

Reflections

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Difficulties for Generational Dialog

A phrase from a contemporary writer, quite cynical but not less real, says: “When I meet two men, one old and one young, who walk together without having anything to say, I know they are father and son.” Generational dialog, which is so necessary, is not easy. A proof for this is that homes are rare where this is a constant practice. What happens is that numerous obstacles come between those who should be permanent talkers.

Exterior obstacles. One is the abusive habit of television. When the members of the family are gathered in front of that apparatus, one could think they are united. Let us not fool ourselves: it is a false dialog which only appears to be dialog. Perhaps many words are said, but there is no exchange of profound ideas. Superficial dialog is an obstacle for profound dialog. In this sense, television is a terrible instrument of silence.

Another exterior obstacle is the extreme cult business. How many men allow themselves to become fascinated by this new god, and, due to serving it, they throw their entire lives off balance! Behind it all, is the religion of “having:” it is a must to have, not of being, to always have more and more without limits in sight. Therefore, it is a must to dedicate all the time possible to business, to professional concerns, and there is no time left to dedicate it to the education of the children. Time is money, and who is ready to lose money? In this way, they abandon those who basically would have the right to them and their lives: the children.

A third obstacle: social obligations. Sometimes they are numerous and they take a lot of time. What is least important takes up all of the time. What should be considered important above all else, the education of the children, becomes secondary and the parents allow others to take their place.

In addition to these exterior obstacles, there are other more serious internal problems. Many parents are not motivated to dialog with their children because they consider themselves incapable of it.

This lack of ability frequently comes from a bad conscience and from the fear of being unmasked.

To accept dialog is to take off the mask. Unavoidably, the parents come to show their soul and they expose themselves to the implacable judgment of the child and especially of the adolescent. Because the youth forgives errors with difficulty, he severely criticizes the weaknesses and looks at the failures. Many parents, overburdened by their errors and faults, when they are face to face with their child at the hour of truth, flee in order to hide their shame and – as it is often said – try to salvage their authority. In this way, what they least salvage is their authority with their children.

Another origin of silence is intellectual weakness. It is not uncommon for the youth of today to be more open than the adult, more informed. In this way, dialog between generations becomes more difficult. It is then easier to flee dialog and to isolate oneself even more in one’s own narrow world and thus not have to discover one’s limitations.

Another notorious obstacle is discouragement. It can exist when facing the aggressive attitude of the adolescent. Aggressiveness proper to this age is in itself healthy, desirable and – I would say – indispensable for the growth of the personality.

On the contrary, passive submission or surrender when facing adverse forces would be negative. Nevertheless, this aggressiveness in the adolescent awakens very little sympathy in those around him. He contradicts everyone, demands without ceasing and with special satisfaction provokes his parents who are the embodiment of authority. Nothing the parents do or say matters to the children. They are always mistaken. With this attitude, the parents are tempted to give up the battle and to let the child work things out for himself. They will flee from dialog, judging it useless and superfluous. A wall of silence is raised between them.....

Questions for reflection

1. Do I feel mirrored in one of the points?
2. How do I rate the dialog with my children?
3. What experience do I have in dialog with adolescents?

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