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WHY DO CHILDREN PUSH OUR BUTTONS?

Nora Minassian

He is only about ten months old, sitting on his mother's lap in the bus. He playfully touches the hood of the person sitting in the front. The mother says no. Suddenly grasping the hood becomes an important project for the child. Now, with a bigger smile, he reaches with his whole body to take hold of the hood. He keeps on trying until the mother ends up having to move to another seat.

The teacher says: "Now we will be completely quiet and only write". Less than a minute of silence, a child asks if she is writing correctly. Then, another one says he has written everything right and so a wave of talking starts slowly travelling from one child to the next until the teacher gives a warning. After couple of minutes, the first child who started talking says that she is done. The teacher gives another warning to stay quiet till everyone finishes writing. Before long, the child forgets that she needs to be quiet and starts chitchatting with the child next to her. The teacher asks her to leave the classroom.

In an all day school, a child is lying on a sofa and listening to his iPod. iPods are not allowed and the sofa is for those children who are feeling ill. The teacher asks him to put away the iPod; otherwise, he will have to confiscate it. The child doesn't hear. The teacher goes to him and warns again. No response. The teacher patiently continues to warn the child and the volume of his voice grows with every warning. By now, the teacher is angry. After about five warnings, the child puts the iPod in his pocket.



What are the children saying when they do other than or exactly the opposite of what we tell them? Do they want to test us? Do they want to push our buttons?

Trees in nature can help us get to know the children better. What we see of the trees is only their outer appearance. We don't see the roots that ground them and keep them upright. The roots are hidden in the earth.

Even before growing and becoming a tree, the seed of the tree has its life there in the invisible. The potentials, forms and characteristics of the future tree are all hidden in that small living seed. When we look at the growing tree, we often forget the invisible seed from which they were born. We often forget the hidden roots that are allowing them to grow.

Looking at the children, we often forget the world that they and we come from. Before we were born, we were living in a different reality than the one we are living here on the earth. Children help us remember this world. They bring us closer to the invisible super-sensible world we all come from. By learning about the children's sense of time and space, and by observing their behavior, we can remember how this super-sensible world is.

Time for children has no meaning, especially for the very young child. He is living in eternity. Space for children has no limitations, no boundaries. They have to learn the boundaries of our space. Children come to the earth with a complete trust that everything around them is good and worthy of imitation. Thus, they imitate what we do. The world they come from, the super-sensible world is good. They believe everything we tell them. In the super-sensible world, there is only what is to believe, only the truth. As they grow, they forget the invisible world and start remembering only the visible world, just like us, the so-called grown ups. We help them learn and remember the visible physical world. This activity of forgetting and remembering is a necessity of life. Yet, it is not an easy process. It is the process of dying in the invisible spiritual and being born in the visible physical.

When children do the opposite of what we tell them, they want to help us remember the world we come from before they have to forget. They remind us that the spiritual world has no such limitations and boundaries as the physical one. They have no intention to test us or push any buttons. These are grown ups' concepts.

They remind us that there are no buttons to push in eternity. They remind us that we are not limited beings and our strength to learn, to grow and to become is not confined to this world. It has its source in the spiritual, the eternal. They instill in us the trust we once had in enduring goodness and truth. They help us experience the eternal nature of patience and love. After we are patient with them long enough, we see how they slowly start doing what we tell them to do trusting that what we tell them is good and true.

Nora Minassian is a priest of The Christian Community working in Washington D.C.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER FOR A CHILD

Adam Bittleston, in Meditative Prayers for Today

In thy breath the light of the sun
In thy bread the salt of the earth
In thy ears true words of love
Sustain thy growing, changing life,
That thy spirits will may work
That thy soul be warmed by joy,
That thy body's world be built.

FOUR PARENTS

Cynthia Hindes

Every child actually has two sets of parents. One mother and father are the human ones through which each of us are born. The second mother is the Earth herself, out of which and into which all of us are born. Our other father is a 'sky' father, a heavenly Father who sends us to earth and bids us eventually to return home.



Nautilus, Josephine Wall, www.josephinewall.co.uk

Having this other, broader set of parents, Earth Mother and Heavenly Father, means that the soul of the child has two directions to send its honor and love. In one direction it honors its connection with Mother Earth (and its earthly parents). For it is love of Mother Earth that has drawn the child's soul to return to earth again and again. It is gratitude toward the earth, the desire to know the earth and work with her, that have brought the child to us.

But coming to earth has meant leaving the child's other home with the divine Father, whom it also deeply loves. In order that we human beings not be banished from our Father for our entire lifetime, we are allowed to visit His house every night. That is why we sleep; in order to visit our Father's house, where we are renewed. Sleep is a natural form of prayer, an unconscious worship.

The child's soul, spanned as it is between heaven and earth, hopes in daily life to be able to practice its connection with both heaven and earth together in some sort of harmony. It seeks to revere the value

and meaning of the earth, while at the same time recognizing that she, the Earth, is the Bride, the spouse of the heavenly Father.

The child's soul wants to be the child of both its sets of parents. The child seeks in its earthly parents and teachers a reverent, respectful attitude that teaches it how both to best to love Mother Earth, how to become a proper son or daughter of Earth, while at the same time still honoring, remembering and being guided by our origins in the Father. The child wants a life practice based not so much on innocence, or maintaining purity, but on redemption—on how our necessary inexperience, the inevitable mistakes, the errors can be transformed, redeemed, made good. For the underlying question for all human beings is: how can our mistakes, our failures and errors be redeemed and made to serve the good that wants to come toward us out of the future? How can we find, in the words of the poet Antonio Machado, "... a beehive inside my heart...[where] the golden bees/ Were making white combs/And sweet honey/From my old failures".

When my children were creating their good books in Waldorf schools, I was astonished by how they were taught to handle their mistakes, their mess-ups in writing in their books: mistakes were not ignored; they were not expunged with white-out; no start-overs; they were incorporated into the larger design element of the page, turned into vines and leaves and flowers. They were accepted, handled and redeemed, made to serve a larger design. Something similar happened in the social sphere—difficulties were turned into opportunities, viewed as teachable moments, to learn new skills and make amends.

The child's soul seeks some sort of resonance between what it feels as its two larger homes, and what is practiced in the family and school culture. The soul feels great joy when its two origins, Mother Earth and Heavenly Father, are honored together in unity with wonder, respect and reverence. Grace before meals honors Mother Earth:

Earth who gives to us this food
Sun who makes it ripe and good
Dear sun, dear earth, by you we live
Our loving thanks to you we give.

A verse or prayer before sleep prepares our visit to our Father's home. One can imagine the stars as the twinkling windows in the Father's house toward which we confidently move:



From Evening to Morning, Langen

As I go to sleep each night
 An angel watches o'er me
 And fills my soul with flood-
 ing light
 And guides me to the stars
 so bright
 And blesses me each morn-
 ing.

And in the morning:

Sun, you shine above my head,
 Stars, you shine above fields and
 cities,
 Animals, you stir upon the earth-
 mother,
 Plants, you live through powers
 of earth and sun,
 Stones, you make firm animal
 and plant
 And me, the human being,
 In whom God's might
 Lives in head and heart,
 Who walks with God's power
 Throughout the world.

Rudolf Steiner



From Evening to Morning, Langen

Such practices around the transi-
 tion times of the day cradle the child's soul, helping it move with ease
 between heaven and earth. Such practices develop in the soul open-
 ness, reverence, strength and confidence in life. They honor the reality
 that in truth we all have four parents.

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PRAYER

Rudolf Steiner. This prayer is ideal for children who are separated from their parent(s)

Round me many beings live,
 Round me there are many things,
 Also in my heart.
 God speaks to the world
 And he speaks best of all
 When I can love everyone, everything.

TRUTH, BEAUTY, AND GOODNESS,
or **Science, Art, and Religion**
Cynthia Hinde

Our humanity, in both our inner and our outer life, rests on three pillars: our thought life, our feeling life and the life of our will. Our thought life is supported by science, that is, by the clarity and grounding that result from the basic search for objective **Truth**. This search for truth through scientific thinking begins to blossom in later childhood. But untruthfulness confuses and wounds any child's soul; it destroys the child's basic trust in human beings, no matter at what age it is encountered.

Our feeling life is supported by art, by the creation of **Beauty**. Our hearts are nourished by activities that create beauty. Beauty, as the poet Keats remarked, is another form of truth. Color, tone, movement each have their own truth. Ugliness tells its own tale. In the ancient stories like Grimm's *Mother Holle*, *Three Little Men in the Woods*, or *The Twelve Months*, ugliness is connect with ignoble, selfish words and actions. Ugliness shrivels and darkens souls. Children, especially in the middle years, need the nourishment of beauty-making in the arts, of stories, so that their hearts grow and expand in generosity.

The third pillar of our humanness, the mysterious life of our will, is supported by striving toward **Goodness**; striving to become those of good will. We strive to find the right word or deed done at the right time; words and deeds of love, perhaps of sacrifice, that spring from regarding the other person as at least of equal importance to ourselves. Such striving toward the good results in social harmony, peacefulness. The very young child especially needs to live in an atmosphere of harmony, love and goodness. Radiant good will, in well-timed words and actions, helps their bodies grow. Just as science supports truth in thinking, and art supports beauty in feeling, religion, that is, a basic reverence, wonder, and sense of connectedness, supports our striving toward becoming human beings of good will.

Objective truth exists in the world; beauty exists in the world; goodness is something only human beings create, just as evil is also of our making. It has been the attempt of all religions down through the ages to help human beings to avoid doing evil and to create the good.

Scientific truth, artistic beauty, and religious practice are pillars in a child's education. Religion helps us infuse all actions and words with the underlying mood of respect and reverence that is the basis of creating the good, of finding the right word or deed at the right time. This mood is based on the knowledge that we have all come down to earth from a divine realm in which truth, beauty and goodness prevail. Children (and all of us) have come to earth hoping to find here

a reflection of this world of our origins. What we may find instead are lies, ugliness, selfishly destructive ill will, a soul-sickening darkness and distance from a divine world of light and beauty from which we have come. The stronger among us may come to realize that it is up to us to create a world of truth, of beauty and of goodness here on earth; that in so doing, we will be bringing a little bit of our heavenly origins, a breath of heaven, to earth.

A sense of urgency for the actualization of these ideals of truth, beauty and goodness stood behind the founding of The Christian Community Movement for Religious Renewal. The following verse, given for students by Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Waldorf education, illustrates how these three qualities weave together to create strong human beings. Notice in particular how the whole is suffused with wonder and trust in divine guidance—a very elementary mood of soul that we can call basically religious (*religare*—to bring together).

To wonder at beauty,
Stand guard over truth,
Look up to the noble,
Decide for the good;
This leadeth us truly
To purpose in living,
To right in our doing
To peace in our feeling,
To light in our thought,
And teaches us trust
In the working of God
In all that there is;
In the width of the world,
In the depth of the soul.



The Three Archangels and Tobias, 1497
Francesco Botticini

We can come to realize that it is up to us to create these qualities within our own sphere of influence. As adults it starts with our own souls, as we work on our own integrity, on our own relationship to truth, to beauty and goodness. Even when lacking or damaged in our own upbringing, we adults can establish a relationship of reverence to divine guidance operating in the world; we can strengthen our own basic inner connection of trust to the world without and the world within. Even without formal artistic training, we can surround ourselves with beauty, create beauty on every level. Even without a scientific education, we can strive to be tactfully honest and objective, truthful with ourselves and with others.

Without this work on ourselves, we can hardly hope to create such qualities for and in our children. But even with a minimum of such efforts, however humble, our striving quickly extends into how we conduct our family's life. We will try to create familial surroundings where goodness, beauty and truth prevail. Most likely our strivings in

this direction will result in greater harmony and a measure of peacefulness in our family life. These in turn feed into life in general, school and workplace. For where truth, beauty and goodness are cultivated at home, the child's soul will resonate to these qualities.

PRAYER

For children between 3 and 14

May you grow
In joy before the wonders of the
world
In grief over the pain of others
Beginning to hear
The call to help and heal
According to the gentle light
Of the Angel who guards you.

Adam Bittleston



Guiding Angel, Sulamith Wulfing

PRACTICING RELIGION WITH OUR CHILDREN

Cynthia Hindes

The Christian Community offers several activities for children. These activities are a nourishing, supportive extension of family life and are possible at all because the parents create religious substance through their own participation in the adult communion service, The Act of Consecration of Man.

For children there is first of all Baptism. In The Christian Community Baptism is a children's baptism. It does not make the child a member of the church, for membership will be his or her free choice as an adult. But Baptism receives the child like a seed into the community of those who are aware of the working of Christ. The community promises to carry this child within itself and to nourish the child's relationship with God.

For the pre-school child, the practice of religion takes place mostly within the family--prayers at bedtime, grace before meals, age-appropriate fairy-tales and stories which nurture the child's natural openness and reverence, mostly by avoiding precocious intellectualism. Young children are always welcome to attend the Baptisms of other children, which helps strengthen their connection with their own christening. Strong relationships cultivated with their godparents also strengthen their connection to the community. Small children (below first grade) are also warmly welcome to attend Festival celebrations, such as an Easter or Advent garden for children. In addition, they may sit with

their parents in The Sunday Service for Children, if older siblings are attending, or as their own participation approaches.

With their entry into first grade the child steps into the wider school community as a learner. This is also the case in religion. To the practice of religion at home and the festival gardens is now added the practice of religion together with other children at the **Sunday Service for Children**. It is worshipping the divine together--that is why there needs to be at least two children. Each child is greeted individually at the door. But the prayer the children speak is choral. The senses are gently addressed through the picture, the warmth and color, the flowers, and the words. By purposely not being dramatic or overwhelming, we encourage the child to look actively, to seek the divine. The content emphasizes the importance of learning the great lesson of earthly life: that Christ is love's teacher in life's learning and working.

With first grade, **religious instruction** also begins. In the early years it is given mostly in the form of stories, songs and verses. Approaching Confirmation at fourteen, it more often takes the form of discussion. Ideally up to about the age of nine, the emphasis of instruction is on God the Father, as illustrated through fairy-tales, legends, through stories that show the divine wisdom in nature, and through the Old Testament history of the Hebrew people. For fifth graders the emphasis is on the Son and the New Testament. For grades eight and up the emphasis is on the Spirit, that is, how the divine works in individual destinies, in the biographies of those who are servants of the divine.

In the Sunday Service for Children, the heart gently awakens the will to worship God. In religious instruction, the heart gently awakens the head to the understanding of the working of God. They complement and balance one another, developing the child's religious life from both sides, in a way that will enable him or her later to make a free but informed choice about religion as an adult.

During the summer there are two-week **children's camps** and in some regions family camps. These constellations provide another level for the healthy weaving of the religious life into a communal life. Many children form friendships there beyond their own school setting. This special time of daily singing and stories, of making things, of outings and sleeping and eating together, of creating a life together, forms a reservoir of inspiration for the young person for the rest of their lives.

Confirmation at age fourteen is both a culmination and a new beginning. The seed of the young person's religious life, which has been surrounded and nourished by the community, is released into life. For likely the first time the young person attends The Act of Consecration of Man as an independent adult, and for the first time receives his/her first Communion. After this, their attendance is their choice. Many still attend with their families. Much depends on whether there is a group of people their own age. They may want to become counselors in the

children's camps. They may want to attend our **Youth Conferences**. There are also International Youth Conferences where older teens and those in their twenties find their own connections before settling down into the more local communities as young adults. Often it is the Baptism of their own children which stimulates their re-entry as active participants and creators of the life of The Christian Community.

THE SUNDAY SERVICE FOR CHILDREN

Claudio Holland

A newborn child is by nature—even without any affiliations—religious: it is fully and continuously open to every impression, every experience, every human being. It is at one with its environment. Only gradually does it create boundaries for itself. It begins to say "no"; it wants to do everything by itself, and so on. Yet even up to the beginning of the school years, something of this devoted openness remains.

The religious service in which the child stands before the altar, placing itself before the divine world, begins in The Christian Community begins with the entry into school age. How is this Sunday Service for the Children shaped, and what is the meaning of this short, beautiful and concentrated celebration?

Entering a Space of Stillness

It is healthy and important that children be able to move a lot, play and romp, express joy and make noise. For their soul health, however, they also need peace and stillness. In the Sunday Service, the children learn how an inwardly filled silence can arise. When they enter the chapel, they are received at the threshold by a server in vestments. In that the children pause there, they experience not only an outer threshold, but an inner one: now I am entering a spiritual, a soul space. The silence is not there for its own sake: it is an intake of breath, before the children go out again and play and run.

Praying Alone and in Community

By the time they are enrolled in school, the children have not only heard of God, but have also experienced something of Him. In the picture of the Christmas tree with its lights, they have seen how the new heavenly light begins to shine in the darkness of nature. In the image of the Easter egg, they have experienced how all of nature is secretly filled with the power of resurrection, through which new life, new nourishment is possible. Through the celebration of the festivals, religious events have become experiences that are stronger than any abstract explanation.

Perhaps the children, in praying before meals and at bedtime, have also come to experience how God's life enlivens and pulses through the world, through nature, and through us.

To pray at home or alone is one side of religion. Prayer can acquire a greater power when from time to time it is united with the prayer of others. In the Sunday Service the children begin to learn how one can turn to God together with other people, outside of the family context.

Christ, the Spirit of God that Permeates Nature with Life.

When the children come to the Sunday Service, they encounter something familiar in a new way. They already have a connection to God; they already have perceived Him, more or less unconsciously, in the environment, in nature, in human beings, in their parents.

In the Sunday service they find this experience again. They hear of the "Spirit of God" who in stone, plant and animal is just as living and potent as in all human beings. But now He becomes a "Thou", a companion. Above the altar is a picture of the Resurrected One, the human countenance of God's Spirit, toward which the priest gestures. The children stand before the altar and pray together with the priest, raising themselves inwardly to this Spirit of God.



Dying and New Life—the Child's Relationship to Death

Christ appears in the Sunday Service for the Children not only as the God who fills the world of the living, but also as the loving mediator between Life and Death.

The children, who until puberty still have a relationship to heaven that can be taken for granted, also have a different relationship to dying than adults do. If death is not otherwise brought to them differently from outside, children do not experience death as threatening, but rather as a transition into the trusted world in which they existed before they were born.

Thus Christ's painful death on the cross is not mentioned in the Sunday Service, and is first addressed with the Confirmation. Rather Christ is spoken of as He who leads all living things into death so that they can find new life; and all that is not living He leads to life so that it can find entrance into the divine world. In the Sunday Service, death and dying are addressed in a form appropriate for children.

Christ, the Teacher of Human Love

Love is described to the children as the central power of Christ, who works in every human relationship. Love makes all learning, all life, all work possible. Lao-tse said that duty without love creates ill humor. As it says in the Sunday Service, without love, human existence becomes 'desolate and empty'—a fact we can all experience. It is also shown, however, that the love of human beings toward one another enlivens all human work. Christ Himself is the 'teacher of the love of man'.

I Will Seek Him.

The children are not just the audience for the celebration, but are also

actively drawn into it. They pray together, and the priest goes to each of the children, takes their hand and tells them that the Spirit of God will be with them when they seek Him. Each child gives the same response: I will seek Him.

As a first impression, this ever-repeated address, always in the same formulation, can seem strange, even stiff. However the sentence, "I will seek Him" is no formality; it is the simplest, deepest Christian acknowledgment. It is not, 'I belong to Him, or 'I am a better person', but rather, 'I will develop myself, set out on a path, my own path, on which Christ accompanies me, on which the Spirit of God is with me.' The relationship to Christ, to the Spirit of God, is no passive state or vague feeling, but rather an activity, a path, a search.

The Gospel—the History of the Working of God's Spirit

Every Sunday the children hear a different excerpt out of the life and working of Christ. Christ speaks of the reality of the divine world and teaches the people to understand the earth and the world of heaven. He gives the power to reconcile themselves with their destiny to those who are despised and barred from their communities. He heals the sick and fits the tattered body back together into a healthy unit. In the choice of these readings, Christ's suffering and death are omitted. In that the children hear the gospel, 'the good news from the realm of the angels', they form a connection to God as a being who has come to earth, has lived, and since then has remained connected with it.

The Sunday Service as a Preparation for Confirmation

The Confirmation at fourteen, toward which the children are moving, would be excessively demanding without the preparation and practice of ritual events. Religious instruction can achieve one part of this preparation for Confirmation. There the children do not just receive knowledge, but are to be inwardly 'tuned' toward the event. But even the best religious instruction can never replace the practice of communal prayer before the altar. In the Sunday Service, the children receive the best preparation for Confirmation. They receive a self-evident, unbiased relationship to stillness, to ritual, to an encounter with the priest in front of the altar.

CHILDREN'S SUMMER CAMPS OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY



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