen beings which resulted from original sin.
A third central perspective within church tradition is that children are developing beings who need instruction and guidance. The Bible encourages adults to guide and nurture children.	Montessori emphasized the child in their current state of development as well as an individual with physical and spiritual potential. According to Montessori, this living man within the child is not yet perfected and has to form himself. The role of the directress is to observe the child's growth as it naturally unfolds.
Fourth, although children are developing, they, are, at the same time, whole and complete human beings made in the image of God. Thus, they are worthy of dignity and respect.	To Montessori, children were not fully formed little adults. Children are distinct from adults and have their own unique personality. Children are worthy of respect and have the capability to perfect themselves.
Fifth, the New Testament depicts children in striking and even radical ways as moral witnesses, models of faith for adults, sources or vehicles of revelation, and representatives of Jesus. In the gospels Jesus blesses children, embraces them, rebukes those who turn them away, heals them, and even lifts them up as models of faith.	When children approached Jesus, Jesus did not turn them away, saying to let the little ones come. Montessori holds to the view that, like Jesus, children should be welcomed and embraced. Children have a capacity for faith distinct from the adult.
Finally, in the sixth place, there are many biblical passages and examples in the tradition that reminds us that children are also orphans, neighbors, and strangers who need to be treated with justice and compassion. There are numerous biblical passages that explicitly command us to help widows and orphans—the most vulnerable in society.	God is just and nothing escapes his justice. Montessori makes a clear distinction between the love of Jesus Christ and humanity.

To Montessori, children are spiritual beings who must be nourished spiritually. As such, an education devoid of spiritual nourishment is an insufficient and incomplete education. Again, this is not to say that all of Montessori's beliefs necessarily align with those of evangelical Christians. However, given her Catholic background, Montessori's educational approach aligns surprisingly closer to that of the orthodox Christian than to that of the secular educator.

In his article, "Montessori as a School Reform Alternative Reflecting Biblical Anthropology," Jaeuk Jeong makes the connection that Montessori's anthropology of learners is based on the doctrine of the Imago Dei of the Bible.[21] Jeong makes the claim that Montessori's understanding of children was rooted and built upon Christian theological anthropology. He asserts, "Montessori utilized the biblical understanding of humanity and relationship."[22] Therefore, he continues, "this Montessori Method clearly perceives the millennia-neglected truth that adults, such as teachers and parents, fail to treat children according to their sense of dignity rooted in the Imago Dei."[23] Jeong's assertion is that Montessori's biblically-based anthropology of children stands in stark contrast to other progressive educational models.[24] He concludes, "Though she didn't use Christian theological jargons, what she highlights in the child is the Imago Dei, the center

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[21] Jaeuk Jeong asserts, "As strongly supported by Balswick et al. theologically, the Montessori system was built upon the Christian theological anthropology that the main source of failure in our education is humanity's original sin and sins preventing us from fulfilling the Imago Dei or the reciprocating self. This is Montessori's greatest contribution and insight that actualized an alternative educational reform which has lasted as a totality of educational system over a century all over the world in direct contrast to the traditional education wherever it has been planted." Jaeuk Jeong, "Montessori as a School Reform Alternative Reflecting Biblical Anthropology," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 29, no. 3 (2020): 315.

[22] Jeong, "Montessori Reflecting Biblical Anthropology," 323.

[23] Jeong, "Montessori Reflecting Biblical Anthropology," 323.

[24] Miller comments, "Montessori saw children growing from the inside out, from a spiritual source, where Dewey saw the human being developed through dialogue and negotiation with the social environment." Miller, "Nourishing the Spiritual Embryo," 20.

of the child's whole being created after God's image."[25] This holistic understanding of the child is evident in Montessori's educational practices.

Another who recognized the sacred underpinning of the Montessori method was Ade Bethune. In the introduction to *Teaching Liturgy to Children*, Bethune writes about the secret ingredient of the Montessori method:

> The core, the secret of her method was not perceived. At the very center of the Montessori way of thought, I believe, we must recognize the sense of the sacred. To me, it seems to be the mysterious key that unlocks the treasures of her observation, her wisdom, and her skill. Without this sense of the sacred her method cannot work. Without it, only fragments of her thought can ever be accepted. Profaned, it becomes meaningless.[26]

In summary, Bethune claims that Montessori recognized the true essence of human nature as being marvelously created by God and "even more marvelously restored by Christ."[27] She states, "Maria Montessori shows us the best (not the worst) in human nature, that which may be illumined in the love of Christ."[28] Bethune argued that the core of the Montessori method was its sense of the sacred and concludes:

> The Montessori method is not a religion. It is only a way of helping small children to educate themselves. But this way is one that is naturally religious. It is based on a sense of awe before truth, of reverence for all the works of God's hands, of minute care and perfection in every action, of deep respect for the human person created in the image of God (even if that person is only two years old).[29]

Jeong and Bethune serve as additional confirmations that Montessori was not only religious, but her Catholic Christian faith was the driving force and "secret ingredient" that undergirded the entirety of her educational method. Montessori's faith informed her method which focused on the spiritual development of children. As seen in

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[25] Jeong, "Montessori Reflecting Biblical Anthropology," 313–14.

[26] Ade Bethune, introduction to *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy: The Montessori Approach* by Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi (Staten Island: Alba House, 1964), 10.

[27] Bethune, introduction to *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy*, 8.

[28] Bethune, introduction to *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy*, 8.

[29] Bethune, introduction to *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy*, 11–12.

chapter 3, others such as Cavalletti and Berryman have also recognized the usefulness of applying the Montessori method to the religious education of children in various church and school contexts.

Step Three: Employ Reflective Discernment

In some respects, Montessori's holistic vision of education has stood the test of time and has proven effective in the world's eye among secular circles and international communities. Upon further examination from a Christian perspective, though, the question must be considered as to what aspects of Montessori's vision can be appropriated into a Christian philosophy of education. Montessori's holistic vision of education was built upon her view of children and was founded on her devout Roman Catholic beliefs.

Although Montessori was a scientist, she did not shy away from spirituality. Her method was a blend of the sacred and the secular, drawing from special revelation revealed in God's Word and general observations found in the laws of nature.[30] In this sense, Montessori integrated multiple sources to create her own approach. Throughout her writings, she focused on the holistic nature of children by combining the psychological and spiritual with the physical aspects of development. In this way, Montessori's holistic approach to education is quite similar to an orthodox—even evangelical—Christian perspective. Just as Montessori viewed the child as a holistic being, so does the evangelical. Just as Montessori believed children have potential and intrinsic value, again, so does the evangelical. This is not to say that Montessori held to evangelical Christianity; she did not. As a Roman Catholic, her views were Catholic. Yet when it comes to her holistic vision of education, her ideas align rather closely. Below,

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[30] Miller notes that Montessori's work, though resting on medical/psychological/biological insight which was ahead of her time, is also "laced with Biblical imagery and religious fervor. This respected physician/scientist would unflinchingly refer over and over again to God, Christ, Scripture, and various saints." Miller, "Nourishing the Spiritual Embryo," 15.

similarities and differences are considered from an orthodox Christian perspective regarding (1) Montessori's view of the role of the directress and classroom setting, (2) original sin, (3) conversion/redemption, and (4) her hermeneutical approach to Scripture.

Role of Directress and Classroom

In addition to Montessori's view of the student as a holistic being, two impactful aspects of her method are the role of the directress and the classroom setting as a prepared environment. Montessori sought to encourage spiritual formation in addition to the physical and intellectual development of children.[31] She did this through self-directed activities and sensorial learning materials within the prepared environment. Miller states, "Montessori frequently commented that the child creates the adult—not, as our modern common sense has it, the other way around."[32] In her approach, the directress serves as a guide who assists children in their own process of learning.[33] This is an aspect of Montessori's method that warrants careful consideration from a biblical perspective.

Although the Christian educator understands that the teacher has multiple roles such as that of an instructor, encourager, equipper, guide, advocate, and mentor, one point of concern is that the child cannot construct his or her own reality entirely apart from adults and environmental influences.[34] Although Montessori's method is

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[31] Maria Montessori states, "We have been mistaken in thinking that the natural education of children should be purely physical; the soul, too, has its nature, which it was intended to perfect in the spiritual life,—the dominating power of humane existence throughout all time. . . . If physical care leads the child to take pleasure in bodily health, intellectual and moral care make possible for him the highest spiritual joy, and send him forward into a world where continual surprises and discoveries await him; not only in the external environment, but in the intimate recesses of his soul." Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002), 275–376.

[32] Miller, "Nourishing the Spiritual Embryo," 18.

[33] In discussing the spirit of the teacher, Montessori states, "From the child itself he will learn how to prefect himself as an educator." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 13.

[34] About this, Montessori asserts, "Each one of them perfects himself through his own powers, and goes forward guided by that inner force which distinguishes him as an individual." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 374.

constructivist in nature, she herself holds to standards of reality and truth. Her view is quite nuanced, as on one hand she assumes the intrinsic goodness of children and that they construct their own education, yet on the other, this capability of construction is based on a known reality.[35] Fisher notes that Montessori believed, "No human being is educated by anyone else. He must do it himself or it is never done."[36] Similarly, Miller comments, "It is the environment that educates, not the teacher directly; more precisely, it is the child's inherent formative energies, finding material in the environment to act upon purposefully, that calls or brings forth . . . the child's true nature. The educational process starts with the individual, with self-formation."[37] Although the practice of self-directed learning is a valuable pedagogical method in education for student autonomy, it does not translate well to the Christian's view of life and reality, especially regarding biblical doctrine. As fallen and sinful people (Eph 4:18), humans—including children—are unable to grasp the mysteries of the gospel message on their own (1 Cor 2:14). According to Scripture, the child will not arrive at a knowledge of the gospel message without it being formally communicated—*taught*—to them (Rom 10:14; Acts 8:31). As such, the Christian educator is an integral part of the educational process in communicating doctrine. In contrast to Montessori's approach, the Christian educator seeks opportunities

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[35] Montessori states, "The children work by themselves, and, in doing so, make a conquest of active discipline, and independence in all the acts of daily life, just as through daily conquests they progress in intellectual development. Directed by an intelligent teacher, who watches over their physical development as well as over their intellectual and moral progress, children are able with our methods to arrive at a splendid physical development, and, in addition to this, there unfolds within them, in all its perfection, the soul, which distinguishes the human being." Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 375.

Additionally, Maria Montessori writes, "The most difficult thing is to make the teacher understand that if the child is to progress she must eliminate herself and give up those prerogatives that hitherto were considered to be the sacred rights of the teacher. She must clearly understand that she cannot have any immediate influence either upon the formation or upon the inner discipline of the students, and that her confidence must be placed and must rest in their hidden and latent energies." Maria Montessori, *The Child* (Adyar, Madras, India: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1961), 25.

[36] Dorothy Canfield Fisher, *The Montessori Manual* (Chicago: The W. E. Richardson Co., 1913), 19-20.

[37] Miller, "Nourishing the Spiritual Embryo," 20.

to actively communicate the gospel message even if the primary pedagogical method is generally more as a passive guide.

Montessori's View of Original Sin

The evangelical Christian recognizes the severity of human sinfulness in that it results in death (Rom 6:23; John 3:16–17), separates from God (Isa 59:2; Rom 3:23), and leads to destruction (Gal 6:7–8; Matt 25:46; 2 Thess 1:9). Sin came into the world through one man, Adam (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:21–22; Gen 3:1–7). Due to this transgression, all humans possess a moral corruption that results in an inherently sinful disposition (Ps 51:5; Jer 17:9). This is known as original sin. The result of original sin is that no one can please God through one's own actions, apart from the saving work of Christ and the empowering work of the Holy Spirit.

Montessori has been criticized as minimizing original sin in children through her approach. In her authorized biography, E. M. Standing comments, "Many persons have argued that Montessori's work, in revealing to us the true nature of the child, has disproved the doctrine of Original Sin and its effects."[38] Standing does not agree with this claim, but merely notes this critique of Montessori's method. Unfortunately, though, Standing does not identify Montessori's interlocutors on this point, leading one to believe that these observations were based on personal interactions. Similarly, Natalie Carnes notes that Montessori "has been criticized for an inadequate understanding of [children's] sinfulness."[39] Yet as with Standing, Carnes does not provide specific instances of this critique beyond Montessori's general reputation in the field of education. Carnes notes that Montessori had "a reputation for being overly sanguine about the nature of

[38] E. M. Standing, *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work* (New York: Plume, 1998), 181.

[39] Natalie Carnes, "We in Our Turmoil: Theological Anthropology through Maria Montessori and the Lives of Children," *The Journal of Religion* 95, no. 3 (2015): 322.

children,"[40] something that Montessori herself would have denied.[41] To summarize, Montessori is criticized as minimizing the doctrine of original sin in that she focuses primarily on the natural "good" of children as opposed to their inclinations toward the "bad."

In her writings, Montessori recognizes the results of original sin. She states, "We have in ourselves tendencies that are not good and which flourish like weeds in a field (Original sin)."[42] She categorizes these tendencies "into seven groups, known of old as the Seven Deadly Sins."[43] Elsewhere Montessori writes, "Nothing escapes God's justice, which takes account of every good deed we do, and compensates us for every ill done us by others."[44] The justice of God is a theme she writes of frequently.[45] Specific to original sin, Montessori states, "The Bible tells us that man was made in the image of God and that Original Sin disturbed the Divine Plan."[46] In this way, she stands within Roman Catholic teaching, affirmed by the Council of Trent, that the sin of Adam is

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[40] Carnes, "We in Our Turmoil," 322.

[41] About this, Montessori counters, "Many who haven't understood me think that I'm a sentimental romantic who dreams only of seeing children, of kissing them, of telling them fairy tales, that I want to visit schools to watch them, to cuddle them and give them caramels. They weary me! I am a rigorous scientific investigator . . . I seek to discover the man in the child, and to see in him the true human spirit, the design of the Creator: the scientific and religious truth. It is to this end that I apply my method of study, which respects human nature." Cited in Rita Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1988), 251.

[42] Maria Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood* (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2017), 93.

[43] Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 93.

[44] Maria Montessori, *The Child in the Church,* in *Montessori: On Religious Education*, (Lake Ariel, PA: Hillside Education, 2020), 67.

[45] Montessori's view of God's justice and the substitutionary work of Christ is different in that there is certainly more of a focus on Christ as Savior in the sense of as our example than the one who took upon himself the wrath of God. She writes, "Our Master, Jesus, was the Exemplar." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 42. One does not find in Montessori's writings references or discussion related to the substitutionary work of Christ—a doctrine to which most evangelicals would hold.

[46] Maria Montessori, *The Holy Mass,* in *Montessori: On Religious Education*, (Lake Ariel, PA: Hillside Education, 2020), 295. She continues, "However, with education, we must help the child to be ready to receive the grace that restores man in the image of God in the original plan," (295).

"transfused into all by propagation, not by imitation."[47] Beyond this, little is said in her writings.[48]

In response to this discussion, Standing—who supports a Roman Catholic position—comments, "The problem, speaking theologically, is really quite simple and easily cleared up."[49] Standing quotes Montessori as holding to the doctrine of original sin and offering the following clarification (which is worth citing at length):

> When we look at the stars which shine in the firmament, so faithful in following their courses, so mysterious in their manner of keeping to them, we do not exclaim, "How good the stars are!" We say the stars obey the laws which govern the universe; we exclaim how marvellous is the order of creation. In the conduct of our children there is made manifest a form of order in nature.
>
> Order does not necessarily imply goodness. It neither demonstrates that "man is born good" or that "he is born evil." It only demonstrates that nature, in the process of constructing man, passes through an established order. Order is not goodness; but perhaps it is the indispensable road to arrive at it.
>
> The order which is revealed in these children comes from mysterious, hidden "internal directives," which can only reveal themselves through liberty; which permits them to operate.
>
> Before arriving at real goodness (i.e., in the supernatural sense) it is necessary first "to enter into the order of the laws of nature." Afterwards from this plane as a basis, it is possible to elevate oneself and ascent into a supernatural order in which the cooperation of conscience is necessary.
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> Similarly with regard to "badness," it is also necessary to distinguish *dis*order, in the order of nature, from the deliberate descent into morally inferior planes. To be "disorderly" with respect to the natural laws which direct the normal development of children is not necessarily to be "bad." In fact the English use different terms for

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[47] Council of Trent, Session 5, "Decree Concerning Original Sin, 17 June, 1546," in *The Creeds of Christendom with A History and Critical Notes*, vol. 2, Philip Schaff, ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), 85.

[48] Natalie Carnes is one example who attempts to find within Montessori a different approach to the doctrine of original sin. She asserts, "Original sin, for her . . . is not bequeathed through sex nor any other biological process. It is passed through our inescapably damaged environment. (We might say that it is passed through our biology's openness to a damaged environment.)" Carnes, "We in Our Turmoil," 327. However, Carnes makes these assertions based merely on abstractions of Montessori's focus on the environment, not on Montessori's words or statements in any primary source documents.

[49] Standing, *Maria Montessori*, 181. It must be recognized that Montessori's focus was not necessarily to offer reflections on theology. Standing notes, "To do her justice Montessori did not worry herself a scrap about such questions [i.e., regarding original sin]. She was so anxious to help the children that she had not time to spend on theological controversy," (181).

> the "badness" of children and of adults; they call the first "naughtiness" and the second "evil" or "badness."[50]

Standing's point is that many childhood actions criticized as "naughty" or "bad" or perhaps even "sinful" by many Christians, Montessori would label as disordered but not necessarily sinful or evil. In this way, Montessori still recognizes the doctrine of original sin even as she views fewer actions of children as specifically sinful.

To summarize, Montessori's writings on original sin appear to be well within Christian orthodoxy. As in the quotes cited above, Montessori explicitly affirmed, "The Bible tells us that man was made in the image of God and that Original Sin disturbed the Divine Plan."[51] Additionally, as a devout Roman Catholic, her view of original sin should be understood as in line with the Catholic church, which affirmed at the Council of Trent that sin is passed down "by propagation, not by imitation" (Montessori did not write against this position). Furthermore, her focus on "order" as in the above cited section from Standing's biography is reminiscent of what one might read in Augustine's *Christian Doctrine* regarding "rightly ordered love" and "disordered love,"[52] in that child may or may not do what he is designed by God to do. His orderly behavior does not necessarily indicate goodness just as his disorderly behavior does not necessarily indicate badness.

Montessori's View of Conversion and Redemption

The evangelical Christian holds that when an individual places his faith in Jesus Christ, he is saved (Rom 10:9; Acts 3:19). One's faith in the gospel message

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[50] Montessori as quoted by Standing, *Maria Montessori*, 181–82.

[51] Maria Montessori, *The Holy Mass*, 295.

[52] "Now he is a man of just and holy life who forms an unprejudiced estimate of things, and keeps his affections also under strict control, so that he neither loves what he ought not to love, nor fails to love what he ought to love, nor loves that more which ought to be loved less, nor loves that equally which ought to be loved either less or more, nor loves that less or more which ought to be loved equally." Augustine of Hippo, Christian Doctrine, book I, chs. 27–28, in A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 530.

(1 Cor 15:3–4) and repentance (Acts 2:38) enables him to be counted right before and redeemed to God (Rom 3:24; 2 Cor 5:21). For the evangelical, conversion and redemption are central components of faith. Although Montessori held to the need for conversion, her views on the topic are quite in line with her Catholic faith—something of which the evangelical Christian educator should be aware. Regarding her view of conversion, she writes in *The Montessori Method*:

> If we try to think of parallels in the life of adults, we are reminded of the phenomenon of conversion, of the superhuman heightening of the strength of martyrs and apostles, of the constancy of missionaries, of the obedience of monks. Nothing else in the world, except such things, is on a spiritual height equal to the discipline of the "Children's Houses."[53]

As is evidenced, in this statement, conversion is certainly important to Montessori.

That being recognized, Montessori's concept of conversion as articulated in her writings appears quite different from the Christ-centered evangelical view. For instance, she writes, "Set yourselves free from all bonds and all measurements and lay hold of the one thing needful: to be alive, to feel; this was the revelation made by Christ."[54] Or again, "He, who is alive, however, is not only capable of reacting to a stimulus very much less intense than a red-hot iron; he who lives and feels may perfect himself—and this is life."[55] She writes of the person who "willed, willed perpetually, with all his strength":

> It was thus he saved himself from futility and perdition, and worked for his own immortality. And it is something of the same sort that we desire to bring about in our children by the education of the will; we wish them to learn to save themselves from the vanities that destroy man, and concentrate on work which causes the inner life to expand, and leads to great undertakings; we wish them to work for their own immortality.[56]

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[53] Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 349.

[54] Maria Montessori, *The Advanced Montessori Method*. Vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2016), 245.

[55] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 256.

[56] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 143.

In statements like these, Montessori does not focus on the exclusivity of the gospel's claims in any way. For the evangelical, at best she is vague and ambiguous; at worst, she presents an almost universalist Catholic faith. To be clear, she makes the point elsewhere that this redemption is only possible through Jesus, whom she refers to as "the Lamb that taketh away the sin of the world."[57] In this way, her views on conversion and redemption are certainly far more broad and Catholic that those of the evangelical Christian.

Montessori's Hermeneutical Approach to Scripture

Any reader of Montessori's works cannot help but note her extensive use of Scripture throughout. However, it is worth noting that her use of Scripture often seems to violate a literal reading of the passage as evangelicals would understand it. It often appears that she pulls passages out of context to fit her needs and prove her points. Examples are numerous and can be found throughout her writings.

In one instance in *The Secret of Childhood*, Montessori uses Matthew 8:20 and Luke 9:58 in reference to the child whom she relates to the messiah "whom the prophets said that He had no place to lay his head or move his feet."[58] In the original context, these passages refer to Jesus as the "Son of Man" who had "nowhere to lay his head." These passages are not about children. Another example is from *The Formation of Man*, when Montessori quotes a passage from Psalm 45 (Ps 44 in the Vulgate) that refers to the king of Israel. Montessori applies it to all humans:

> The ideal, the proposed aim, however, must be common to all. Its realization must lead to what has been said in regard to man in the Scriptures: *Specie tua et pulchritudine tua intende, prospere procede et regna*!" [Vulgate Ps 44:5; English Ps

[57] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 257.

[58] Montessori writes, "The child struggling to build up the man in him is like the Messiah, whom the prophets said that He had no place to lay His head or move His feet." Montessori, *Secret of Childhood*, 66.

> 45:4]. We might paraphrase it thus: "Understand thyself and thy beauty, proceed prosperously in thine environment, rich and full of miracles, and reign over it!"[59]

Although she makes an intriguing point from the passage as an illustration to develop her argument, she does not do so in accordance with the context of the passage.

This is not to say that Montessori always handles Scripture inaccurately and non-contextually. Sometimes she uses it quite in accordance with what appears to be the literal meaning. For example, she quotes Matthew 6:27 in stating, "Who, as the Gospel says, can by taking thought add one cubit to his stature,"[60] and uses it in the way it seems to have been intended. Or again, when she cites Mark 10:18, "None is good save God," to make the point that "Goodness is the attribute of God. He who creates is good, only creation is good."[61] To summarize, the evangelical reader of Montessori's writings must be careful to weigh and examine each instance of her use of Scripture. Although she certainly depends on a Christian theological framework and cites Scripture extensively, this does not mean that she always uses Scripture correctly. This should cause pause for the evangelical Christian to avoid accepting Montessori's theology uncritically.

Comparison of Orthodox Christian View and Montessori's View

The chart below compares Montessori's views (summarized, not in her own words) to those held by historic, orthodox Christianity, thereby demonstrating how her approach aligns and diverges from biblical doctrine related to theological anthropology:

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[59] Maria Montessori, *The Formation of Man* (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2007), 14–15.

[60] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 8.

[61] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 226.

Table 3. Comparison of orthodox Christian view and Montessori's view related to theological anthropology

Doctrine	Orthodox Christian View	Montessori's View
I. Creation of Humans	The Lord God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing (Gen 1–2; Heb 11:3; Col 1:16; Isa 45:12; John 1:3). He created man and women in his image (Gen 1:26–28; 2:7).	Montessori recognized that there is a God of the Universe and attributed the creation of man, with the capacity to reflect divine attributes, to this God.
Science and Nature	Science involves the discovery and exploration of God's creation, namely nature (Prov 25:2; Job 38:4; Eccl 1:13; Heb 3:4). General revelation involves what can be known about God through the natural order (Ps 19:1–6; Rom 1:20; Matt 5:45).	The work of Science can only assist Nature, but is it Nature, not Science, that brings forth the physical and internal development of humans.
Characteristics of Children	Children are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26–28; 2:7). God knows and values them even before birth (Ps 139:14; Jer 1:5). Jesus welcomed the children (Mark 10:14). Parents are to train up children in the way of the Lord (Prov 22:6; Eph 6:1).	Children are not fully formed little adults and infants are their own man. The living man within the child is not yet perfected and has to form himself, for he is not yet an adult.
II. Composition of Humans	Humans are composed of material and immaterial parts, physical and non-physical, body and soul/spirit (Gen 2:7; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb 4:12; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eccl 12:7).	Children are spiritual creatures, and the spiritual aspect of a child's soul is inextricably connected to the life of the body.
Children Do Not Live by Bread Alone	"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4; Deut 8:3; John 6:35).	Children need not only physical bread for sustenance, they also need spiritual bread to nourish the soul.
III. Freedom and Responsibility of Humans	Humans are free in choice and responsible for actions (Rom 10:11–13), yet God is fully sovereign (Eph 1:11; Rom 8:28; Matt 10:29–31). Apart from Christ, humans are in bondage to sin (Rom 3:23; 6:23; John 8:44; Gal 5:1).	Montessori advocated the principle of liberty of the pupil, which permits a development of individual, spontaneous manifestations of the child's nature.
Order and Chaos	The Lord is a God of order, not of chaos (1 Cor 14:33). Creation is ordered (Gen 1:31; Ps 104:19), yet sin produces chaos and disrupts that order (John 10:10; Jas 1:15).	Montessori described how children are not naughty but are curious creatures who are seeking to make sense and order of the world around them.
IV. Fall and Redemption of Humans	God created all things good (Gen 1:31), yet due to human sin, creation is in a cursed state (Rom 8:18–20; Gen 3:17). One day, God will restore all things (Rev 21:1–3). Humans are redeemed only through faith in Christ (Gal 2:16; Rom 10:17; John 5:24).	Man is moral and his conscience distinguishes humans from animals. Montessori makes a clear distinction between the essence of human nature and the love of Jesus Christ. A moral man without love is dead.
Physical and Spiritual Redemption	Sin is the transgression of the Law of God (1 John 3:4; Josh 1:18; Rom 6:23). Jesus Christ was the propitiation of sins (1 John 2:2, Rom 3:25).	Man's insensibility to evil leads to the death of the soul. Montessori believed that children have the capacity within to perfect or "save" themselves.

To summarize, evangelical Christians can accept much of Montessori's approach to education, even as they ought not accept her entire approach uncritically. Oftentimes, Montessori addresses the issue correctly, particularly in regard to the spirituality of children, yet she seldom goes as far as evangelical Christian educators would be willing to go in their beliefs. For example, when Montessori refers to the statement, "Man does not live by bread alone"[62] (cf. Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4; Luke 4:4), she articulates well the spiritual need of children.[63] However, she does not here explicitly acknowledge the exclusivity of Christ in salvation. Although at points, Montessori clearly emphasizes the saving power of Jesus Christ, she does not focus exclusively on the biblical teachings of Christ. As such, she is quite more ecumenical than evangelical Christians would be in their theological position. Again, Montessori was not evangelical; she was Catholic. Yet unlike her secular educational counterparts, Montessori does recognize biblical connections and utilizes these truths in her writings and philosophy of education. The gospel message (especially as defined by orthodox Christianity as recorded in passages such as 1 Cor 15:1–6) is not clearly articulated in Montessori's writings, even as aspects of the gospel message are alluded to with frequency.

Step Four: Identify Appropriative Outlets

With these considerations in mind, the Montessori method can be incorporated into a Christian philosophy of education, given the above caveats. As Knight astutely comments:

> It is a part of the task of the Christian educator to evaluate the assumptions underlying these theories in the light of Christian philosophy, and then to build a personal educational theory that utilizes, where helpful, the discoveries of the educational philosophers and theorists. That conclusion does not imply the

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[62] See Maria Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 16–20, 240–42 and Maria Montessori, *Pedagogical Anthropology* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1913), 126–27.

[63] Montessori writes, "For if man does not live by material bread alone, neither does he live solely by intellectual bread." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 242.

> wholesale adoption of a theory, but rather the building of a theory of Christian education upon a Christian philosophic position.[64]

In contrast to that of many educational theorists, Montessori's holistic vision of education is not all that far from what the Christian educator readily embraces. The major distinctions are as follows. The orthodox Christian educator will: (1) reject Montessori's assertion that children are capable of learning—especially the gospel message—completely on their own, without the active teaching of an adult (or at the very least, a peer); (2) hold to a similar—though perhaps slightly nuanced—understanding of original sin and its implications for humanity; (3) place a greater focus on the need for conversion/redemption; and (4) recognize the inconsistent hermeneutic with which Montessori often interpreted Scripture. In this way, Montessori's overarching holistic vision can be embraced, while still rejecting some of her conclusions.[65]

Montessori's overarching holistic vision of education can be appropriated in a variety of settings. Jeong asserts, "The Montessori Method can be proposed as one of the most feasible school reform alternatives."[66] Perhaps most simply, Montessori's holistic vision can be incorporated into early childhood and elementary education classrooms. However, it is not a far step to propose that her approach can be incorporated into a variety of Christian settings: church education, secondary education, as well as perhaps higher education. The holistic nature of the Montessori Method—although originally focused on children—is broadly applicable to many settings since adolescents and adults, like children, are holistic beings. Two specific ways in which this holistic vision of education can be applied are the role of the directress and the prepared environment.

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[64] Knight, *Philosophy & Education*, 146.

[65] It is certainly true that some of Montessori's principles will not apply to culture today. Miller comments, "In assessing Montessori's vision . . . it is useful to separate the *principle* that the growing child requires a spiritual home that enables the true self to develop from the *prescription* of what that environment must entail." Miller, "Nourishing the Spiritual Embryo," 20.

[66] Jeong, "Montessori Reflecting Biblical Anthropology," 323.

Regarding the role of the directress, Christian educators would do well to prioritize student-centered learning. Although this looks different depending on the context, the Christian teacher can employ various projects and self-directed learning activities in the classroom. Some possible examples include actively encouraging students to find what interests them most, treating students as fellow image bearers, and providing opportunities for meaningful learning. As Christian educators facilitate learning by means of guiding, helping, and encouraging, they simultaneously embrace Montessori's holistic vision of education as well the biblical mandate to care for their students as made in the image of God.

Regarding the role of the prepared environment, Christian educators can set the scene in such a way to maximize a child's learning potential. By using resources such as child-sized furniture and sensory learning materials, the teacher provides an atmosphere that encourages the enjoyment of learning. Simple steps such as adjusting the classroom lighting, providing practical life materials, and offering shelf activities that align with the students' interest and ability levels provide meaningful experiences for children to thrive. By providing an intentionally prepared environment, the Christian educator treats children in a way that encourages their independence, autonomy, creativity, and love for learning.

Conclusion

In one way or another, educators will adapt and appropriate educational methods to their particular setting and situation: both secular educators as well as Christian educators. Ironically though, even as the Montessori approach to education has been embraced by numerous secular educators, it aligns far closer to the worldview of the orthodox Christian. In this way, although one should not accept it uncritically, the Montessori approach can be enthusiastically embraced by the evangelical Christian.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes this study by considering implications for Christian educators and suggests potential avenues for further study.

Research Purpose and Questions

This study provided a survey of Montessori's works through the examination of her primary source literature. This study further analyzed Montessori's writings by using the Inverse Consistency Protocol to examine which aspects of Montessori's educational method can be appropriated by the Christian educator. The goal was to use this four-phase protocol to envision redemptive maturity, read for receptivity, employ reflective discernment, and identify appropriative outlets.[67]

The four questions that guided the research for this thesis, considering the relationship between the Montessori method and historic, orthodox Christian thought were as follows:

1. In what ways is the educational model of Maria Montessori, as expressed in her writings, congruent with historic, orthodox Christian thought?

2. In what ways is the educational model of Maria Montessori, as expressed in her writings, incongruent with historic, orthodox Christian thought?

3. What aspects of the educational perspective of Maria Montessori, as expressed in her writings, are useful in Christian contexts?

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[67] John David Trentham states, "These four phases outline and annotate a process of reading the social sciences theologically, in order to guide the practical task of appropriation." John David Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2): Engaging the Appropriating Models of Human Development," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 488.

4. What aspects of the educational perspective of Maria Montessori, as expressed in her writings, are not useful in Christian contexts?

The goal of this researcher, therefore, was to provide a theological analysis of Montessori's work documented in her own writings to determine if/what can be approapriated for Christian education. By using the Inverse Consistency Protocol, this study examined the primary source literature of Maria Montessori and thereby offered a theological analysis of her work.

Maria Montessori sought to provide a revolutionary approach to childhood education. Through her holistic vision of education which focused on the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual development of children—Montessori provided opportunities for children to naturally develop their passion for learning. This holistic vision of education undergirded all aspects of Montessori's method, principles, and practices. Although little has been written regarding a theological analysis of the Montessori Method, this thesis has attempted to do this through analyzing her method using Trentham's Inverse Consistency Protocol. Specifically, this thesis has proposed ways in which Montessori's holistic vision of education is congruent/incongruent with historic, orthodox Christian thought. It suggests aspects of Montessori's educational perspective that are useful/not useful in Christian contexts especially regarding the role of the directress and the prepared environment. As Christian educators continually seek to refine their own approaches to teaching and learning, the Montessori method provides some much-needed clarity on the importance of the holistic and spiritual development of children.

Research Implications

Montessori proposed an alternative model of education that she viewed as a comprehensive system that takes into account the holistic development of children from birth to adulthood. Throghout her lifetime of studying children, Montessori discovered that under certain circumstances ("a prepared environment") and nurturing guidance from

the teacher (whom she referred to as the "directress"), the child could realize his or her true potential. Through Montessori's unique perspective on the child, the role of the directress, and her approach regarding the classroom as a prepared environment, she sought to nurture the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects of children.

Jaeuk Jeong acknowledges that, "no one single system can be complete in all the possible educational purposes."[68] As such, the researcher does not promote a wholesale adoption of the Montessori method, however, the Montessori method should not be disregarded either. The Montessori system has been proven to be effective model in the education of children that helps facilitate the learning process. If children are understood as holistic beings, it becomes apparent that they learn holistically as well. If this is the case, then it corresponds that humans in general likewise learn best in a holistic manner, where the teacher seeks to engage not only the mind, but also the emotional and spiritual aspects of the student. Duane and Muriel Elmer state, "We teach and learn for wholeness; the undivided life; building the seamless tapestry of our character where our words and our actions merge as one, mutually reinforcing each other toward integrity—the journey to Christlikeness."[69] Montessori provides a model of education that focuses on the holistic development of children—including their spiritual formation. As one seeks to understand this system of education, perhaps its greatest strengths are its emphasis on the child as a spiritual being and its focus on the spiritual development of children.

Recommendations for Christians

For the Christian who is curious or hesitant about Montessori education, this study suggests that it should not be accepted uncritically. While considering and choosing any educational model, one has to be intentional to carefully examine all aspects. When

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[68] Jaeuk Jeong, "Montessori as a School Reform Alternative Reflecting Biblical Anthropology," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 29, no. 3 (2020): 321.

[69] Muriel I. Elmer and Duane H. Elmer, *The Learning Cycle: Insights for Faithful Teaching from Neuroscience and the Social Sciences*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 37.

examining the Montessori method, one will find that its roots are not far from an orthodox Christian view of humans. No educational approach is completely neutral. However, for the Christian educator, Montessori's view of children as spiritual beings created in the image of God is preferred to those approaches advocated by secular educators. Montessori's observation of children is described in detail and documented in over thirty books. Her comprehensive approach to education was developed over her lifetime and continued on through her training courses for teachers. Christians ought to view her educational approach as a thorough and viable option for Christian education.

Others such as Sofia Cavalletti and Jerome Berryman have recognized Montessori's intention and have since developed their own adaptations of the Montessori method, mainly for Catholic and Episcopalian churches. In more recent times, Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May have advocated for evangelical churches to consider the Contemplative-Reflective model of ministry that stems from Montessori education.

Ade Bethune recognized that superficial aspects of the Montessori method have been applied but the core of Montessori's method seems to have been largely neglected. Bethune writes:

> In the last fifty years, many educators have accepted various facets of Dr. Montessori's method. For example, small colorful furniture, pleasant surroundings, educational toys—all these have become a commonplace in the twentieth century. They were unheard of in the nineteenth. Dr. Montessori was a pioneer in promoting them, and in this superficial respect, her work succeeded. But, for the rest, after a very enthusiastic beginning, her method was largely disregarded, and all but totally so in the United States.[70]

There are many ways in which the Montessori method can be applied including these "superficial aspects" of child-sized furniture and a pleasant classroom aesthetic. However, what is often overlooked is Montessori's reason for all these elements—her emphasis on the spiritual development of children. Christian educators would do well to

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[70] Ade Bethune, introduction to *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy: The Montessori Approach* by Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi (Staten Island: Alba House, 1964), 10.

consider the Montessori method as an educational means to encourage the spiritual development of children. In this way, the Montessori perspective of learning which focuses on the triad of child, teacher, and environment, could be used as the mechanism or educational means to bring about true transformative learning.

Contribution of Research to the Precedent Literature/Montessori Studies

Although Montessori's Catholic background is widely known and often cited, to date, there has been no comprehensive analysis of Montessori's writings and their viability for appropriation from an orthodox Christian perspective. This being recognized, Montessori's approach has been found widely applicable on a universal scale for various people from different faith backgrounds. Under these conditions, the present researcher sought to contribute to this growing body of knowledge by analyzing the primary source literature of Maria Montessori, in her own words, from a confessional Christian perspective. The goal of this study was to provide a theological analysis of Montessori's work documented in her own writings to determine what can be appropriated for Christian education. By using the Inverse Consistency Protocol, the researcher examined the primary literature of Maria Montessori, formed an understanding of what Montessori herself articulated, and offered a theological analysis of her work.

In the precedent literature, there are others who consider aspects of the Montessori method that deal with the spirituality or spiritual devleopment of children in a broad sense. This thesis contributes to the literature base by analyzing Montessori's words from a distinctly Christian perspective. Unlike, the claim made by Karen Bennetts and Jane Bone that, "the spirituality to which Montessori most often referred was universal and secular,"[71] the researcher holds to the view that Montessori's perspective

[71] Karen Bennetts and Jane Bone, "Adult Leadership and the Development of Children's Spirituality: Exploring Montessori's Concept of the Prepared Environment," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 24:4 (2019): 356–70, 357.

was distinctly Catholic. Montessori builds on an understanding of theological anthropology that resembles a view to which most evangelical Christians would hold. Montessori's view of children lines up in more areas than one would think and includes many similarities to what the Bible teaches about children.

Areas of Future Research

This study was initially limited to the primary source writings of Maria Montessori (chapter 2), though past Christian critiques of her method were subsequently surveyed and analyzed (chapter 3). Since the purpose of this study was to consider Maria Montessori in her own terms, this study did not deal with Christian appropriations or adaptations of her method in school or church contexts. However, this does not mean that there is no room for further research and application in these Christian contexts. On the contrary, there are ample opportunities for further research in the demonstration and viability of this method in Christian education—Christian school and church/ministry contexts—especially in the evangelical circles where there has been little developed. This thesis does not attempt to provide a specific Christian adaptation of the Montessori approach, however, this is an area that could be expanded as a Montessori-inspired curriculum could be developed and implemented for evangelical churches (something that Sofia Cavalletti developed for Catholics and Jerome Berryman for Episcopalians).

One area that can be expanded upon is how the Montessori method could be used as the educational means to bring about school reform in evangelical Christian school settings. Jaeuk Jeong is one of the few evangelicals who has advocated the Montessori approach as a method for school reform.[72] The steps necessary for how this might be accomplished practically would be a worthwhile study. Additionally, empirical studies (qualitative and quantitative) as to the long-term educational value of a Christian

[72] Jeong makes this link to school reform in his article, "Montessori as a School Reform Alternative Reflecting Biblical Anthropology."

Montessori school as compared to a secular Montessori school might further demonstrate the implicitly Christian nature of Montessori's approach. It would be intriguing to see if there was a measurable difference in student outcomes.

Unlike popular belief, Montessori education was not specific to young children. It was acknowledged by Montessori that her method had room to grow in the areas of adolescent and adult learning. Montessori herself did not write about this extensively, however, there is potential for developing the Montessori method in areas such as the Christian education of teenagers and adults in schools, churches, and theological higher education institutions such as Bible colleges, universities, and seminaries. Montessori adult education has been limited to those with learning disabilities and second language aquisition. It would of value to develop a Montessori adult education, specific to Christian education. Were this to be developed, it would be worthwhile to evaluate spiritual formation along with student outcomes through measurable, empirical studies.

Conclusion

In many ways, Maria Montessori was known as a woman of education and science. What is rarely discussed is that she was also a woman of faith. Montessori wrote, "The vision of the teacher should be at once precise like that of the scientist, and spiritual like that of the saint. The preparation for science and the preparation for sanctity should form a new soul, for the attitude of the teacher should be at once positive, scientific and spiritual."[73] In her life and practice, Montessori sought to exemplify both: the scientist and the saint. In this way, one cannot easily divide her method from her beliefs, her educational vision from her Catholic faith. When writing about her scientific education, Montessori states, "When it shall have succeeded in penetrating the inner man and there

[73] Maria Montessori, *The Advanced Montessori Method*. Vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2016), 104.

make manifest the laws of life and the realities of existence, a great Christian light will surely shine upon men; and maybe children, like the angels over Bethlehem, will sing the hymn invoking peace between science and faith."[74]

[74] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 199–200.

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ABSTRACT

A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EDUCATIONAL METHOD OF MARIA MONTESSORI USING AN INVERSE CONSISTENCY PROTOCOL

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The Montessori approach to education has been embraced by a wide variety of educators around the world. Ironically, though, as secular educators have accepted Maria Montessori's pedagogical methods, little research has been conducted by Christians especially in relation to the driving force of her approach: the intrinsic spirituality of children. Through the consideration of Montessori's primary source writings, the aim of this thesis is to summarize this often-neglected component of children's spirituality in Montessori's own words. In so doing, the spiritual nature of the Montessori method is articulated and compared to an orthodox Christian view of children's spirituality. The researcher examines Montessori's educational perspective with specific attention to her view of the child, environment, and teacher as well as her Catholic Christian foundations. Utilizing the Inverse Consistency Protocol, the researcher provides a theological analysis of the Montessori method to determine what is congruent/incongruent with the Christian faith and identify what is potentially useful in Christian contexts. The hope is to provide Montessori-curious evangelical Christians some insights into the spiritual nature of this educational phenomenon.

Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction and background of the Montessori method. In chapter 2, the researcher attempts to articulate Montessori's key principles and assertions from her published works (books, articles, and lectures), giving special

attention to how her Catholic faith influenced her view of the spiritual nature of children. Chapter 3 interacts with past Christian sources that have sought to provide analyses of what Montessori said in her writings. Some of these include individuals such as Sofia Cavalletti, Gianna Gobbi, Jerome Berryman, Sonja Stewart, Catherine Stonehouse, and Scottie May. Chapter 4 builds upon the prior two chapters by employing the Inverse Consistency Protocol as a method to analyze and evaluate the final iteration of Montessori's writings from an orthodox, Christian perspective. Lastly, chapter 5 concludes this study by considering implications for Christian educators and suggests potential avenues for further study.

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