

Johann Christoph Arnold

Why Children Matter



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The Plough Publishing House

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Dedicated to all the children of the world.



*The author and his wife, Verena, with their granddaughter
Stephanie Jean Rimes (September 3 – October 5, 2008)*

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A Note to the Reader

from Timothy Michael Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York

Dear Reader,

Since God's commandment to our first parents to be fruitful and multiply, and continuing with unbroken teaching over the course of thousands of years, marriage and procreation have been revealed as not merely an arbitrary precept of God, but as an imitation of his very nature – life-giving love.

In an age where both the importance and definition of family seem to be under constant attack from all sides, my friend Johann Christoph Arnold provides a much-needed perspective on marriage and an approach to child rearing that is at once time-tested and completely up-to-date, and solidly grounded in faith.

A Note to the Reader

In this engaging work, Pastor Arnold explains with certainty that we can still raise children the right way and avoid caving in to the pressures of a confused culture. He doesn't mince words, but his teachings maintain the compassion of the gospel as he genuinely shows his concern for the plight of parents faced with a difficult teenager or a disabled child. As the fabric of family, and society, is challenged, he offers up concrete steps to bolster and encourage those parents who want to pass on to their children the values their parents gave them.

I have often said that the greatest blessing I ever received was being the son of Robert and Shirley Dolan, and being raised within the loving family of my parents and four brothers and sisters. As I read *Why Children Matter*, I found myself nodding in agreement as the love and wisdom of my own parents was reflected in Arnold's sage advice.

In the following pages I invite you to enjoy insights which reflect the experience and tradition of an entire generation of pastors and teachers who guided schools, parents, and children – over the last hundred years – in Europe, South America, and the United States. And I

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pray that *Why Children Matter* will help contribute to a better understanding of the amazing gift of marriage and family.

Faithfully,
Timothy Michael Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York
New York City, March 2012

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Introduction

IN THE FIFTEEN YEARS since I wrote my first book on child rearing, the state of our children has changed only for the worse; the world is in crisis because we do not love our children enough.

God has been just about completely pushed out of schools and other public places. In many districts sex education is mandatory right down to the first grade, and because of divorce and remarriage, cohabitation, and same-sex unions, the word “family” is used for almost everything. As a result the true meaning of Christian marriage – and thus the true picture of the family – has been blurred, if not destroyed. The tragic results can be seen everywhere.

Deep down we all long for the family as God created it, and it is this God-given family order that can bring stability back to our culture and our children. Sadly, we often do not want to submit to God’s plan, and are

instead distracted by lofty educational ambitions. There is tremendous pressure to turn children into miniature adults.

All of us were created in the image of God, but children are unique because they most closely mirror God's original creation. Returning to that first creation is going to be a tough battle, but it is my hope that this book will give both vision and courage to parents, grandparents, and educators along the way.

When God created Adam and Eve, he gave them – and us – the commandment to be fruitful and multiply and by so doing, to conquer the world. This command is more important today than it was then. It shows that children matter to God and should matter to us. As long as this world lasts, God wants children to be born. He needs each one of them for his coming kingdom. Young families should take heart in one of God's most beautiful commandments.

Bringing a child into the world today is more daunting than ever, and raising a child has never been more difficult. But it is well worth the challenge, and our future depends on it. As the well-known Hasidic saying goes, "If you save one child, you save the world."

We live in a time where there is not just fear but even hostility toward families and children. And though governments and policy-makers worry that the world is becoming overpopulated, children are still part of God's plan.

When the British commentator Malcolm Muggeridge asked Mother Teresa if she thought there were too many children in India – where many die of disease, starvation, and neglect – she gave him this remarkable answer: “I don't agree, because God always provides. He provides for the flowers and the birds, for everything in the world that he has created. And those little children are his life. There can never be enough!”

Founding new families and bringing children into the world will always be a step of faith. But it can give purpose to our lives and will be rewarding beyond all other ventures.

Johann Christoph Arnold

May 2012

Introduction

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1

The Childlike Spirit

*Unless you change and become like little children,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Matthew 18:3

The Childlike Spirit

“CHILDREN WERE BROUGHT TO HIM so that he could lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, ‘Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them’” (Matt. 19:13–14).

With these words, Jesus tells us that children are important. And his assertion that the kingdom of God belongs to them is a message we need still today: in our time no less than his, children are often not wanted.

Adults often fail to grasp how near to God children already are. We forget that, as Jesus says, “their angels always have access to my Father” (Matt. 18:10). *Angel* means *messenger*. Guardian angels are spiritual messengers, spirits sent by God to protect and guide children. Unlike these angels, and unlike children, we cannot see God. Yet we can see children, and we can receive them

into our hearts. In receiving them, we receive Jesus himself (Luke 9:48).

How do we bring children to Jesus? First of all, we must believe in him ourselves, and come to him with trust and faith. In the New Testament we read how Simeon and Anna – two very old people – waited their whole lives for the Messiah, the “consolation of Israel.” When Jesus was born, they welcomed the new baby with joy and belief. Now they could face death without fear and could live in peace (Luke 2:25–38).

As a pastor I am often asked to bless newborn babies, and it is one of the most wonderful things I do. Jesus himself says that “whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me” (Mark 9:37). This attitude of love and faith is what the childlike spirit is all about.

Everyone loves a new baby, but even babies can quickly test our patience and may soon seem to be a burden or inconvenience. But no matter how much trouble they bring, children are gifts from God. When we welcome them in this way, God will surely bless us and give us the strength to raise them. This should be an

encouragement to all young families and to those who are thinking of founding a family. Especially when we face adversity, God is waiting to help us, providing we pray and ask, seek and knock (Matt. 7:7–11). Then doors will be opened.

In a time when childlike faith is despised and mocked like never before, we would do well to remember Jesus' words about becoming like children – and his promise that they will be the greatest in the age to come: “Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3–4).

For the sake of children everywhere, one wishes that this kingdom might come very soon.

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Founding a Family

*For this reason a man will leave his father
and mother and be united to his wife,
and the two will become one flesh.*

Ephesians 5:31

Founding a Family

IT IS OBVIOUS ON ALL FRONTS that the traditional nuclear family is on the way out. The family as we have known it for centuries has fallen apart, and children are increasingly being raised by grandparents or siblings. Rising divorce rates and growing pressures in the workplace mean that parents are passing on child care responsibilities to relatives.

Assisted reproductive technologies such as artificial insemination can have tragic consequences. Many children do not even know who their real parents are, or how they are related to other children. We seem to have forgotten that the health of society is dependent on the health of its families.

Fathers and mothers should always be the main role models in a child's life. All children long to know the two people who brought them into the world – to love them, and to be loved by them. Sadly, in too many cases,

