

Rich in Years: Finding Peace and Purpose in a Long Life

Johann Christoph Arnold

The Plough Publishing House (Nov 1, 2013)

Softcover \$12.00 (183pp)

978-0-87486-897-5

This author helps other seniors find new ways of thinking about the way they are living as they push the limits of age.

Rich in Years roots itself in a Christ-centered framework as author Johann Christoph Arnold invites readers into an anecdotally driven meditation on the end-of-life issues most seniors face. In a society that prides itself on “pushing the limits of age,” Arnold argues for a peaceable acceptance of the difficulties soon to come, as well as a restored relationship with Christ and family members. A senior himself, Arnold has organized his book around the stories and photographs of parishioners and elderly friends who have faced illness and dying with an indomitable spirit. How do these elderly deal with diminished faculties, keep faith in difficult circumstances, say goodbye to loved ones, cope with loneliness, and find peace amid sorrow? How should one think about suicide, euthanasia, and medical intervention? Throughout the book, Arnold prescribes a few courses of action.

While Christian readers could find Arnold’s spiritual counsel refreshing and anchoring, there are times when the practical application seems contradictory, perhaps mirroring the frustration many seniors already feel regarding the great gulf between what they desire to do and what they are physically capable of. Arnold says, “Perhaps God uses us best when we give, rather than receive,” yet this comment comes on the tails of the story of Charles Sinay, whose declining faculties made it impossible for him to remain independent, let alone serve others. Sinay, however, was lauded for his surrender to community and receiving help. Perhaps, then, Arnold means to recommend multiple courses of action, each in succession to that which is no longer possible: Serve if you can. If you can’t serve, receive. Later, Arnold comes full circle by stating that “by allowing others the chance to care for us, we can actually give to the givers.”

However, the already poignant *Rich in Years* becomes more so with the marriage of Arnold’s meditations to those of Browning, Blake, Shakespeare, Dylan Thomas, and other literary greats, along with firsthand accounts from parishioners and friends. Arnold’s use of literature and poetry and so many human voices speaks to the heart rather than the head, and he succeeds in linking deeper meaning to the suffering in old age and the presence of Christ throughout all stages of one’s life.

HEATHER WEBER (Winter 2014)

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