

THE BROTHER AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

Brother Henrique Justo

1. Time

Time is a constant concern of mankind. The present, the past and the future form a thread which crosses the entire Bible, from creation to the Parousia.

Martin Heidegger devotes more than 500 pages to this topic in "Being and Time" (Sein und Zeit). If Heidegger is pessimistic in his thought about "being unto death" (Dasein), his disciple and helper, blessed Edith Stein, a Jew who converted to Catholicism, became a Carmelite and finally ended up as a victim of Nazism, shows us the great wealth of the hereafter as she was inspired by Christian Theology and Philosophy.

Even though Heidegger would write that "the thread between being and man's essence is in the theological realm (...), the idea of transcendence that man is an entity that goes beyond himself", (1) for Heidegger existence, in its proper existential state consists of anguish and nothingness, in the sense that the verb to exist contained these ideas as a direct object. (2) It is in this way that Heidegger took a definitive leap towards the abyss. What did he find at the center? Nothing! (3)

Edith Stein wrote: "To understand oneself is to understand one's own power of being; that is to say, the realization of what one was and is now at the same time; future, past and present constitute the three states of mankind's temporal nature. (4)

The past and the present give a direction for the future. In addition, the present which is based on the past and aimed at the future, lasts only for an instant and is transformed, in the case of mankind, in past reliquaries and future dynamism. The present almost does not exist... On the life journey, it is the small bridge between the past and the future; between the more or less long, already walked stretch and the other, more or less wider stretch of the future.

Psychic events might occupy merely fractions of a second, such as a glance, a word, a smile...; but they are immortal. Viktor Frankl, speaking about human life, says: "Everything is transitory. But on the other hand, everything is eternal. And what is more: it becomes eternal. We cannot avoid it. If we start with whatever thing, eternity is somehow involved in it. So we have to take the responsibility for that which we have wanted to do, for that which we have chosen which will begin to be part of the past, for that which we have destined so that it might become eternal." (5)

2. The unconscious and the journey.

Since the comparison has spontaneously been brought forth from the unconscious, let us continue with it.

On a trip, the most important area is that which yet re-

mains to be covered. The journey will be better if the walker knows how to take advantage of the experiences, both good or bad, of the road already traveled.

Something similar happens on the road of existence, since "man is, before all else, a plan that is subjectively experienced (...) And man will be, more than anything, what had been planned for him to be and not what he wants to be." (6)

The last two sentences seem like they are in opposition to each other. But they are not because the boat can row in one direction and be carried in another by the currents.

The currents are continually nourished by sources that come from daily life; all types of perceptions, conversations, radio, television, people we meet, reading, prayer, meditation...; in a word, the incredible number of our past experiences, along with the current ones, are much more powerful than our simple "wanting to be" this or that. The majority of experiences remain embedded in the psyche without crossing the threshold of consciousness; these experiences will occupy a place in the archives, the dynamics and the eternity of the unconscious.

They are responsible for the trajectories, or at least some aspects of them, both positive as well as negative ones. Any journey has an intrinsic logic, whether for the saint or for the criminal. For spiritual directors and for psychotherapists this is something obvious, as it was also obvious for ancient authors, such as St. Augustine.

Alfredo Binet (7) has demonstrated experientially how the intellect is under the influence of the unconscious in the way and the form that it receives reality.

In support of Binet's theory, I myself have also quoted (8) important authors such as Manuel Bandeira, Mario de Andrade and Rainer Maria Rilke who are in agreement with the sometimes shocking theory of Jung: "Consciousness is formed beginning with the unconscious. The unconscious is the creative mother of consciousness. Consciousness is developed beginning with the unconscious." (9)

Where do the ideas that have no relationship with the concern of the present moment suddenly come from? And what about the famous inspirations of writers, poets and artists in general; where do they come from if not from the unconscious? What does Mario Quintana see, for example, in daily life that others do not perceive? For him a "hotel" is not simply a hotel, nor is a suitcase simply a suitcase loaded with gear for the trip:

"This life is a cramped hotel from which we always leave thoughtlessly, since our suitcases are never packed and our bill is never up to date..."

Without a doubt Max Weber is correct when he says: "Man is an animal hanging from the thread of meaning that he himself has woven." (quoted in Jung, *ibidem*, p. 427)

The person is guided by accepted ideas, either implicitly or explicitly, or ideas which have been worked out by the person himself: "When an idea is a psychic reality, it secretly penetrates many areas, apparently without the least historical causal relationship... Ideas that are psychic realities... are more powerful than man and his intelligence." (10)

In spite of everything, we are generally unaffected when faced with the reality of the workings of the human psyche: "It is true that (man) believes that he is the one who produces those ideas: but in reality it is ideas that produce the man so that, unconsciously, he becomes simply a spokesperson." (11)

His life plane is guided by the autopilot, following the predetermined route. Only a new program could alter the route.

I would now like to put forward an idea from the next subtitle. Why after mature reflection, prayer, spiritual direction, etc., are a certain number of religious resigned to the process while others (many!) resist? They made promises, they renewed their commitment in their local parish, they had par-

ties... But, in the second case, the supply of the unconscious was sparse, perhaps due to the deficit of the assimilating organ... The Catholic writer Chesterton remembers this in his caustic style: "Human virtue tends by its own nature to either rust or get moldy." (12)

3. The religious and the unconscious.

From the preceding it is easy to deduce that "we are responsible not only for our own conscious minds and our 'good intentions' but also for our unconscious." (13)

The unconscious or not-conscious, due to its overriding after-effects, some kind and some harmful, in addition to the orientation of one's existence, deserves very special attention, just as it has through the centuries, although this was not as intellectually clear as it is today.

The unconscious is an artesian well that provides nourishment to our life and the life of those who come into contact with us, "since the real person educates by means of his very existence." (14)

And so it is impossible to separate consecration from mission, even though ontologically and logically the first proceeds from the second. (15) Furthermore, "the consecrated person receives grace from a unity of action, by which consecration and mission do not constitute two juxtaposed instances of life but they are deeply implied in each other." (16)

This unity was very clear for Saint John Baptist de La Salle: "Do not distinguish between the duties of your state and what pertains to your salvation and perfection." (17) Another very significant text is this: "You have exercises which are arranged for your own sanctification, but if you have an ardent zeal for the salvation of those whom you are called to instruct, you will not fail to perform them and to relate them to this intention." (18)

After this basic theory, the reader will understand why the Rule says that "we reserve at least two hours per day for mental prayer, Eucharist, community prayer, spiritual reading and personal prayer" (Rule 73). In number 6 the Rule tells us: "The Brothers nourish and strengthen their faith by biblical and theological studies." Number 78: "The Brothers...immerse themselves in his writings and the lessons to be learned from his life (the life of St. John Baptist de La Salle)." Number 79: "The Brothers also honor the beatified and canonized members of their Institute". Number 71c: "The more flexible time-table on Sundays, holidays and during vacation periods always includes...more prolonged personal prayer and religious development".

It is presumed that the two hours per day are the minimum amount of time necessary in order to supply a storehouse for our consciousness and especially for our unconscious and to take care of the quality of the content.

Our special religious consecration to God is constantly threatened by opposing forces that we assimilate in an imperceptible way, especially in the current secularized world which has within ourselves the allies that St. John summarizes as "the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride in riches." (1 John 2:16)

If one does not carefully cultivate his garden, the bad weeds will overcome it...the orchard where the tree grows is judged by its fruit (Eccl. 27:7). Or as Jesus says: "The tree is known by its fruit." (Luke 6:44)

After these considerations, it is easier to understand the reasons for "the daily examination of conscience, spiritual direction, the reception of the sacrament of reconciliation, the

times for retreat..." (cf. Rule 75), since in the course of a day, a week, months and the year, in the daily routine, harmful elements slip in to the psyche, in an unconscious way, weakening the human-spiritual organism, emptying the primary apostolate of the witness of consecrated persons and making it necessary to purify the sources of our artesian well...

The "flight from the world", so profoundly preached in other times and remembered by De La Salle in his last recommendations, as he was nearing death, in the light of the dynamic of the unconscious, now is more important and current. We easily forget that in our state of life we have committed ourselves to something superhuman. (19) And "we have this treasure in clay jars" (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Thus one can understand St. John Baptist de La Salle's insistence better: "The Brothers of this Institute should have a great love for meditation and they should consider it as the first and principal of their daily exercises and the one most capable of bringing down God's blessing on the rest." (Rule of 1718: 4.1; cf Rule 69)

Meditation (oraison, in French) is at the same time a spring provider and a purifier of our human-spiritual life, and disposes one more toward community prayer, for Eucharist and for mission.

We count on the wonderful and varied examples of our 26 blessed and saints and of many other faithful followers of St. John Baptist de La Salle, many of whom we know; they take the greatest care of the fountains, provide adequate irrigation for the seed, so that it bears fruit in abundance either a hundred fold or thirty fold (Matthew 13:8), according to the fertility of the earth. •

-
- (1) Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*. Petropolis, Vozes, 1988, p. 85.
 - (2) Levinas, E. *Ethics and the Infinite*. Lisboa, Edic. 70, 1988, p. 33.
 - (3) Buber, M. *What is Man?* Mexico, Fondo de Cultura, 1985, p.113.
 - (4) Stein, Edith. *Phénoménologie et Philosophie Chrétienne*, Paris, Cerf, 1987, pp. 77-78.
 - (5) Frankl, V. *O sentido para a Vida*. Aparecida. Ed. Santuario, 1989, p. 100.
 - (6) Sartre, J.-P. *O Existencialismo é un Humanismo*. Mafra: Presença, 1970, p. 217.
 - (7) Binet, A. *L'étude Expérimentale de l'Intelligence*. Paris, Costes, Ed. 1922.
 - (8) Justo, H. *Somos diferentes*. Porto Alegre, Liv. S. Antonio, 1979. pp. 176-180.
 - (9) Jung, C. G. *A pratica da Psicoterapia*. Petropolis, Vozes, 1991, p. 56.
 - (10) *Id.*, p. 62.
 - (11) *Id.*
 - (12) Chesterton, G. K. *Ortodoxia*. Porto, Tavares Martins, 1944, p. 178.
 - (13) Fromm, E. *Do Amor a Vida*. Rio de Janeiro, Zahar, 1986, p. 41.
 - (14) Buber, M. *Sobre a Comunidade*. Sao Paulo, Perspectiva, 1987, pp. 90-91.
 - (15) Gallego, S. *El Hermano Postconciliar*. San Sebastian, 1969, pp. 162-164.
 - (16) Bishops' Synod, *The Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and in the World*. 1994, p. 12.
 - (17) La Salle, John Baptist. *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, p. 183.
 - (18) La Salle, John Baptist. *Meditation 205.2*
 - (19) Gallego, S. *op. cit.* p. 90.