

Growing-up — the Great Adventure

GROWING-UP is “A work in progress.” As for the critics, “Fools and children should not be shown unfinished work.”

Parents are often discouraged or annoyed by criticisms of bystanders — especially by the armchair critics who have never done it themselves and don't really know what they're talking about.

Even the Lord Jesus failed to make His apostles perfect. But just look at the final successful outcome!

GROWING-UP progresses, at least as an ideal, through three stages:

Secure child

Eager adolescent

Mature adult.

These stages are not like changing gears on an old three-speed gear box. Rather, this is a case of fluid-drive. One stage merges into the next, as infancy does into early childhood.

THE SECURE CHILD

The secure child depends on a faithful marriage.

Father and mother build on their own experiences when they were children and adolescents. They modify ideas and ideals in the light of new experience. Thus they lead, guide and educate their children through the varied facets of fallen nature, despite all its instinctual impulses, for better or for worse.

‘Education’ comes from two Latin verbs:

educare, to bring up;

educere, to draw out, with a specialized meaning of piloting a ship from the harbour to the open sea.

Vatican II favours the idea that **parents are the educators**, while **schools offer specialist teachers** for intellectual formation:

Among the various organs of education, the school is of outstanding importance. In nurturing the intellectual faculties which is its special mission...

Christian Education, GE n. 5(a)

This was before Catholic home-education. In it, parents are also give a *schooling*, which is not the same as classroom teaching done by school teachers.

Various aspects of the secure childhood involve:

“Civilizing the savage”;

“Discipling the child”.

FOUNDATIONS for civilizing

- Children saying YES to parents (= co-operation).
- Helping them say NO to self (=obedience).
- Dressing, washing and knowing where their shoes are.
- Not getting everything they ask for.
- Not having too many toys, books, clothes, gadgets.
- Stopping instantly when told.
- Obeying at once.
- Answering respectfully when called or spoken to.
- Coming at once when called.
- Consideration for others through punctuality.
- Becoming increasingly worth of trust.
- Rendering an honest account of their duties.

FOUNDATIONS FOR DISCIPLING

Civilizing is foundational for character, which itself is the foundation for a growing measure of freedom.

Discipling to the Lord requires spiritual growth. Freedom is essential for that growth, for responding personally to His whisperings in the conscience.

A failure in civilizing or discipling leaves the soul open to the persuasions of the Devil.

Inevitably children will make mistakes. They should learn from them. Henry Lawson said, “The young fool must learn what he won't be taught.”

Freedom is a challenge to do something difficult:

- Tom Sawyer painting the fence (cf. HO n. 52).
- Shackleton recruiting for the Antarctic (*ibid.*).
- Naaman bathing in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:13).

ADULT CHILDHOOD

‘Adult childhood’ has nothing to do with childish adults. Rather it is a highly desirable rounding-off a secure childhood. In our time, if it happens at all, it mostly passes unnoticed and without comment.

Girls of about 8 to 13 well brought-up in a family, especially a large family, or a small family with relatives and friends, can often be, and often are, entrusted with adult duties. Without any supportive adult present, they adopt the motherly role:

1. minding little children, baths, nappies and all;
2. occupying them (without using plug-in-drugs);
3. cooking meals, cleaning a room or a whole house;
4. and all without discord, raised voices or fights.

Boys of about 10-14, even when well brought-up, seem less capable of taking on a fatherly role and adult responsibilities. Without adult intervention, they tend to

1. fail in ‘constant vigilance, eternal suspicion’;
2. neglect essential details in prescribed tasks;
3. or cover their uncertainty with blustering egotism.

Some boys do achieve adult childhood: *Children of the Oregon Trail* 1844 by A. Rutgers van der Loeff is a history of a recently orphaned boy of 13 (growth-spurt then was at 14). He led his six siblings on foot across half of North America. Try to see one of the film versions of his real-life saga.

Moreover, in traditional fiction, boys do reach adult childhood, as once they really did in bush expeditions — look after each other, find their way, camp, cook, observe hygiene, and cope with mishaps better than in present suburban hot house upbringings. See *Bush Boys on the Move* Appendix 3 or *New Boys Go Bush Again* Appendix 6. (A hint for budding authors: you need a plausible reason for getting rid of the adults.)

THE EAGER ADOLESCENT

An adolescent is moving upward through a *stage*, progressing towards adulthood: the word ‘adult’ is from *adultus*, past participle of *adolēscere*, an incipient, meaning “to grow up” (nothing to do with adultery, *adulterare*, to make impure, spurious).

