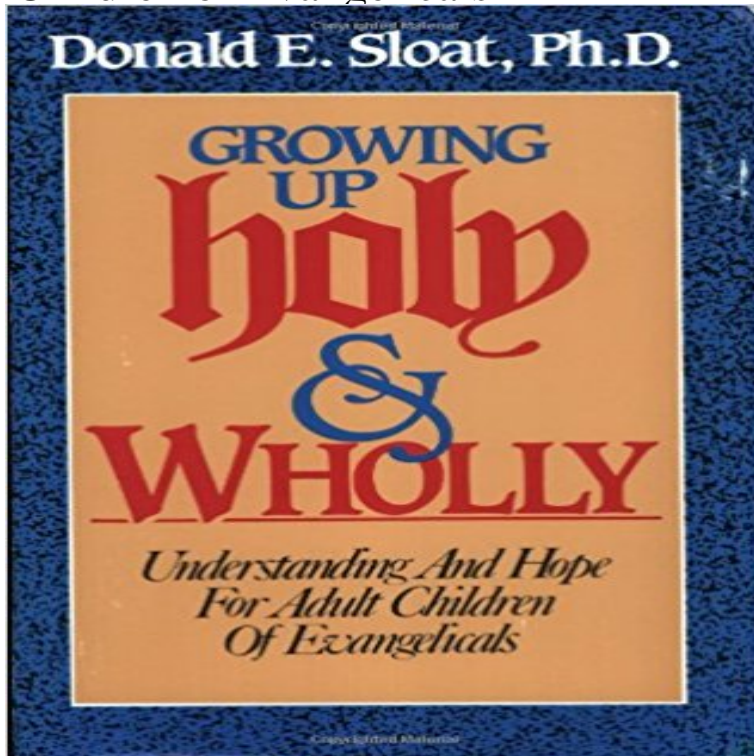


Growing Up Holy and Wholly: Understanding and Hope for Adult Children of Evangelicals



This book takes the Adult Children of concept that originated in the secular addiction field and applies it to the dysfunctional Christian environment. It highlights the subtle Christian teachings that can force growing children to be dishonest with themselves and their feelings. Insights into how this takes place inside a person and suggestions for healing are offered. AUTHOR COMMENTS: In November of 1988, a historic event took place in Atlanta, Georgia. The First International Congress on Christian Counseling convened with over 1300 registrants representing the United States, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Switzerland, and other countries. It was an inspiring, energizing event as I experienced the excitement and the stimulation of ideas being expressed and exchanged. It also had an additional, significant effect on me. Atlanta 88, as the congress was also called, offered a day of pre-congress institutes, and I organized a workshop entitled Moving From Holiness To Wholeness: Treating Individuals From Dysfunctional Christian Backgrounds which was attended by professionals from all over the United States and one person from South Africa. The workshop participants responded positively to the ideas presented, and I also tested the phrase of Adult Children of Evangelicals on them. Their enthusiastic encouragement was valuable support for my budding ideas. By listening to the professionals in the workshop, I also realized that many of us had individually made

the same discovery: many of the Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA) concepts also fit dysfunctional Christian families except the crossover breaks down when there is no alcohol involved. Although the ACA ideas were helpful, there was an incomplete fit between the two sets of dynamics. Nevertheless, we had begun to notice a syndrome of behavior that was peculiar to Adult Children of Evangelicals in a way that certain behaviors were peculiar to Adult Children of Alcoholics. This reinforced my developing notion of Adult Children of Evangelicals (ACE). As the congress progressed, I listened, watched, talked, and tried to learn as much as I could about the issues that Christians and Christian counselors were facing. The air was filled with talk about dysfunctional homes, physical abuse, sexual abuse, co-dependence, drug abuse, and so on. The book tables were covered with books on these same topics. It gradually occurred to me that a modified version of the three alcoholic rules (Dont Talk, Dont Trust, and Dont Feel) could serve as a model for understanding the dysfunctional evangelical Christian home and the problems that Christian counselors were seeing in the lives of struggling Christians. As I was pondering all of this in Atlanta, the evangelical version of the three alcoholic rules and their unique ability to create an emotional split in people suddenly flashed in my mind. I have used the alcoholic model of dysfunction as a jumping off point for the evangelical version of the three rules since many lay people as well as professional therapists are already familiar

with the ACA concepts. The phrase, Adult Children of . . . has become a common term that is used to describe survivors of various dysfunctional family situations and experiences, and many evangelical homes have produced their share of survivors who are now Adult Children of Evangelicals. The Adult Children of Evangelicals (ACE) syndrome as conceptualized here is broader than co-dependence, another current term. Although the dynamics that produce ACEs are fertile soil for co-dependent behaviors to develop, not all ACEs are going to be co-dependent. If you are not familiar with the ACA concepts and rules, enough material is provided to give you a basic idea of their meaning. Before we go any further, let me also explain what I mean by Evangelical. Historically and theologically, the term has been used to describe Christians who emphasize the importance of personally embracing the Gospel. In spite of other theological differences, the emphasis on personal experience is the common denominator that has defined the evangelical identity. This traditional definition certainly applies to the concepts being discussed here. Through the years of working with people from varied denominations, however, I have discovered that these ACE conflicts are not the exclusive property of evangelicals. Christians from denominations who resist the evangelical label also experience similar struggles and problems. In fact, any legalistic religious belief system that emphasizes control and personal stifling is going to create the climate for personal repression. Since there are also

wide differences among congregations across the same denomination due to the pastors emphasis or the communitys local culture, some churches may or may not fit the qualities described in this book. The critical component that results in the problems under discussion here is the rule-based approach to the Christian life, and although I realize there are churches and groups of believers who do not emphasize this type of Christian system, there are many who do. In light of this, I am using Evangelical loosely as a broad brush term to cover general Christendom and those who take the Bibles teachings seriously. This includes the major denominations as well as the independent churches, and the Calvinists as well as the Armenians and the Catholics. The term Fundamental is too restrictive since there are many Christians who do not identify with the Fundamentalist movement, but evidence the disorder under discussion here. Not everyone fits the historical evangelical definition, either, but it seems to be more adequate than other terms that are available. It is my hope and prayer that this book will fill the niche that exists between the ACA concepts and the evangelical dysfunctional family as we all work together as Christians in striving toward the true holiness and wholeness that God intends for us.

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