

## Should We Leave Our Children in Freedom?

Excerpts from a sermon by the Rt. Rev. Alfred Acton, II

How often do we fail to restrain our children when they do what is wrong? How often do we say to ourselves, "We must leave our children in freedom?"

The Lord never leaves anyone in freedom. The Lord never leaves anyone. He is our Heavenly Father. He jealously guards our spiritual freedom. He does not allow us to leave Him except when we ourselves willfully seek to do so. We should no more think of leaving someone in freedom than we should think of doing the evils the Lord prescribes us not to do. If we wish to follow the Lord's Word, we must work to *keep* freedom, to preserve freedom, to guard the freedom of those who are entrusted to us.

This is particularly clear with little children. The Lord works to ensure their spiritual freedom. We cannot destroy that. We may destroy the freedom of their spirit to act here on earth, but when they die the Lord will surely bring them to a point where they can choose to follow Him or reject Him of themselves.

But the Lord has entrusted both people and angels with a responsibility in preserving freedom. Angels, from within, present good loves to children. Parents and others, from without, present an environment in which those loves can flourish. A little baby, just born, receives love from heaven. Parents have the responsibility to provide an environment in which that love can take root and develop. To the extent that there is order and a sphere of innocence in the home, angels can be with small children, inspiring them with spheres of innocence, so their freedom can grow. Children's freedom is the freedom to follow a love, whatever that love is. Parents can promote the freedom to follow good loves by providing a suitable environment.

Somewhere around the age of ten a new kind of freedom begins to work with children. This is the freedom of thought. Parents need to be aware of this new kind of freedom. They can no longer simply expect a child to follow love as presented in a warm environment, but now expect that they will act from freedom of thought. Adolescence is a process of taking a sense of order from outside and placing it inside, so that one can act from that order. This process is done by thinking, by testing, by challenging, and so eventually by accepting values for oneself. The process is often painful, but it is necessary if freedom is to be guarded and protected.

If we truly seek to *keep* our children in freedom, we will teach them the truth. We will have the patience to let them see that truth clearly in life so that they can follow it. But we will not *leave* them in the freedom to follow whatever loves happen to flit through their minds. Adolescents are easily carried away by natural loves, and the Word specifically tells us that we must guard against this happening. We must protect our children's freedom of thought and not expose them to the later, adult, freedom: the freedom of rationality.

Freedom of rationality is the freedom that sees good above evil, the freedom that seeks to follow good instead of evil. It is no longer a matter of truth and falsity; it is now a matter of the good of life or the evil of life. It only comes after enough loves have been experienced in life so that they

(the loves) can be ordered. This is the freedom we seek for our children; the freedom that they will have to live their life as adults. This is the freedom that we must guard for and work for and so keep our children in.

The Lord never abandons any individual. He works to keep them in freedom. And He has enjoined upon us the responsibility to work with Him toward this goal. As parents, we need to preserve the true freedom of our children: the freedom that they have in innocence in childhood; the freedom of thought that they have in adolescence; and be always working toward real adult freedom, the freedom of rationality. The Lord has entrusted us with this task. And as we work to preserve this freedom we can rest assured that we are cooperating with Him in the work of bringing people into heaven.