

Growing up

This week I am taking a number of things said by children and seeing what they can tell us. The one I start with today is about growing up, about discovering who and what we are and what rules we must follow:

One of the important stages we pass through in growing up is the discovery of our gender. You might think this is hard wired into us, but for much of our very early life it is largely irrelevant. I was very amused when I heard that my very young nephew walking up the stairs had been overheard saying to himself "I'm going to do a wee - or a pee. Mummy says a wee, Daddy says a pee. I'm going to do a pee." I have been thinking of this because of the current difficulties the Church of England is having with gay or female Bishops seem to me hark back to rules set in an age when men were totally dominant and women of no real significance, so behaviour which blurred or denied that distinction was something which had to be stamped out vigorously.

In my youth it was very important for boys to behave like boys and girls like girls. Once we had contact outside our home we were expected to comply with a stereotype. Professor Winston has shown on Television that a separation is natural, with girls being communicators while boys make things or play games together without much talking. This works for most of course, but difficulties for some come from the peer pressures that force us into our society's approved mould. Though my Mother was as conventional as they come, she had always wished for a daughter to whom she could pass on some of her own skills in sewing and cooking. As the eldest, I became the subject of her urge to teach - for which I was very grateful, first when I was in the Navy with responsibility to mend my clothes and later living in a bed-sit in London in the days before fast food. I was the envy of my friends - even though I had learnt "girls' stuff"..

Of course I recognise that the Church of England's problems with gender are not about cooking and darning. The attitude however does originate in an earlier civilisation and if you look through Leviticus you will find a surprising number of activities which are forbidden, though if you see them as guidelines for a warlike tribe which had limited medical knowledge, they become more understandable. Today we

don't need macho men quite as badly, I think our need now is more for understanding and cooperation, for recognising our differences and feeling as free to make a choice as my nephew did walking up the stairs.

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