



The Mystery of the Child (Religion, Marriage, and Family (RMF))

By Martin E. Marty

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Much of today's writing on children treats the child of any age as a problem or a set of problems to be solved, effectively reducing the child to a complex of biological and chemical factors, explainable in scientific terms, or regarding children as objects of adult control. In contrast, Martin Marty here presents the child as a *mystery* who invokes wonder and elicits creative responses that affect the care provided him or her.

Drawing on literature as new as contemporary poetry and as old as the Bible, *The Mystery of the Child* encourages the thoughtful enjoyment of children instead of the imposition of adult will and control. Indeed, Marty treats the impulse to control as a problem and highlights qualities associated with children -- responsiveness, receptivity, openness to wonder -- that can become sources of renewal for adults.

The Mystery of the Child represents a new tack for Martin Marty -- universally respected as a historian, theologian, and interpreter of religion and culture -- but displays the same incisive, erudite quality marking the fifty-plus books and thousands of articles that he has previously written. Marty's broad, thoughtful perspective will inspire readers to think afresh about what it means to be a child - - and to be a caregiver.

This book is sure to claim a wide readership -- parents, grandparents, schoolteachers, theologians, historians -- engaging anyone wanting to explore more fully the profound realm of the child.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Breathtakingly ambitious in scope, written with the author's customary sober and reflective erudition, this wide-ranging exploration of the wonders of the child is both inspirational and slightly elegiac in tone. Although it covers topics such as the tension between nature and nurture in child development, this is no ordinary child guidebook. Professor emeritus at the University of Chicago and a prolific writer on religion, culture, history and theology, Marty's deeply personal and sometimes dauntingly scholarly book urges his readers to abandon seeing a child as a problem to be controlled. Instead, he calls adults not only to nurture wonder in children, but to seek their own "childlikeness," or what, near the end of the book, he terms "childness." While the book is written with a general audience in mind, Marty's understanding of mystery and of childhood is unabashedly rooted in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. A random sampling of sources includes writers as diverse as the late Catholic theologian Karl Rahner and evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker. Aimed at all who care for children, this volume is, at least in part, the fruit of Marty's work in Emory University's three-year study of "The Child in Law, Religion and Society." (*Apr.*)
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Review

Charlotte Observer

"The thesis of the book is entirely radical, and yet, once you think about it, so obvious that we should have known it all along. A child is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery — and not in the sense of a confusing puzzle, but of wonder, reveling in uniqueness, being moved by what is profound and elusive."

Library Journal

"A vigorous advocacy for seeing the child as a useful disrupter of convention, resistant to control, and open to the unexpected. . . Likely to become extremely important in our view of human personality and possibility from childhood forward. Highly recommended."

Publishers Weekly

"Breathtakingly ambitious in scope, written with the author's customary sober and reflective erudition, this wide-ranging exploration of the wonders of the child is both inspirational and slightly elegiac in tone. Although it covers topics such as the tension between nature and nurture in child development, this is no ordinary child guidebook. . . Marty's deeply personal and sometimes dauntingly scholarly book urges his readers to abandon seeing a child as a problem to be controlled. Instead, he calls adults not only to nurture wonder in children, but to seek their own 'childlikeness,' or what, near the end of the book, he terms 'childness.'"

Lawrence S. Cunningham

— University of Notre Dame

"I have never fully understood those transcendent moments when I have observed very young children at play, mine especially, with a sense of awe too deep for words. Martin Marty helps me give voice to those experiences as an in-breaking of grace. An extended meditation on the sheer gift of children in our midst, this beautifully rendered book makes clear the deep truth of Gabriel Marcel's assertion that life is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be lived "

James J. Bacik

— University of Toledo

"The renowned historian Martin Marty has woven his vast knowledge of the Western intellectual tradition into a brilliant and inspiring reflection on the child, seen not as a problem demanding control but as a mystery evoking joy and wonder. Especially illuminating is his sustained dialogue with the German theologian Karl Rahner, which yields valuable perspectives and practical suggestions for relating to children and maintaining a childlike attitude throughout the adult life cycle."

About the Author

Martin E. Marty is the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago, where he taught for thirty-five years. Among his many books are *Righteous Empire* ? for which he won the National Book Award ? and the three-volume

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