

Reflections

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The Odor of the Barrel

The influence of the subconscious on the personality. The impressions kept in the subconscious do not always stay there. At certain times they crop up on the surface of our conscience and they influence our personality. This happens for two reasons:

By association. I have in my subconscious, for example, undigested offenses which have accumulated for many years. If I am suddenly offended anew or even by the same person, my subconscious associates it with the prior offenses and everything crops up on my conscience and falls on me like a mountain.

By overload. When the demands imposed on my conscience are very heavy, the subconscious makes itself less noticeable. But as soon as the pressure exercised on my conscience lessens, the images of the subconscious can reappear more strongly. That is how it is with the barrel. Although water may be added in drops, as soon as it is full, it overflows. This happens, for example, in situations of tiredness or exhaustion.

The subconscious decisively influences man's development and acting. We can distinguish two possibilities for intervention by the subconscious.

1. The positive, integrating function. The key is in the profound affective attachments to the father and the mother. They mark the child for life. They create in the child's subconscious positive predisposition and instinctive security. The mother is already forming the unconscious life of the child in her womb. Thus we become aware of how important are the first impressions we receive as children. Father Kentenich, the founder of the Apostolic Schoenstatt Movement explains: "It happens like in a barrel. It keeps the odor of that with which it was first filled. Likewise, the first impressions cannot be erased from the soul of the person, and neither can the later ones. But the first ones are so decisive for life because all of the subsequent images and impressions are associated, related with the first images."

The first impressions determine the direction of our affective life and the subconscious life of the soul. And we also become aware of how important it is to preserve our children from harmful and unhealthy impressions in their affective and fantasy domains.

To these primary attachments of the child to the mother and the father, added are the attachments to siblings and other persons, and also the attachment to places and ideas. Thus a totally healthy organism of attachments is formed where the human being feels sheltered, protected and accepted.

2. The negative impressions. These can lead to the disintegration of the human personality: they are those impressions not worked through or digested. They are the cause of our inhibitions, complexes, traumas and other neurotic illnesses. They can even end up in physical illnesses. There are a multitude of bodily illnesses due to – ultimately – sicknesses of the soul.

We have to dedicate time and energy to that profound transformation of our subconscious life. It is important to work through those things even when we are still young. Later on, while losing our creative energy, that which we did not recuperate will now become a boomerang which we can no longer control.

Now, **what type of undigested experiences could we find in our soul?** They could be things which haunt our childhood: lack of love or understanding, rejections, traumatic sexual experiences. Perhaps we have received interior wounds which make us bleed. Or, perhaps we have been disappointed or betrayed by other persons. Perhaps our great hopes were frustrated and we remain bitter. Many times we have been treated unjustly and, therefore, we became vengeful. Or, perhaps my honor or the honor of one of my loved ones was damaged and I remain resentful and rancorous. All of these things hurt in one's soul and they should hurt us. We are not and we do not want to be supermen who grit their teeth and swallow everything violently. All of those impressions generate, additionally, reactions. And those reactions are, quite often, exaggerated and uncontrolled.

Questions for reflection

1. Am I aware that my son/daughter is "taping" all family experiences in his/her soul?
2. How can we increase affective experiences in the family?
3. What do we "fill the barrel" with?

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