

The Question of Saints

— Stephen Spitalny

Last fall around Lantern Walk time, a flurry of questions and replies were exchanged online in a Waldorf early childhood list. This sparked my thinking about festival celebrations in early childhood programs in general, as well as about this particular festival, Martinmas. Many Waldorf early childhood programs and kindergartens celebrate this festival by that title, named for St. Martin, and tell stories about the saint and his deeds. I would like to question that practice and offer some ideas.

One of the foundations of Waldorf education for the young child is to bring the archetype rather than the specific. What is the archetype of festival celebrations? A festival celebrates the coming together of earthly and cosmic forces. Communities of human beings come together in celebrating the harmony of earth and cosmos, of matter and spirit. These seasonal celebrations mark the changing of light, the relation of the earth to the sun, and the connection to what is universal in the cycle of the year. Festivals celebrate points in the year when earth-spirit and world/cosmic-spirit meet.

How is the celebration of a saint different? What is a saint? A saint is a specific human being whom others have come to consider as holy and as living in service of high ideals and divinity. Often saints

are human beings who started out as very imperfect human beings yet who had radical transformations. The point is that a saint is a particular human being. What the young children need, what we can provide them with in our early childhood programs, are archetypal images of the activity of becoming more human, such as those found in fairy and folk tales. Young children are nourished by archetypal images of human-ness rather than specific human beings

To support young children, festivals can be celebrations of the seasons, especially in relation to the sun. Festivals can provide a connection for the children to the natural world around us. The festivals fall in an annual rhythm that can be strengthening to the physical body of the young child. Festival celebrations can also be community-building experiences for young and old.

The kindergarten focus can be on celebrating the divine spark that lives in each of us and upon the divine creator powers of the universe. A powerful guiding image is the light that streams toward us from the sun and stars and the warmth and love into which we can transform that light. That is the central theme around which the variations of individual festivals revolve. It is important that our celebrations are so universal that no one feels excluded. A goal

is that all the families will inwardly experience that each festival speaks to them personally. Through celebrating what is universally human and universally cosmic, the spiritual is celebrated, rather than the specifically religious. Kindergarten festivals present archetypal pictures of divine truths. Festivals for the older children often celebrate developed human beings such as saints. Saints are saved for the grade school years.

I celebrated only a few major festivals in my kindergarten. They include Michaelmas, Lantern Walk (not Martinmas), Evergreen Spiral Garden and an end-of-year Bridge Festival. Each child's birthday was also celebrated. In a sense, every day is a festival in kindergarten, but parents were invited only to these.

I often did celebrate a Lantern Walk evening with my kindergarten. We would make various types of lanterns from year to year and then gather at some dark, outdoor spot and sing lantern songs and walk around with light only from our lanterns and the stars. I would hold it on a non-rainy night when the moon was not very bright sometime in November. I never mentioned anything about St. Martin—it was simply our “Lantern Walk.” For me an integral part of a festival is a story, and in this issue is reproduced one I told for our Lantern Walk (previously published in a past issue of *Gateways*).

The Lantern Walk was part of a late fall celebration of the shortening of days and lengthening of nights that culminates at winter solstice. I tried to make festivals for the young children reflect the human in relation to the cycles of seasons, without any explanation. We just experienced and let the images the children take in do all the “talking.”

Why are saint stories and fables from various cultures told in Second Grade in a Waldorf curriculum? It is because the children in second grade are beginning to become aware their own dark side. Story images act as a guide to overcoming these baser characteristics. Saint stories appropriately wait until second grade. Kindergarten is about the archetypal activity of becoming human.

When considering a festival calendar, there are various possibilities. Some teachers try to honor many religious and spiritual streams by celebrating a mix from different traditions. I prefer trying to contemplatively and creatively get to the essence of a festival and present its universal qualities in celebration of human becoming. The latter approach is by

far harder. It requires us to be creative and awake and think for ourselves. I vote for this hard road to find the universal element in each festival because the rewards are profound. Among the possible rewards are greater senses of community and inclusion when all families feel acknowledged and spoken to through the festival celebration.

In closing, I would like to broach the subject of the “Christ Impulse” that people refer to as standing behind the Waldorf school movement. Some people use this as justification for celebrating festivals with a Christian tinge. Steiner called the “Christ impulse” a universal unifying and connecting impulse that can be active among groups. He also explained, “In the future, it will not matter much whether what Christ is will still be called by that name.” Here is how Dr. Steiner described this “Christ Impulse” in a lecture on January 9, 1916, published under the title *The Universal Human*:

This is one of the meanings of the Mystery of Golgotha: the attainment of the unity of humanity from within. Externally human beings are becoming more and more different. The result will not be sameness but differences all over the earth, and human beings must exert all the more force from within to attain unity...Such differences will always exist because human beings will only gradually be able to attain unity. At the same time, different groups will fight each other tooth and nail about everything concerning their outer life. These are setbacks from earlier epochs that run counter to the Christ impulse, rather than in harmony with it.

Indeed, here we have a very profound meaning of this Christ impulse. Based on true knowledge, we can say it is Christ who keeps human-kind from being fragmented into groups...

In the future, it will not matter much whether what Christ is will still be called by that name. However, a lot will depend on our finding in Christ the spiritual uniter of humanity and accepting that external diversity will increase more and more...

We have to be able to face calmly and courageously the increasing diversity in human nature because we know that we can carry a word into all these

diversities that is not merely a word of speech but one of power. Though there may be groups that fight against each other and though we may even belong to one of them, we know that we can bring something that will express: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" into every group. We know that this "Christ who lives in me" will not lead to the forming of groups; rather, it will bring about the spreading of the glory of the name "human being" over the whole earth....

You are called upon to help in this development, which will lead to something appearing to people in bright clarity, something we cannot yet express because we do not have words for it in our languages, yet something spiritual science works toward. When you feel you belong to such a spiritual stream, and feel at home in it, because you see that it is necessary for human evolution, then you have a right understanding of our spiritual movement – you belong to it in such a way that you rightly understand the greatest of its goals based on your increasing understanding of the contrast between Christ and Lucifer-Ahriman. You understand that this contrast is vital and had to exist...

And again, in Lecture 2 of *The Inner Aspect of the Social Question*, given on February 11, 1919:

...If we expand our interest to embrace with inner tolerance, everything human, and say to ourselves: "Through the fact of my birth I am a prejudiced person; only through being reborn into an all-embracing feeling of fellowship for the thoughts of all men shall I find myself the impulse which is, in truth, the Christ Impulse. If I do not look on myself alone as the source of everything I think, but recog-

nize myself, right down into the depths of my soul, as a member of the human community" – then, my dear friends, one way to the Christ lies open. This is the way, which must today be characterized as the way to the Christ through thinking.

After taking these words to heart, through many long meetings and subsequent, lengthy word-smithing, the Santa Cruz Waldorf School reached agreement on an inclusiveness policy. I offer it as a compass for your consideration towards a new culture of community, connecting, and unity, toward which our festival celebrations can contribute.

A Guiding Principle for an Inclusive (Waldorf) School Culture

A core principle is the creation and maintenance of a school culture that is welcoming and inclusive to families and individuals from all religious traditions. We reflect a balanced and universal spirituality of the human being and nature in our developmentally appropriate curriculum, classroom decoration and festival life. This worldview is based on the anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner, though anthroposophy is not taught to the students. By the end of eighth grade each student will have experienced the panorama of major world religions within the language arts and history curricula.

The strength of this principle rests on the clear and open communicating and working together between teachers and parents. ♦

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