

# Bringing Up Children



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1. Kathleen Haverlack: *Using Saint John Chrysostom's Views to raise Children in the Orthodox Faith*
2. *An Address on VAINGLORY and THE RIGHT WAY FOR PARENTS TO BRING UP THEIR CHILDREN*, by Saint John Chrysostom, translation by Max L. W. Laistner, published 1951 by Cornell University Press in *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire*.
3. Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty: *Brotherly Love (3); Family love (7); Bringing Up Children and Vainglory (in Arabic)*.

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## BRINGING UP CHILDREN IS A SACRED TASK!

St. John Chrysostom considers that the sacrifice of thanksgiving which parents offer to God for giving them their children is that of undertaking the task of raising them up in a manner that is pleasing to Him. They therefore should consider that they're doing this task to please God first and foremost (Ch 90). Consequently, this will bring joy to their children as well as to themselves, and to their country.

- ❖ **Upbringing children is a holy task; and whoever violates this duty is guilty of somehow committing the crime of child murder.**
- ❖ **There are parents who sacrifice everything to ensure that their children enjoy all pleasures and to render them wealthy inheritors. They do not pay any attention whatsoever to raising them as Christians who practice piety.**

## PREOCCUPATION WITH THE CHILD'S EARLY UPBRINGING

The Archbishop Chrysostom advises his congregation to start the task of upbringing their children as early as possible. This is because the child is more apt to accept guidance at the earliest stage of his life (Ch 20). If a parent delays the task of upbringing, it becomes difficult to change the child's character or to guide him to better ways (21).

- ❖ **When the Apostle commands us to care for others more than we care for ourselves; thus if we are considered guilty when we are careless of their welfare, would we not be guilty when this applies to those closest to us? The Lord will tell us: 'Am I not the One who has assigned a place for these children in your family? Am I not the One who has entrusted them to your care, and**

**have set you up as teachers, guardians, and governors over them? I have granted you complete authority over them. I have wholly entrusted you with their upbringing?'**

**You will tell me that they refused to submit to the yoke, and that they have abandoned it. Yet this could have been avoided from the very beginning. It would have been befitting to bend their young soul under the yoke of obedience and commitment and to train and teach them such habits. This would heal the wound while it is still fresh... Sirach warns parents saying: "Do you have children? Discipline them, and make them obedient from their youth."**

## CHOOSING A CHILD'S NAME

St. John Chrysostom considers that the first lesson which parents should provide to their child is the choice of his/her name. He elaborates on this subject as he stipulates that the child should not be named after someone of the family. Rather, he should be named after one of the martyrs, apostles, or bishops (Ch 47). It is as if he wishes the parents **to realize that their child is related to the heavenly family** more than to them or to anyone of their own family. Consequently, the child would cherish the name he has been given and would imitate one of the saints that has the same name by wholly devoting and consecrating his heart to the Lord.

A relationship of love in the Lord would develop between the child and the saint whose name he carries. He would pray that the saint intercedes and prays for him even though he would not be an identical image of him. Indeed, each believer has his own unique personality and is God's unique child!

Based on this advice, some find it appropriate to offer the child - on his birthday or at his baptism - an icon of the saint whose name the child will carry. If the saint is celebrated on a day other than the child's birthday or baptism day, then the



family should celebrate the saint's feast since it is also a special feast for the child carrying that saint's name.

### **GUIDING THE CHILD TO THE HOLY BIBLE**

**St. John Chrysostom** requires parents to guide their children to enjoy the Holy Bible and to study it. Parents will be the first to gather the fruit of such guidance as the Holy Bible teaches children to obey their parents. Consequently, parents will find that their children have developed a spirit of humility and obedience towards them.

❖ **Do not tell me that the Holy Bible is for monks... do you want me to turn my child into a monk? No. He should not necessarily be a monk: make him a Christian!**

**Why do you fear a good matter? It is appropriate for everyone to learn the Scriptures. These are truly necessary for children... let us be models for them, and let us teach them from their early childhood to study the Holy Bible.**

❖ **Let us teach our children the laws and teachings of the Lord. This would earn and store for us great rewards. Artists are greatly appreciated when they make statues or portraits of kings. Would not God far more richly reward those who proclaim and adorn His royal image (for man is the image of God)?**

❖ **This is therefore our duty: to teach ourselves as well as our children to walk in holiness. Otherwise, how shall we stand before the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus Christ? If a person who has rebellious children is unqualified for priesthood, how can he be qualified for the kingdom of heaven?**

### **ENTRUST YOUR CHILD INTO GOD'S HAND!**

❖ **Is there anyone who would not wish his child to be like Samuel who is ever so far better than a king ruling over the whole world? You would answer: 'This is impossible... my child can never be as good and great as Samuel!' Why is that an impossible matter? It is because you do not truly want it. Entrust your child to the Almighty One who is able to make your child great. And who is that One? God!**

**Hannah entrusted Samuel into God's hands. The high priest could not raise him for he had failed to discipline his two sons. It is the mother's faith and zeal that made everything possible.**

**Samuel was her first and only son. She did not know if she would have another one; yet she did not say: 'I will wait until he gets older and gets a taste of the pleasures of life at least in his youth...' No. She rejected all such thoughts and had only one goal. From the beginning, she was determined to consecrate her son, the whole joy of her heart, to the Lord.**

### **GOD IS HIMSELF INVOLVED IN THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN**

❖ **God is personally and greatly involved in children's upbringing. This is why he has created this natural attraction and tenderness in parents. It consequently charges parents with the necessity and sense of obligation to care for their children.**

❖ **God has set specific laws for that charge, and has established feasts which oblige us to clarify their meanings.**

**God has summarized the meaning of Passover in the following teaching: 'And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, 'This is done because of what the Lord did for me when I came up from Egypt,' (Exod.13:8)**







## APPRECIATING THE CHILD’S WORTH AND TALENTS

**St. John Chrysostom** cherishes the child and appreciates him/her tremendously. **He regards children as philosophers** as they develop, and as wrestlers in their training. He considers them to be citizens who are being formed and **prepared to live eternally in heaven** (Ch 38, 39). He finds that they possess great talents that become fulfilled through diligent training.

He regards the child as a city with gates or multiple entrances. The soul is inhabited by unseen governors or judges who are good or who are wicked and disrespectful. Therefore the child needs rules that control wrong behavior before laxity leads to the destruction of the city (Ch 23-26).

## WARNING AGAINST PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT

Discipline and firmness are two important matters. However, parents should be warned against the use of physical punishment. **St. John Chrysostom** believes that a wise father (or mother) needs to cease from constantly using physical punishment or whatever he calls a stick. Indeed, the use of a stick leads a child to belittle this kind of punishment and to disregard the punishment. It also does not create in him/her any desire for virtues. A child should fear punishment, but should not be subjugated to it constantly (Ch 30).

## TEACHING AND TRAINING A CHILD ACCORDING TO HIS ABILITIES

**St. John Chrysostom** comments on the following words of the apostle: ‘do not provoke your children.’ (Eph. 6:4) This is a call to set requirements that match the child’s ability and potential. It is inappropriate to exaggerate teachings or demands for they could produce terror in the child (Ch 52).



## TEACHING BY EXAMPLE

The saint focuses on the role of parents as models in a child’s life. As they demand from their children to be philosophers and wrestlers as well as citizens of heaven, parents need to act in accordance with such teachings so that the children can imitate them through their own practical demonstration.

## PAYING DUE ATTENTION TO THOSE WHO INFLUENCE THE CHILD

Warning the parents, the saint underlines the necessity of choosing carefully those who would influence their children. Parents need to prevent anyone who might tell them useless stories or fables from getting close to their children. Children need to listen to Bible stories presented in a joyful manner, while providing the opportunity for discussions and arguments.

## PURITY OF HEART

**St. John Chrysostom** focuses on the importance of the role of parents in developing purity in the child’s inner heart. They need to teach him/her love, and long suffering, especially towards wage earners (Ch 66-69), younger siblings (Ch 74), and to treat servants as friends (72).

## CHASTITY AND PURITY IN THE CHILD’S LIFE

**St. John Chrysostom** asks the parents not to permit their children to enter theatres, to prevent any sexual immorality from creeping into their lives (Ch 77). This is from a negative perspective. From a positive aspect, it is adequate to encourage the child to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays to enable him/her to enjoy a pure and chaste life. He wants parents to encourage their child to get married early in life after having enjoyed a mature and upright life and so preserve his/her purity.



## **THE PREDOMINANCE OF WISDOM IN THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN**

The saint underlines the role of parents in promoting wisdom in their child. This arms him/her with self-control (Ch 85).

- ❖ **Do not seek to provide the means of extending the child's life here on earth. Rather seek to show him/her how to enjoy eternity in the life to come. Present to the child great issues rather than trivial ones. Do not struggle to make him a skillful orator. Rather teach him/her to love true wisdom... We do not wish to convey that temporal teachings are worthless or to be ignored, but we should not be so engaged in them to the extent of exaggeration!**

## **BEING ENGAGED IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND IN PLANNING TEMPORAL MATTERS**

The focus of **St. John Chrysostom** is on divine wisdom and the training of children through the Word of God. This does not imply any neglect in educating them in the sciences and in the planning of their temporal needs.

- ❖ **You might ask: 'How? Should we seek wisdom and neglect earthly issues?' No. Most honorable ones, this would not embody the love of wisdom and it would be detrimental to it; and this would destroy and corrupt everything.**

## **ENCOURAGING CHILDREN TO CONSECRATE THE HEART**

Saintly parents support their children, and their blessings support their grandchildren throughout numerous generations. Moreover, saintly children devote their lives and hearts to support their parents. For the sake of David the prophet, the Lord blessed his son Solomon as well as some of his

grandchildren like Hezekiah the king. Similarly, Samuel the prophet who was the fruit of his mother's prayers was also the source of blessings to his mother.

- ❖ **May we allow our children to serve the Lord! May we lead them not only to the Temple as was the case with Samuel; but may we lead them to heaven itself. They would therefore serve with the angels and archangels. It is possible for any person to realize that he/she who consecrates his/her life to love truth and wisdom definitely serves with the angels. Such children are greatly favored by the Lord and intercede on our behalf as well as on behalf of themselves. Some children are granted God's help for the sake of their parents, while fathers are even more apt to be granted support for the sake of their children. In the first case, this is granted through nature, whereas in the second case help comes through education which is far more effective than nature.**

## **TEACH YOUR CHILD LEST THE WORLD TEACHES HIM/HER!**

- ❖ **If good parents diligently offered their children a good education, we would not have been in need of any laws, judges, courts or punishments. Those who have been appointed to execute these punishments have been employed as result of our own moral shortcomings.**

## **PREPARING THEM FOR HOLY MATRIMONY**

It seems that some people fear that the study of the Holy Bible would inspire their children to abandon earthly ways and to choose to lead a monastic and ascetic life. Therefore, **St. John Chrysostom** clarifies that a person who lives in the world - so to speak - is all the more in need of the word of God to discipline and sanctify him/her. Consequently, he/she





will be able to lead a holy life as well as succeed in his dealings with others. The saint then goes on to confirm the need of a holy education in order to prepare our children for holy matrimony.

❖ **A person who has been chaste before marriage will remain so after marriage. But those who have had adulterous relations before marriage will continue in the same path. The divine Word says: ‘To a fornicator all bread is sweet; he will never grow weary until he dies’ (Sirach 23:17). That is why a crown is placed on the head of newly weds (before the holy sanctuary). It is a sign of victory as they are entering the realm of matrimony unbeaten or overpowered by lust. In contrast, there is no need to place a crown on the heads of those who have indulged in pleasures and submitted to adultery since they have been vanquished and beaten. Let us not spare any means to inculcate such concepts and warn our young ones in every way possible.**

