

THE HOPE BOOKLETS

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11

LIFE AND TIME IN THE MIRROR OF ETERNITY

- 1. Rediscovering God**
- 2. Rediscovering the angels**

CONTENTS

Foreword

First Part - REDISCOVERING GOD

1. The creator God and the new physics
2. The dimensions of the absolute
3. From the pure Self to the One-All: another way of discovering immortality
4. The eternal present and the creation
5. In time towards eternity
6. Does becoming merge with the eternal?
- 7 . Trinity and incarnation: dogmatics to be rediscovered
8. Some good inspiration from Gnosis

Second Part - REDISCOVERING THE ANGELS

1. Everything that exists receives sense of being from a consciousness. But if we do not want to fall into forms of pantheism, the consciousness that gives sense of being to every reality has to be conceived not as single, but rather as articulated into a multiplicity of autonomous con-sciousnesses: in fact, angelic consciousnesses.
2. The religious phenomenology of primitive-archaic man attributes a consciousness and a quasi-personality to every being, even when it is purely material. And the most powerful beings end up by being connoted as gods.
3. With the monotheist revelation-revolution the supreme heavenly Entity reclaims his position as sole God. Before the sole true God there can be no “gods” but only “angels”. What is the function that angels have in such a context? They have to render possible the manifestation of the one and eternal God in the multiplicity of situations of space and time.
4. The angels are innumerable and also of extreme variety: from the spirits of nature to the guardian angels of individual men and those who protect churches, cities, nations and every human collectivity.
5. The angel is immediate and yet imperfect divine presence, because this presence has to filter through the imperfection of finiteness and the negativity of evil present in the world.

6. The evil present in the world is attributed to the original sin of men. And yet many forms and potentialities of evil existed already in the creation before the appearance of man.
7. It is more reasonable to trace the presence of evil in the world, including pre-human evil, back to a sin that precedes that of men: to a sin of the angels, the only truly original sin.
8. References to the original sin of the angels can be found in the Bible: from Wisdom to Revelation, from Ezekiel to Jesus Christ himself, to Paul, Peter and John. Though indirectly, even the story of Adam and Eve alludes to the sin of the angels.
9. Evil is introduced into the creation by the sin of the angels and the struggle against evil takes place primarily at the angelic levels.

FOREWORD

Be it even with humble means, but hoping and, indeed, trusting in a good inspiration, the present Hope Booklet sets out to consider very lofty topics; the intimate life of God and the more “exterior” relationship of God with the created world by means of the mediation of the angels.

The present Hope Booklet is subdivided into a series of essays. The *First Part* contains eight of them, while the Second Part consists of just one, though much longer than the others.

This variety of essays, written on different occasions, implies repetitions, for which I ask to be forgiven.

Since the themes are rather arduous and complex, an eager reader may well exploit these repetitions, no matter how fastidious they may be, to better assimilate such concepts as the different levels and modes of being of the Divinity and the different spiritual experiences to which contact with each gives rise.

If he thinks he has already understood them well, each time the subject crops up again, he can limit himself to a brief glance. But perhaps not too brief, because there may well be new aspects and further developments that could be worth a second look.

First Part

REDISCOVERING GOD

1. The creator God and the new physics

An allocution of Pius XII before the Pontifical Academy of Sciences is very significant as far as this theme is concerned. Considering the implications of the modern cosmological theories, the Pope referred to the hypothesis of the “big bang”. “Everything seems to indicate”, he said, “that the universe had a powerful beginning in finite times”.

Paul Davies recalls this in his book *God and the new physics*. He is a university lecturer in mathematics and theoretical physics, as well as a scholar of cosmology. And it seems to me that his book can constitute a privileged point of reference for anybody who wants to compare his own Christian religious experience with the data of twentieth-century physics following the turning point impressed by Einstein and Planck.

Obviously, we here have to concern ourselves with an entire literature that has its technical volumes full of mathematical formulas, but which fortunately comprises also a part where the authors explain their theories in less formal and more popular terms.

Davies expresses some reserve as regards possible attempts of considering the big bang as similar to the creation that the Bible tells us about. I myself am fully convinced that one has to be very cautious and use every possible discernment; all considered, however, I see attempts of this kind in a more favourable light.

It may well be that the beginning of the Book of Genesis gives us a different representation. Nevertheless, we must not forget that none of the biblical texts sets out to be a description of scientific phenomena, no matter what they might be.

They are sacred texts, written in a picturesque style, that generally have to be considered on account of their spiritual content and under no circumstances are to be taken literally. May God preserve us from every kind of fundamentalism!

The Old Testament, in particular, offers us a powerful representation of God that nevertheless remains anthropomorphic in certain respects. We therefore have to learn to look beyond the images to grasp the more profound truths they express in such a strong and vivid manner. We have to learn not to dwell on the images more than is strictly necessary.

All said and done, the images should neither be thrown away nor absolutized, they have to be taken for what they can give. They are mere means of expression – certainly not abstract like concepts, but concrete and powerful – of a truth that transcends them. It is a truth that undoubtedly descends to some extent to the images that express it, but nevertheless remains far beyond them in its essence.

Let us come back to the idea that we can gain of the creation of the universe. Far too many times the work of the Divinity is likened to that of a human artisan: who draws up a project, collects the necessary materials, works and shapes them, assembles them, and then there is the completed work.

This articulated and subdivided work implies a succession of temporal moments that seem inconceivable in the case of God. It is only of a God conceived in anthropomorphic terms that one can say that he does first “this” and “then” something else, and so on.

The only action, the only type of activity that metaphysicians and theologians attribute to a God who is above time consists of a single act that is unique, unchangeable and infinite.

This divine action becomes concrete in a single but infinite act of love in which God donates himself. In this sense the act seems capable of being likened to the initial movement that produced the universe, that brought the so-called big bang into being.

Davies observes that, as far as science can tell at present, the initial state of the universe must have been characterized by the greatest simplicity. The complex structures and activities that constitute its present condition seem to have come into being only at later stages.

At that first moment of existence the cosmic substance was extremely hot: its temperature was certainly of the order of billions of billions of billions of degrees. And the universe was in a state of extreme disorder.

The entire cosmos was still concentrated in a minimal and at the beginning even infinitesimal space, as if it had all sprung from a geometric point where it found itself in a condition of concentration and extreme density.

At what is known as Planck's instant, i. e. the first moment when the concepts of time and space become meaningful, one may calculate that the horizon of the entire universe measured 10 centimetres to the power of -33 , which is equivalent to a number of centimetres that one would write as a nought followed by a point and the thirty-three zeroes to precede the final 1!

Moving from that starting situation, the big bang led to a formidable expansion of the entire universe, the size of which increased out of all proportion with extreme rapidity. Within one billionth of a second of its creation the universe had already reached the size of our solar system. Today it has dimensions of the order of billions of billions of billions of cubic light years.

In the course of the big bang the immense energy that was being released brought into being great quantities of matter and antimatter constituted, respectively, by protons and antiprotons.

But protons and antiprotons would annul each other if it were not for the fact that every billion of antiprotons have their counterpart in a billion of protons plus one. And it is this one proton that survives, accompanied by a single electron that revolves around it.

Very well, then, all the matter that exists in the universe is made up of these surviving atoms. The infinitesimal residue of matter that survived the first instant of existence is the matter that came to form the galaxies, the stars, the planets, the living beings and also us men.

Matter did not appear all together at that first instant, on the occasion of the big bang, but formed gradually in the course of billions of years. Possibly sporadically as the result of a succession of mini-bangs. In any case, each individual particle can come into being in a sudden and unforeseeable manner.

The *mass* of any body, which measures the quantity of matter, is equivalent to energy. A body of great mass is massive and heavy, while another body of smaller mass is also less dense, lighter and can be moved more readily. If mass is equivalent to energy, the matter of a body can be defined as the energy enclosed within it. Matter is thus condensed energy.

Mass is the measure of the matter of a body and, what is more, is also the measure of its inertia. Every time a body changes its movement, it has to overcome a resistance, that is to say, has to overcome its own inertia. Photons travel at the speed of light because they are devoid of mass, but other quantities of energy that have a mass move at smaller speeds.

The selfsame mechanisms that act in the formation of matter also bring about its destruction. But this calls for very long times, like the times needed for a proton to become transformed into a positron and then to annul itself with the electrons of the same atoms. To use an example that concerns us more directly, a man's body loses no more than a single proton throughout life.

But the energy reserves of the universe tends to become exhausted. The sun's energy is produced thanks to an immense consumption of nuclear fuel and one may assume that it will become exhausted within four or five billion years. A long time ahead for us. We don't really have to worry for the moment. One should bear in mind that the most recent results suggest that the sun has existed for about four and a half billion years and the entire universe for about eighteen.

Thus there are already other stars that are dying. The lightest explode, while the heavier ones, i. e. those held together by a greater gravitational force, contract at an

increasing speed that ends up by exceeding the speed of light: so that at a certain moment the star is no longer visible for us and comes to constitute a “black hole”.

Any body, no matter what its size, tends to gravitate into itself. Gravitation acts in antithesis to the force of expansion of the big bang. Indeed, this formidable expansive force has already lost much of its initial impetus and tends to lose more.

The inward gravitation of each cosmic reality is thus characterized as an involutionary force. If it were not balanced by other forces, gravitation would cause each body to collapse into itself, to implode (which is the contrary of exploding and expanding), to increase its density and heat until it attains “thermal death”.

An excessive contraction of matter would cause even the collapse of the atoms, which would implode and thus reduce themselves to pure neutrons.

There is no need here to mention all the various phenomena that could derive from the implosion of a body, be it large or small, from a star to an atom.

But there can be no doubt that the complex of the phenomena caused by a gravitation not opposed by other forces and left to itself would cause all bodies not only to contract as already said, but would ultimately bring them to complete disintegration.

The destruction of the universe is avoided and, rather, its evolution is promoted by the very force that caused the big bang. This positive force of expansion is continued in other forces that seem to generate other evolutionary phenomena. It is always the same quid that, after having brought the universe into being, gave origin to life and then the various stages of its evolution.

Life is a series of phenomena of increasing order and complexity. But even before life came into being, we can note in inorganic nature structures of a complexity that in some way are a prelude of the structures of living forms.

Among the manifestations of this order we may here recall crystal formation. And also, to give another example, the generation of vortices in a fluid (which can assume highly elaborate and undoubtedly decorative spiral forms). Passing to astronomy, the rings of Saturn and the strange configuration assumed by the surface of Jupiter (as if its atmosphere in some way organized itself) seem noteworthy in this connection.

But let us consider the phenomena of universal import: here we shall note that matter is uniformly distributed in every part of the cosmos. And let us also bear in mind that the universe expands everywhere at the same speed.

Davies observes that if one opts for the scenario of the big bang, it would seem inevitable to conclude that the universe exploded in an improbably orderly manner: in all probability and practically with certainty, a random creation would have implied a completely disorderly universe.

The factors of order that can be found in the universe contribute to a growing and in the limit perfect dynamic order.

These evolutionary factors are opposed by others that undoubtedly cause each body to become centred in and consist of itself, but, if left free and unopposed, would cause it to decay to a condition of growing disorder, of gross and formless materiality ultimately destined to destruction, to annihilation.

Left to themselves, on the other hand, these involutionary factors tend to increase the presence in the universe of so-called “entropy”, i. e. the fall into materiality that I have so far tried to characterize in some way.

These other evolutionary factors, on the other hand, tend to increase order in the universe, a more widespread order that is also better in the qualitative sense. They thus tend to increase the so-called “negative entropy” in the universe, i. e. the anti-entropy that some people prefer to call “syntropy”. I shall likewise refer to it by this name, because the term coined by our Luigi Fantappiè seems less cumbersome and more beautiful.

Davies goes on to conclude that there would be no order at all if the universe had not been born with a considerable reserve of negative entropy, alias syntropy. He wonders whether this does not demonstrate the existence of a Creator, a God. He considers the pros and the cons of this hypothesis, as also of other hypotheses, some not so very different, that I shall not here review, because I want to concentrate on the conclusion that, in any case, order and life are sustained by syntropy.

For me it is sufficient to underscore that if the universe is to become orderly, live, if it is to progress, ascend to the highest expressions of being and value, it stands in need of being sustained by a relative reserve of syntropy. And it does not follow that this reserve has to be limited. I prefer to think of a spring rather than a cistern.

I have delineated the concept of a God whose reality and life are comprised in a single act without any becoming or succession, but also without limits, infinite. Such a God would be infinite love, infinite donation of himself. The expansion of the universe would spring from that infinite act of love, non-becoming and unique in its simplicity, but capable of conferring the highest quality of being upon the creation.

A God thus conceived as infinite and indestructible Source of being and good, value and beauty, in short of syntropy, would exercise a continuous action on the universe to gradually continue the creation in the course of time in order to complete it. But how could such a God act on the multiplicity of situations that are in any case continuously changing?

I am convinced that a solution of this problem can be provided by the concept of the "angels", as they are called in various religious traditions. They seem to be the vehicles of the divine presence in the universe and intermediaries between God and men, between God and the other creatures at every level. Every individual or collective reality could have its angel, i. e. its point of communication with God, the channel through which it draws all inspiration and energy from the Divinity.

A brief aside: In addition to the angels as metaphysical entities, there may also be angels of election. And, rather, we can only hope that all will eventually become such. To the extent to which it placed itself in the service of God and therefore in the service of the evolution of the universe, each reality could exercise an angelic function as bearer of God, as God's collaborator in the work of creation. This is also the vocation of each man and woman.

The idea of the angels, which we encounter above all in the monotheist religions, has its counterpart in the polytheist religions in the conception of the gods. There is a god of the sea, but also a god of the sun, the moon, the individual planets and stars. And each tree could have its genius: and likewise each river, each animal or vegetal species, each weapon, each tool, each form or expression of the life of man. The Olympus of a religion that respects itself is always extremely crowded. With the principal and minor gods it associates innumerable spirits of nature and spirits of things and protector spirits of individual human activities, of each moment into which these are subdivided, of each institution in which they assume concrete shape.

Polytheists call all these entities by the name of gods, or by names equivalent thereto. But for monotheists no creature can call itself "god". There is only one God, the only one to whom this name is due. On the other hand, however, a creature may aspire to being an "angel" of God, his messenger, vehicle of his presence, instrument of his action.

The kingdom of God "is not of this world". Nevertheless, it will come some day when the kingdom of God will be "on earth as it is in heaven", when all men will be prepared to assume the role of angels in the sense here explained, when the entire creation will assume the same role of cooperating with the Creator for its own ultimate completion.

However willing they may be, the angels appear to be as yet highly imperfect vehicles of the divine initiative. Though it nourishes itself of God, each of these entities is solidary with the individual or collective reality to which it belongs. And this undoubtedly conditions the action of the angelic entity.

Each angelic entity is a channel of the syntropy that has its primary Source in God and applies it in the situation assigned to it. But it does this rather imperfectly: due to lack of power and, possibly, also will.

It does not follow that every energy that springs from the Divinity will necessarily maintain itself “positive” in everything. To express the same concept in other words: it does not follow that the angels are all perfectly “good”. Between those who fully adhere to the divine will and those who clearly oppose it there may be a large number of entities who act in a non-negative but independent manner.

Each animal species may have its angel, i.e. its point of communication with God; but each animal species pursues its own “imperialism”, which may be in contrast with the imperialism of a different species and may also act in an anti-evolutionary direction. Even a tumour has an imperialism that has gone mad.

Each existing being has its angel, who is its point of contact with God; but this angel, who adheres to this living being, may be solidary with it to such an extent as to be wholly conditioned by it.

The various concepts developed in this last part of our discourse clearly have nothing whatsoever to do with Paul Davies, whom I propose to utilize only from the scientific point of view, reserving to myself to search in full autonomy for the possible philosophical and theological integrations.

While Davies, basing himself on scientific data, contests a certain traditional image of God, the problem that I set myself is to update this image.

This is an operation that I intend to perform on my own account, not least because the theological part of Davies’ discourse, notwithstanding the complex dialectics employed by him, seems to me to be unsatisfactory. I shall proceed not only on the basis of scientific data, but of everything that my particular vision and religious sensitivity suggests to me.

I am here delineating the concept of a God who undoubtedly does not sit down at the drawing board to design his creation before he brings it into being. Each divine action is comprised in an act of infinite love and infinite and total donation of God himself. This act gives origin to the ongoing expansion to the universe that proceeds by giving reality to beings who are becoming ever more autonomous.

The angelic entities draw upon the syntropy of the divine Source and insert it in the appropriate cosmic situations. Each situation thus comes to be determined as the resultant of a combination of forces, among which the divine force is undoubtedly fundamental, but not determinant in everything.

Hence the equilibriums that enable the cosmic reality to benefit from a certain order as it evolves in widely differing situations:

- 1) the uniform speed of expansion of the universe at every point;
- 2) the uniform distribution of its matter;
- 3) the equilibrium of forces that generally makes it possible for stars and planets to subsist in their structures;
- 4) the equilibrium that facilitates the genesis of life at least on this earth;
- 5) the ecological equilibrium;
- 6) and, lastly, all the situations that facilitate the gradual evolution of the living species and eventually of man.

The divine will is infinite donation of being, good, value, perfection, syntropy, but is far from being completely dominant in all situations.

However, we intuit that syntropy will fully prevail in the end: that will be the final triumph of the kingdom of God, which for the moment remains only a germinal reality, a prospective reality that is as yet far from being fully implemented.

The kingdom of God is its manifestation. And we clearly see that the manifestation of God is limited and crucified by the forces that de facto oppose it.

The involutory forces may arrive at killing even God: certainly not God himself in his absoluteness, but rather the presence of God in the universe, his manifestation and incarnation.

And yet our faith is that, notwithstanding everything, God is destined to rise again and triumph.

Davies says that it is impossible for a natural entity, intelligent or otherwise, to postpone the end of the universe forever. The organization of the cosmos is however destined to diminish and only a supernatural God could restore it.

Our faith in a God, in a true God, in a “supernatural God” who operates in the direction of syntropy tells us that the evolution of the entire universe tends towards perfection and commits also ourselves to cooperating by coming out of ourselves, out of our egoism and egocentrism.

This faith also tells us that finalization of the creature to its own ends constitutes the typical and classical involutory attitude. It is the attitude that makes us become centred on and gravitate around ourselves, with the unpleasant result of imploding into ourselves and becoming annulled: right through to the “death” that constitutes “the wages of sin” in accordance with an idea that the Bible suggests to us and has a counterpart also in a cosmological framework.

As we can see, I have strangely omitted any mention of the Einsteinian concept of time as a further dimension of space. And then, moving from this idea of the relativity of time, I have not even made the least attempt of developing the ideas of an eternal present that can readily be obtained from and well conform to the concept of God as absolute Mind, absolute and eternal Consciousness.

Here, albeit in a first and very incomplete and imperfect sketch, I have limited myself to gathering some inspiration that the new physics can give us. It can, indeed, help us a great deal, because in it we can see our idea of the Divinity. But what always remains the most essential thing is a further deepening of our religious experience.

2. The dimensions of the absolute

We argue and discuss a great deal without realizing that each can have some part of truth. Those who think that they possess the whole of truth – and exclusively so – are gravely mistaken. It is a mistake to exclude that the truth may also illumine other subjects in different ambits and on different levels.

The various metaphysics clash with each other as far as the Absolute is concerned. They clash, I fear, rather than striving towards a superior synthesis. Such an integration could be brought about in a far more pacific manner, in an incomparably more interesting perspective, when one becomes aware that even the Absolute has several dimensions.

The Absolute is a reality articulated into widely different planes or modes of being. This is intuitively grasped by Hindu spirituality when it places Paredra, the divine Spouse or Shakti, by the side of the supreme original God.

And thus we have two distinct spheres of divine life: above and at the first origin of everything, God as pure Self, as pure Self-consciousness immersed in the contemplation

of itself; and, on a lower and derived level, God as active Principle, as living and creator God.

And then the Trinity of the Neoplatonists and the Christians. At the supreme, first origin, God the Father of the Christians or the One of the Neoplatonists, who corresponds to the pure Self, the Brahman of the Hindus, pure self-consciousness and self-transparency.

At the base of the scale, the Holy Spirit, whom the Neoplatonists would call Soul of the World: the God who creates all things and, operating in the intimacy of each reality, gradually transforms it to render it ever more perfect, right through to the ultimate completion of the entire creation process.

Whereas in the Hindu vision there prevails this dualism, in both the Neoplatonic and the Christian perspective the intimate life of God becomes enriched by an intermediate plane: between Father and Holy Spirit there is the Son. I am referring to the Son as the Second Person of the Trinity not yet incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth. This mode of divine being is called *Nous* or *Logos*, i. e. Mind, by the Neoplatonists.

Christian theology also defines this Second Person as another particular mode of being of God: here we have God inasmuch as He is the universal, eternal Consciousness of all things; God inasmuch as his absolute thought gives all things their sense of being.

Let us try to understand what can be the role of this universal Consciousness. First of all, let us try to imagine how any reality could exist without having been thought by any thought. Everything that exists receives its sense of being from an act of consciousness.

I find myself taking a solitary walk in an oak wood and stop to contemplate an oak that on several occasions has already attracted my attention on account of its truly singular size. The oak exists. It is I who make it exist with my look. And I ask myself: if nobody were to look at it and be conscious of it, would it exist? At this moment I am here to contemplate it, and in an hour's time somebody else will pass and make it live again with his own act of consciousness. And in the meantime... ?

Even in the meantime the oak continues to exist. But not by its own virtue. Not independently of an act of consciousness that thinks it. Of this I am certain. On what basis? Not on the basis of a reasoning, but rather on the basis of an interior experience. An experience that matured within me at the very moment when, deep down in my intimacy, I developed a certain form of spiritual sensitivity.

This affirmation of mine may find consensus to the extent to which other subjects, each in his own intimacy, have matured similar experiences. Otherwise it would be love's labour lost to try to "demonstrate" the truth of the assumption to anybody who does not live in that truth, anybody who has not acquired it in a live, existential manner.

If the other person lives my truth, two words are more than enough to understand each other in a couple of seconds. But if he does not live it, I could sweat seven shirts without shifting him even a single millimetre from his own convictions.

In the act of looking at the oak, seeing it, considering it, thinking it, I bring it into being for myself: I make it exist for as much as I may know, in a manner that is undoubtedly very imperfect, subjective, relative.

But the oak exists also in itself, independently of my look. What consciousness can give it the sense of being that the oak has in itself? Certainly not the imperfect knowledge of some man, but only the absolute Consciousness of God.

Such a discourse is not unconnected with a concept of Shankara, the great master of the Vedanta. Shankara refers to what he calls "the Witness". He says that "when a thing is perceived, it means that there is a witness behind that perception". And immediately afterwards he asks himself: "But when the agent comes to lack, how is it possible for something to be perceived?" (*Vivekacudamani*, 215). The implicit answer is

clearly that the thing is impossible. It is simply inconceivable to the eyes of anybody who has matured that experience.

The Witness is the intimate Principle that brings the individual consciousnesses into being and, at one and the same time, the original Principle of the universal, divine, absolute Consciousness. The Brahman, as Shankara affirms, “is the interior Self” (131) and “the Witness of individuality” (294) and also “the subject of Everything” (466) and the “Self of all” (240).

The divine Consciousness therefore seems to be simultaneously articulated on two planes: on the plane of the originary it is pure Consciousness of itself; on what we might call a derived plane, it is the universal Consciousness of all the finite and created realities of this world.

Considered in this second modality, the Consciousness becomes the Second Person of the divine Trinity. It becomes the absolute Mind, of which – as Dante puts it – he “saw that in its depth far down is lying / Bound up with love together in one volume, / What through the universe in leaves is scattered “ (*Paradise*, XXXIII, 85-87).

The Consciousness of all things, the divine Logos is a reality that is not only universal and infinite, but also non-becoming and eternal. One could define it as a four-dimensional reality. All the events that we call past, present and future are contemporaneous in it. Everything is compresent in the mirror of the eternal present.

Here both space and time prove to be relative. It is a vision at which modern physics is arriving today. This vision is also confirmed by the data of parapsychology and, more particularly, the phenomena of clairvoyance in the future. In this form of clairvoyance future events are often grasped with such a host of detail that, taken on the whole, makes it extremely improbable that these future facts could be guessed by chance or that the subject could predetermine them.

Let us now consider the entire set of facts and events. Each is in itself transitory, ephemeral. But the whole is eternal. Seen as part of the whole, the individual fact is no longer ephemeral.

That a given small insect will live only a single day, that the day after it will no longer exist, is an eternal truth, is something that will remain forever: its memory will never be lost, because it is inscribed in the single act of non-becoming consciousness that is the divine Thought, that is God as absolute Mind, Logos, Second Person of the Trinity.

If things stand in these terms, it follows that the divine Consciousness of all finite and created things is anything other than ephemeral with respect to the originary Self-Consciousness. It lasts for just as long and is co-eternal with it. It is anything other than *maya*, anything other than an illusion: can an illusion that lasts for the whole of life be anything other than life itself? And what is an eternal illusion if not the Eternal?

This belies the assumption of the Indian ascetics, who see illusion in everything other than the pure Self, the Brahman-Atman.

It also belies the inferiority of the Second Person with respect to the First and more originary Person of the divine Trinity. The Second is coeternal with the First: how could it be inferior to it? The Second is not a kind of Under-God (as in the Neoplatonic Trinity); it is fully God, just like the First (as in the Christian Trinity). The Son (divine Logos, absolute Mind) is no less God than the Father (i. e. what Neoplatonists would call the One, and Hindus the Brahman).

And here is another consequence that seems to be of great interest for us men and better defines what could be our ultimate destiny: the divine perfection to which we tend in the ultimate limit is not a form of mental void that becomes realized in the state of consciousness of the “enstasis”, the *samadhi*, that the Indian ascetics seek to attain. At least, it consists of more than that.

Side by side with this “void” (may I be forgiven if I call it in this very approximate manner), which could even represent one of the modes of being of perfection, it is a question of attaining also a “full”. It is a question of attaining the vision of all things that we men, at this moment of time, define as present, past and future.

This panoramic vision is total, absolute knowledge: it is omniscience. It is an omniscience that brings things into being as they are, makes them consist of all their being, is but one with their being.

Let us assume that the evolution of us men has to attain its ultimate goal rather than approach it indefinitely without ever attaining it. Let us assume that divine perfection can eventually be attained. We can therefore imagine that the course of the individual consciousnesses must merge with the divine Consciousness like rivers that reach the sea.

At this point one may think that our ultimate destiny as men is to merge with the divine Consciousness, which is so universal as to comprise everything and is so strong as to bring all things into being.

In other words, our ultimate destiny is to achieve a perfection understood in the precise sense of completion and fullness.

Attaining this ultimate perfection is equivalent to achieving the supreme good and, consequently, perfect felicity.

So far we have considered the two more originary dimensions or planes or modes of being of the Absolute. Hindu spirituality tends to resolve everything in the First: the true absolute is the Brahman. We may call the Brahman the God of the Yogis.

There are also philosophical schools that tend to conceive the Divinity as the universal, eternal, total Consciousness, as the One-All, as absolute Being that becomes resolved in absolute Thought. A God conceived in these terms has been called, and we may likewise call him, the God of the Philosophers.

To concentrate attention on just a few names, we may recall Parmenides with all the Eleatic school; and also Plotinus (but only as regards the definition of his Logos, or Nous, identified with the Second Person of the Trinity, if we want to express ourselves by borrowing the language of Christian theology); and we can also recall Spinoza as the modern philosopher who develops with greater coherence elements that we can also find in the thought of many others. In our own day it fell to Emanuele Severino to take up the thematics of Parmenides. A conspicuous teaching in this sense comes to us through the mediumistic channels of the *Cerchio Firenze 77* (Florence Circle 77).

Hindu spirituality of the Upanishad-Vedanta-Yoga vein resolves all reality in the pure Self: all the rest is nothing but illusion.

We saw that an eternal Thought concerned with things to which it gives sense of being for all eternity can no longer be defined as illusory. It is very real, it is absolute reality.

At this point we should note a psychological phenomenon that involves also – and above all – numerous thinkers, scientists, spiritual men: each tends to attribute an absolute value to his own discoveries or, at least, is tempted to do so, a temptation to which it is difficult not to give way.

To come back to the discourse in which we are interested: whoever affirms the absoluteness of this divine Consciousness that contemplates not only itself but all things, whoever discovers the absoluteness of this universal Consciousness is tempted in the fervour of his discovery to conceive this Logos as the sole mode of being of the Absolute.

Whoever concentrates attention on the Logos in an exclusive manner will tend to pass in silence, tends to let the very autonomous (because originary) reality of the Brahman, the Father, the divine Self fall into oblivion; he will also tend to leave in the shadows not only the First Person, but also the Third.

This leads to the devaluation of God's third mode of being according to which He is the Living God, the Creator, the Holy Spirit or, if we want to translate into Hindu language, the Shakhti, the Spouse and Divine Mother.

God is the pure self, the pure originary Self-Consciousness, but is also the universal, eternal consciousness of all things. Inasmuch as he is absolute Consciousness, God donates their sense of being to all things. But there are things that express the creative will of God in a more direct manner, and there are others that do this far less. In reality there is good and evil, there are values and there are disvalues.

Perhaps one can also add that even a disvalue may be underlain by a fundamental value at the very first origin. At the base of everything there is God's creative act that gives being and value, good and beauty to all things.

If the creature then obscures this divine imprint (which in itself is positive) within itself, this depends on its attitude of creature. It is the creature that moves away from God every time it absolutizes itself, every time it turns itself into an idol, every time it puts itself in the place that is due only to the Divinity.

It is obvious that the creature does all this unduly, illicitly. Each creature should recognize God as its All, as its Beginning and its ultimate End, as the reason and motive of all its actions; every time it assumes the opposite attitude, it turns its back on God, betrays God and betrays itself, decays from its role, degrades itself.

To the extent to which it no longer sustains itself with God, it becomes arid, moves away from the Spring of life and goes towards its death. If this turning its back on God is sin, death is its wage, is its consequence.

And, even though total death is a limit situation, in relative terms we are all dead to some extent, some more, some less, in various and different ways. Whether or not we are aware of it, we all long for this eternal life, wherein alone we can attain our definitive salvation, the salvation that will once and for all give us back to ourselves and our true being.

God is present in all things in a different manner and to different degrees. To give the floor once more to Dante: "The glory of Him who moveth everything / Doth penetrate the universe, and shine / In one part more and in another less" (*Paradise*, I, 1-3).

God operates in things through the mediation of spiritual energies that tradition calls "angels". The angels are spiritual realities intermediate between God and his creatures. And it is by means of the angels that God, though absolute, makes himself relative; though infinite, makes himself present and active in the finite existing beings of this world; though eternal, acts in time, moves the evolution of the cosmos, carries forward the history of men, intervenes in the personal history of each one of us, lives in every reality, be it large or small or even infinitesimal.

All this is denied or at least devalued by certain gentlemen, among whom we can also find many of our friends. We dissent most strongly from them, we fight great philosophical battles, but in the end we remain friends all the same. And then there are those who limit themselves to seeing in God the Consciousness of all things and, in this sense, the One-All. They are the people who make every reality consist of this absolute Consciousness to which all things are reduced. They are monist, as one would say in philosophical terms. If we prefer to borrow an expression from the Vedanta, we can also call them "non-dualists".

What does such a monism, i. e. the affirmation that there exists only a single and unique Reality, the One-All, imply? It implies that the multiplicity of the existing is reduced to appearance. All are really one.

I believe myself to be an individual: undoubtedly solidary with the totality of the existing beings, but well distinct from the others and from every other reality. Very well

– they say – this is an illusory belief. Multiplicity does not exist, is a mere appearance. And the passage of time is likewise an appearance and illusion.

And they also say: there is only the Absolute. I illude myself to lead an existence of my own, distinct and different from those of the others. But these people reply: in actual fact, if everything coincides with the Absolute, I too am the Absolute. And everything is absolute, everything is good, everything is perfectly rational. Even the apparent evils have their justification. Evil does not exist: it is pure illusion, fruit of ignorance.

Affirmations of this kind could fit the divine Consciousness: God himself lives such a state of mind on the plane of the Logos; just as we may also live it at the ultimate end of our evolution.

But referred to our present condition, for as long as it may last with all its limits, referred to our present toilsome and imperfect existences, often even very painful, or guilty, or miserable, or all these together, such affirmations seem extremely paradoxical. They clash with the evidence of common sense: the abstractness of the philosophers can arrive at this point only when they fall blindly in love with their own abstractions!

Such affirmations may prove to be adequate as far as they concern God as absolute Mind that gives sense of being to all things. But then, if everything resolves itself in this absolute reality and there is nothing else, if the individualized, autonomous and multiple existence of the realities of this world is nothing but an illusion, if all is one, it follows that any empirical reality has to be identified with the All and therefore has to be defined with the same attributes.

When one proposes a discourse, no matter what it may be, one has to avoid falling into the absurd. And here, if we want to avoid a danger of this kind, which seems highly incumbent, we are obliged to conclude that the existing beings of the universe, multiple and becoming, have full and autonomous consistency: they really exist in themselves, cannot be reduced to mere cinematographic images.

But God also *exists*: in his absoluteness he not only *is*, but *is there* as living presence, at work in the things of the world and protended to bringing the creation to its ultimate perfection.

It is precisely in this sense that “the glory of Him who moveth everything / Doth penetrate the universe, and shine / In one part more and in another less”. This is the verse, already cited, with which Dante commences his Paradise. And then immediately adds: “Within the heaven which most his light receives / Was I...”, alluding to his ascent to the Empyrean of the Blessed.

“Our Father, who art in heaven”, begins the prayer Jesus taught us. The kingdom of God is in the heaven of the spirit and “is not of this world”, as Jesus said to Pilate (Jn 18, 36). But even the Lord’s Prayer invokes: “Thy kingdom come... in earth as it is in heaven”.

“The kingdom of heaven”, as Jesus explained, “is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (Mt 13, 31-32).

The living and creative God is undoubtedly well present also in our world as of this moment, but his presence is germinal, just as his creative work is ongoing, in full swing, but as yet far from the goal of complete and perfect implementation.

In creating, God leaves space to his creatures, who therefore remain free to follow or not to follow the Creator, to pursue or not to pursue the goals of the creative process, to obey or not to obey the divine law, to cooperate or not to cooperate in what is called the divine “project”. The creatures thus limit God, they can effectively oppose his action and in the limit can “crucify” Him.

Divine omnipotence does not consist of the fact that God can realize whatever he wants at any moment in a creation that limits Him; rather, it consists of the certain fact that final victory will be his.

God nevertheless stands in need of the cooperation of his creatures. The creation is also a commitment of us creatures to cooperate with the initiative of the Creator, to fight with Him against all obstacles, inadequacies and forms of evil.

Albeit in extreme synthesis, we have characterized three modes of being of God, three levels of divine life: from the God of the Yogis we passed to the God of the Philosophers and then we considered what we may call the God of the Religious.

The God of the Religious, God as creator and Holy Spirit, is also God as other from ourselves, as totally Other. Here we have the “dualistic” God who transcends us, with whom we may establish an “I-Thou” relationship, a relationship of dialogue, love and prayer.

For his part, the “monistic” God does not justify prayer. In a monistic vision, where the creature is reduced to a mere part of an All, the part cannot dialogue with the All other than as poetic figure. Even the monistic Cerchio Firenze has its prayers, which are not devoid of beauty, warmth and vigour, but one cannot understand what sense they may have if not on the level of pure poetry.

Side by side with these three modes of being of God, we shall now have to consider a fourth: the incarnate God. God incarnates himself in all the saints, to the extent of the sanctity of each. Indeed, sanctity is nothing other than the renunciation of all egoism and human egocentrism to donate oneself wholly to God, not to live other than for Him and of Him.

To the extent to which a saint surrenders himself to God and renders himself capable of receiving Him, deep within himself he opens a road for an infusion of divine life. The man of God thus really implements himself as Man-God.

And the Man-God, who has his paradigm in Jesus Christ, is a man transformed at all levels, a man who speaks and acts with power in an aura of prodigy, of daily miracle. His selfsame physical body becomes an ever more adequate vehicle for the spirit, this to the point of having a paranormal phenomenology, an ever greater and more incisive range of paramystic phenomena.

When he implements himself as Man-God even from this imperfect human condition, the man of God prefigures the perfect condition of the risen saints. It is in the end that we shall find ourselves all “grown up in every way” to the point of attaining “mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4, 11-16). This will happen until in the end “God will be all in all” (1 Cor 15, 28).

In this sense each man in his singularity is a new God who is beginning, a God incarnate in the process of formation, an imitation of Christ.

We have thus very summarily reviewed four dimensions of the Absolute, none of which should be either forgotten or undervalued if we want to have an idea, certainly imperfect but not wholly incomplete, of divine life in the different expressions of its dialectics, in all its complex and powerful dynamism.

3. From the pure Self to the One-All: another way of discovering immortality

This road commences in the East and, more particularly, in India. As a start, it will be useful and also agreeable to recall a beautiful Indian story that the *Katha Upanishad* tells us.

Naciketas, son of a Brahmin, was one of those boys who, as one may say, are born philosophers. One day his father offered the gods a sacrifice that was somewhat special, but nevertheless contemplated by usage: he offered everything he possessed. These chattels, though formally donated by the divinity, would in practice be divided among priests and other Brahmins.

Some cows were offered. But when they were presented, the boy noted that they seemed old or in poor shape and therefore unusable. Remembering that according to the law the property of a man comprised his offspring, the boy therefore offered himself: "And to whom will you give me, father?" Such a perfectionist son irritated the parent, who lost his patience and replied: "I shall give you to death". And thus the son, who took everything seriously, set out for the place of Yama, God of death. The god was not at home and the boy expected him for three days without eating.

At long last Yama returned home and, having learnt that a member of the Brahmin caste had to wait three long days for him, became worried that this omission, though involuntary, might harm his own spiritual progress and future happiness. In the Indian tradition even the gods may have these problems, just like men. Yama therefore received the boy with extreme courtesy and, in token of his regret, offered him three graces, three favours.

Naciketas asked the god: first, that he should placate his father; second, that he should explain to him how one has to execute the sacrifice of fire that assures paradise. Yama accorded these two graces. And the third...?

The third favour that Naciketas asked of Yama was that he should reveal to him what was man's destiny after death.

At this point the god dodged and proved to be extremely unwilling. Even the gods, he said, once had doubts in this connection. The matter was difficult to explain. Yama asked the boy not to insist and offered him other things instead: children and grandchildren who would live a hundred years, elephants, horses, herds, gold, power, beautiful dancers and as many years of life as he wanted for himself.

But all these things are ephemeral, objected Naciketas (who, notwithstanding his tender age, already knew a thing or two) and do not bring true and lasting happiness. In the end Yama relented and agreed to explain that man himself, choosing one road rather than another, could determine his destiny.

The man who pursues pleasure, the man who desires and entrusts himself to the rite for obtaining the satisfaction of his desires, if he acts well and performs all the rites, after death can at the most aspire to the *Brahmaloka*, a paradisiacal state that is undoubtedly happy and of very long duration, but not wholly eternal.

After having sojourned in *Brahmaloka*, be it even for a very long time, the soul is destined to become reincarnated inasmuch as it is still a prisoner of desire, has not yet freed itself of desire in a definitive manner, has not yet become emancipated from ignorance.

We can free ourselves from ignorance only when we realize that our true I is not the empirical I that successively becomes incarnated in many different lives, but an I that has always been immutable, eternal and absolute, and is identical and one with the divine Principle of every reality.

It is to be understood that this learning occurs in an act of consciousness that commits not only the intellect, but the whole of man.

This universal, eternal, divine I is the *Atman*, which is the true essence of each particular human I. It is a question of learning, a question of realizing that the true I of each one of us is the divine I, the *Atman* or, which is the same thing, the *Brahman*.

Now, to attain this knowledge, which is so important for the liberation, the salvation of each one of us, one has to learn to discriminate. Who discriminates knows, is

no longer ignorant. Discrimination guides us men to discover that in reality, in our profound and true essence, we are the Atman, we are the Brahman, we are God.

We can find affirmations connected in this manner not only in the *Katha Upanishad*, but also in the other Upanishads, the texts of the Vedanta in general and particularly in the *Vivekacudamani* of Shankara. The Yoga was later to add variations concerned more with the methodology to be followed than the basic principles.

Yama would therefore seem to be justified in concluding his words to Naciketas as follows: “Whoever has realized the Atman, which is unfathomable, intangible, without form, without decline, and also without taste, eternal and without odour; whoever has realized what is without beginning and end, what exceeds all greatness, what is immutable, that person is free of death” (*Katha Upanishad*, 1, 3).

If I may formulate a brief comment, let me note that we are here concerned with an impersonal immortality, where everything that formed part of the existence of the empirical subject, i. e. of Tom, Dick or Harry, is wholly transcended and forgotten. There are no dear memories to be conserved, nor are there values to safeguard and promote that are not ephemeral, outside the pure Self.

The pure Self, or Atman, is a single whole with the Brahman: “This you are”, the *Chandogya Upanishad* (6, 8, 7) tells the young Svetaketu and therefore to all men.

An equivalent expression is the “I am Brahman” that we find in the *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanishad*.

Whoever is capable of becoming aware of this identity in a live and profound manner will realize it in his own life. He who knows, the illumined, is also a realized person.

In this sense, as the *Mundaka Upanishad* adds (3, 2, 9), “he who knows the Brahman becomes it”. He effectively becomes the Brahman precisely because he already was it originally, always.

The Vedanta, and particularly Shankara in the aforementioned work, develops all these concepts in a more systematic manner.

Substantially, Shankara defines the Atman-Brahman as the “witness” that renders possible any kind of perception of things and, ultimately, also the existence of the perceived things. Man becomes conscious of all this in an intimate experience.

Here we have a true spiritual discovery that contains the aspect of truth of what in philosophy is called idealism. Idealism affirms that nothing could exist without a mind that thinks it, that gives it sense of being by means of an act of consciousness.

If we reflect well, it is truly so. Let us try to imagine a reality that exists without having been thought by anybody. If we meditate about this in depth, we shall realize that a reality that exists independently of a thought is a nonsense, something absurd, something altogether inconceivable.

This conclusion is of extreme importance. It means that matter cannot remain in itself, cannot consist of itself, without a spirit that thinks it. It means that matter is ultimately mind, spirit. And if it is spirit, it is also immortal.

Let us try to reconstruct Shankara’s thought in his own words, with a series of citations from the book I have already mentioned several times.

Shankara notes that “when a thing is perceived, it means that there is a witness behind that perception”. And he asks himself: “But when the subject of the action comes to lack, how is it possible for anything to be perceived?” (*Vivekacudamani*, 215).

His conclusion is: “All existence, being effect of the real Brahman, cannot be anything other than Brahman, because it cannot exist independently of It” (V., 230).

We therefore have to realize within ourselves the Brahman or Atman or the Paramatman, or whatever else we may want to call this true and profound reality of ours.

Study of the Scriptures gives us an important point of reference, but that is not enough. The same may be said of “meritorious actions”.

The essential thing is to concentrate on the Brahman with constancy, with the most intense and exclusive attention and with the sole desire of realizing the Brahman, translating it into practice. “Fix your purified internal organ on your real nature, on the Witness, on knowledge”, admonishes Shankara, “and, little by little, rendering yourself calm, realize your own Atman” (383).

Keeping “the mind firmly on the Atman”, great progress can be made along this spiritual road, whereas “for him who pursues knowledge of the Brahman there is no death worse than inattention” (327).

One has to desire this goal with all one’s soul: “Just as the grub, aspiring to be a wasp, becomes a wasp..., so the Yogi, contemplating only the Paramatman, realizes the Paramatman” (358-359).

Continuous attention has to be combined with “uninterrupted discernment” (8). This is the “discernment between real and unreal” that “bases itself on the unshakable conviction that only the Brahman is real and that the phenomonic universe is not real” (20).

The ascetic receives a twofold invitation from discrimination: “contemplate the Atman, which is beatitude and source of liberation” and also “renounce everything that is non-Self, generator of suffering” (379).

This renunciation implies detachment from every reality that is not in keeping with the goal to be pursued: “Therefore break every desire for the objects of the senses, dangerous poisons foreboding death, abandon pride of caste, family and social state; abstain from acting, do not identify yourself with the body, the mind, etc., all unreal things; and fix your consciousness on the Atman, because in truth you are the Witness, you are the Brahman, devoid of duality, supreme, not contaminated by the Mind” (179).

In the end, “when the modifications of the mind have become re-absorbed in the supreme Self, in the undifferentiated Brahman, the phenomonic world ceases to be perceived” (398). And “what remains is the Witness that has the nature of knowledge” (210).

At this point, “having realized the identity of the Atman with the Brahman, my mind has vanished with all its activities. I no longer distinguish ‘this’ from ‘that’, neither do I recognize the measure of incommensurable beatitude”, attests the now fully realized ascetic (481).

And here are some other ways in which he tries to explain the experience of the goal he has attained: “I cannot express in words, nor can I conceive with the mind, the splendour of this supreme Brahman. In this ocean, essence of beatitude, my mind has become dissolved, just like a hailstone in the sea” (482).

Full of stupour, he asks himself: “Where is it that the universe has gone? Who has made it vanish? I have only barely glimpsed it and yet it has already disappeared. Oh wonder of a mirage!” (483). Now, in the Brahmanic ocean... I no longer see, no longer know and no longer feel anything at all; I am Atman, distinct from all the other forms” (485).

I also note that, if in realized man there remains only the experience of the Atman or, which is the same thing, the Brahman, and all the other experiences have been overcome and forgotten because they are unreal, the same may be expected to happen after death. The immortality of liberated man is the subsistence of the pure Self and nothing other than that. And therefore no immortality for persons as such, for things even if they are important for us, for values.

Since I also want to make some critical considerations, it seems to me to be appropriate at this point to keep particularly well in mind what Shankara says in the first of the cited passages, which merits being read again and completed.

“All existence”, recites Sutra (or Aphorism) 230 of the collection under consideration, “being effect of the real Brahman, cannot be anything other than Brahman, because it cannot exist independently of It”. And then adds: “Whoever sustains the contrary is under the impression of the illusion and speaks like someone who is asleep”.

The first affirmation, namely that all is Brahman and that nothing exists outside it, certainly expresses a direct experience, and on this I have no doubt whatsoever.

But I wonder: how did the ascetic succeed in obtaining an experience of the Brahman so exclusive as to leave no room for any experience other than illusions and dreams?

Shankara himself explains how one can arrive at this way of seeing things: one gets there by virtue of an exclusive concentration of the mind on that reality, excluding all the other possible thoughts in such a manner that in the end they are all emarginated and, in the limit, suppressed.

But let us reflect more thoroughly about this: that we, availing ourselves of well-tried techniques, succeed in expelling certain thoughts is not of itself sufficient to legitimate the conclusion that the realities thought by these thoughts are as ephemeral as the clouds that the wind may disperse in a few minutes.

Even a deluded lover could say: “That woman no longer exists”. And let us assume that he is capable of eliminating this thought from his mind. Does this mean that she has ceased to exist also as such, in her own reality? It may well be that thinking her to be non-existent, or illusory and dissolved (or, at least, dissolvable) like a bad dream, can help to forget her.

Another element that will help to chase that thought away will be to re-evoke of that woman not so much the magic moments, her beauty and virtues, but rather her faults, the quarrels, the more disagreeable memories. Thus, in the few thoughts that he may still dedicate to her (may they indeed be as few as possible!), the ex-lover will remember her above all as the negative being that made him suffer.

Otherwise he would run the risk of becoming again involved with someone who will only renew his afflictions. Perhaps she will concede him some other magic moments or ephemeral gratifications. But with the result of rendering more distant the (even more magic) moment of liberation that seemed so close at hand and has now been postponed for nobody knows how long.

Though this example may seem inadequate, it will make us understand what can be the functionality of a certain attitude that can be adopted: if there is need to eliminate certain experiences, emarginating them from our life, the best technique would seem to be to persuade ourselves and suggest to ourselves that:

- 1) these experiences are truly negative;
- 2) we can get rid of them just as easily as a bad dream that we can dissipate with even a minimum of good will.

Ascetics turn the search for the Self into the purpose of their life. To “realize” the Self in the strongest sense, they have to suspend the experiences of the phenomonic world. Since this undertaking is not easy and calls for a true mobilization of all the psychic energies and resources, it is essential that these energies be prevented from considering the empirical world. This operation will best succeed if it is performed in a more radical manner: not temporary suspension of the experiences of the exterior world, but rather abolition, because the world is bad, offers nothing other than vain sorrows and toils.

Enough of the world, therefore. And what does it need to get rid of it? Nothing: the world does not exist. Abolishing it calls for the same toil as killing a dying person. The external world is a huge cloud of ugly and disagreeable illusions, certainly, but fortunately they are also ephemeral and easy to disperse: it needs little to disperse them, all one has to do is to blow them away.

Let us read Sutra 230 once more to examine its second part. Let us read it from the beginning to remember its overall significance, which will help us to concentrate our attention better on what remains to be considered. Hence: “All existence, being effect of the real Brahman, cannot be anything other than Brahman, because it cannot exist independently of It. Whoever sustains the contrary is under the impression of the illusion and speaks like someone who is asleep”.

As I said before, the ascetic here expresses a spiritual experience, is dominated by it. There can be no doubt about this. What seems more open to discussion, however, is the logical passage between the various affirmations, which are:

- 1) “All existence is effect of the Brahman”;
- 2) All existence cannot exist independently of the Brahman”;
- 3) All existence cannot be anything other than the Brahman”.

It is clear that we are here concerned with a metaphysical causality that by its very nature is permanent, because it is essential, not empirical. In simpler words, a man or an animal may continue to exist even though his parents are dead, a table may continue to exist perfectly even after the death of the joiner. On the other hand, the creatures of this world could not continue to exist as such if the divine Creator were no longer to exist, however absurd this may be.

Having clarified this presupposition, we can review the three affirmations and note that the first perfectly implies the second, whereas the first two do not by any means imply the third. Indeed, are very far from implying it.

If existence is the (metaphysical) effect of the Brahman, it is clear that it cannot exist independently of it.

But the fact that existence is effect of the Brahman does not imply that it must wholly coincide with It in a single whole.

As if a son had to coincide with the father in a single whole. Woe if a father were to get it into his head that the son has to be equal to him, just one with him, as if he were not another: a different individual, with characters and gifts and aspirations and projects of his own!

The same can be said also as far as metaphysical causes and effects are concerned. A universe clearly distinct from and “other” than its divine Creator is perfectly conceivable. This is the least one may say even without entering into the merit of whether truth and reason are on the side of the monotheists (who conceive God as transcendental) or the pantheists, who in the limit identify him with the created.

I have tried to render these reasonings simpler by making use (possibly in a manner that is not very dignified for a philosopher who takes himself seriously) also of examples taken from empirical life. However this may be, anybody who has followed the thread of these reasonings and (let us assume) agrees with me has opened for himself a road for concluding - if our Indian masters will excuse me - that there is not only the Brahman, that there is not just a single subjectivity devoid of any kind of concrete thought, but that there is also a universe. Such a universe, though brought into being by the Brahman, is not a single whole with It: it is a clearly distinct and different reality, endowed with a certain autonomous consistency of its own.

Now, the problem is to see what is the consistency of all these realities, which comprised also the persons who are dear to us and many things that may be of great value for us.

It is a question of seeing whether the universe as such, as a reality distinct and different from that of the Brahman, has a true consistency within it and what may be the degree of this consistency.

The Indian tradition, especially in the vein of the Upanishad-Vedanta-Yoga succession, affirms the mental character of all reality, even of matter. And this must undoubtedly be considered as a great discovery of the spirit.

But one must nevertheless ask oneself: does affirming that reality is wholly produced by thought imply that it must necessarily be of an illusory character?

I certainly do not think that this must be a necessary conclusion. There can be a weak thought, just as there can be a strong thought. And it all depends on seeing with which of these two adjectives one can define the divine thought that creates the universe.

Even without entering into the merits of the question, let me say right away that the Divinity as generally seen by the Indian tradition is incomparably weaker than it is seen by monotheism. No Israelite, no Christian and no orthodox Muslim would ever dream of defining the creation as illusory. But it would be perfectly coherent for them to affirm that it is of a mental character and that even matter reduces essentially to spirit.

At least for the moment and on this particular occasion, I leave the question whether monotheism is or is not nearer the truth than other conceptions of the Divinity open and unprejudiced. Here I only want to observe that the more modern scientific theories tend in any case to conceive reality as a four-dimensional continuum. In this framework time as such, i. e. as the becoming or succession of events, is relative, just like the succession of the stations on a page of a railway timetable. All events, in actual fact, are compresent. In a certain way even future events already exist.

Monotheist theologians confirm that all is already present and continues to be so in the divine mind.

Another confirmation of this conception can be induced by considering the phenomena of precognition, or clairvoyance in the future, that are studied by parapsychologists. Certain future events are foreseen and foreknown in such detail as to make it extremely improbable and practically impossible for a clairvoyant to succeed in foreseeing them by pure chance, or due to the simple fact that he has determined them himself.

From this conception one deduces that what is eternal is not only the Brahman, or God, but also all that exists in the divine mind. This means that there is immortality not only for the pure Self, but also for the memory of everything that has happened. This implies the possibility of finding there once more all the persons dear to us (and it may well be that all will be dear to us then), together with all the common memories. What is more, it would also be possible for us to find there all the realities in which there are expressed our values, everything that is truly important. And hopefully we shall find the Self there, which (as we saw) is the foundation of everything; but we shall find it together with many other things just as essential for us, that will give us just as much pleasure.

4. The eternal present and the creation

Each of us is anxious to confirm to himself by means of some argument that the soul survives physical death. Idealism is undoubtedly one of the roads to follow to this end.

What is idealism? It is the affirmation that every reality is idea, is thought, is consciousness or phenomenon of consciousness.

We can find veins of idealism both in the East (in the great Indian spiritual tradition) and the West; here, above all, in German nineteenth-century philosophy. A century earlier, Britain had witnessed the flourishing of empirist philosophy, which already contained some idealist elements.

George Berkeley was one of these British empirists. His philosophy moved from the principle *Esse est percipi*, “Being” is “being perceived”. In other words, nothing can exist unless it is in some way thought by a consciousness.

The empirists resolve every act of consciousness in perception. But a philosophy that wants to go all the way may ask itself whether a perception does not stand in need of a subject, a mind, someone who thinks.

Some millennia earlier, Shankara, India’s great master of the Vedanta, had already noted that “when a thing is perceived, it means that there is a witness behind that perception”. A subject, in fact.

He added that such a subject is also “the witness of himself, who knows himself by himself”.

Let us therefore explore the depths of ourselves. Let us ignore the sensations, the feelings, the individual thoughts, which come and go. In the end we shall discover a kind of substrate that is and remains always the same.

Let us assume that my name is Mario Rossi. I can ask myself: “What is this substrate?”. Is it the man Mario Rossi?

Indians are tremendous analyzers. Here we started by talking about a witness, i. e. we talked about somebody. But now this somebody, this Mario Rossi is mercilessly stripped of all his empirical connotations. Away with the physical body, destined to perish, but also away with the contingencies of psychic life: away with the sensations, away with feelings, away with thoughts by means of which the psyche determines itself in ever different and changing forms.

What is it that eventually remains of Mario? Nothing that can still distinguish him from Giuseppe or Pietro or Gabriella or Caterina. There remains a subject in general, a pure light of subjectivity. There remains the pure principle of subjectivity that is in me, but is exactly the same also in you, in this other, in all of us.

This pure principle of spirituality that I discover within me corresponds to what the Indians call the Atman, a Sanskrit term.

Let us be guided by the Indian masters of the Upanishads, the Vedanta and the Yoga and continue this voyage of exploration of ourselves. We shall discover that this principle of spirituality that gives light and sense to our personality of individuals no longer belongs to the individual as such.

It is like the sun that illumines my room. Opening the blinds, I capture its particular ray that gives me life, light, warmth and pleasure of being in the world. Though it enters my room just as it enters the room of billions of other persons, the sun remains outside, far away. It transcends all men just as it transcends myself.

The soul has its interior windows. The Atman is thus in all of us. It gives sense to the spiritual life of each one of us. It personalizes itself in each one of us, even though it is not necessarily bound to his person.

Using the image of the sun that enters through our windows even though it rises high in the sky and far away, I think I have already given a first idea – and a rather visual one – of the great discovery of the Indian tradition: the Atman, pure principle of every spirituality of man is, even before that, pure principle of universal, absolute spirituality. The Atman is divine: it is all one with the Divine in its originary essence. The Atman is the Brahman.

In the Hindu perspective that we are here developing all the beings of this world, just like this particular woman and this particular man in their empirical existence, as

also the world in its totality, derive from a kind of mental game of the Brahman. Projecting himself outside himself, the Brahman creates all these forms that, having only ephemeral consistency, are illusion and mirage, Maya.

All that is real is therefore the Atman-Brahman. Every other being has the reality of a curtain of clouds that can be dispersed by a single gust of wind.

Very rightly, we take the theme of survival to heart. In this horizon, what is it that can survive of us? Undoubtedly, the pure spiritual principle, but nothing of our personality and not even the memories associated with it. Everything that has been in our life, the human values in which we believed, the things that were dear to us, even the persons whom we loved, all this becomes annulled as if it had never happened or existed.

The fact is that the Indians of this particular vein of spirituality that we have examined agree in seeing existence in a negative light. To avoid suffering, to realize in ourselves the perfection that is also perfect felicity, we have to free ourselves of existence.

Now, if existing is suffering, if existence as such does not merit other than being “done away with”, conceiving it as an ephemeral reality, ready to vanish like a bad dream upon reawakening, is certainly of great comfort for the ascetic. “Wake up, ascetic: all you have to do is to wake up” are undoubtedly words that bring help and strength. It is like saying to soldiers: “Courage, victory is ours”. Thus the worse things go for the combatant, the militant, the more blows he has to take, the more courage he will give to himself by raising the fatidic two fingers in the form of a “V” in token of victory. It may be inexact as a statement, but is highly functional.

Though this Indian spirituality sees the very fact of existing in a negative light, there are also other traditions that consider existence in a very different manner. The monotheists – Jews, Christians, Muslims – believe in a God who is supremely good and is creator in the strong sense. Everything that springs from the creative act of such a God is good. And therefore existence as such is good.

Ill and evil are unfortunately present in it, often in intolerable forms and proportions; in the vision of the monotheists, however, this does not imply that existence as such is intrinsically bad.

Ill and evil are often an atrocious reality, but fortunately only contingent. Evil was not introduced into the creation by God, but by his creatures. God does neither ill nor evil, but only good and redeems us from all evil. Some day when the creative process attains completion, its ultimate point of perfection, evil will completely disappear and good will be fully realized.

In the monotheist vision, the creation, considered in its principle and also its ultimate outcome, is not only something positive, but also very consistent. It is undoubtedly a mental creation, it undoubtedly is of an essentially mental nature: it is undoubtedly made of thought, consists of thought, but we are here concerned with a strong thought brought into being by a strong Mind.

As a prospect, God, infinite Mind of unlimited power, gives everything to his creation, without limits. The creation is a God in embryo: it is like another God in the making, in the process of formation. For it there is the prospect of eternal life.

Eternity is immutable by definition. A destination of eternal life can also be our future; but in itself, in its own sphere as we might say, it is already present: it is eternal present. There is a sphere in which the totality of things and events gives itself all together, compresent.

After Einstein, modern physics is oriented to accepting that time can be defined as a “fourth dimension” of space. To express the concept in the words of Professor Giuseppe Arcidiacono, a well known physicist: “This is equivalent to saying (but not all think of it) that we no longer have a space like the one we imagined, namely

characterized by a continuous passage from past to future, from being to not being. It is not true that there 'exists' only the present, while the past drops into oblivion, because it no longer is, and that the future does not yet exist. That is only an illusion of our limited senses. In actual fact, space and time constitute a single entity that 'exists'... in its totality of past-present-future as a single whole" (G. A., *Oltre la quarta dimensione* [Beyond the fourth dimension], Il Fuoco, Rome 1980, pp. 17-18).

Another confirmation is provided by parapsychology. There we note the phenomena of "precognition", also referred to as "clairvoyance in the future". A sensitive has the vision of a certain future event that eventually takes place. Far more often than is generally realized, the event is foreseen with a host of details that it is very difficult to attribute to pure chance. The intervention of chance can always be assumed in abstract terms, but seems highly improbable: an altogether minimal and even infinitesimal probability.

The extreme improbability that precognition is due to chance strongly suggests that it is a true precognition. If that is so, it means that future events are in some way already compresent in a "four-dimensional continuum", or whatever else one may want to call it.

But there are those who do not want to admit this, do not want to admit this eternal present. And for the sake of not admitting it make the assumption that the event the subject is said to have foretold was in actual fact determined by him. Possibly without realizing it.

Let us assume that, as happened on several occasions, the subject person, though in his own home several thousand miles away, has had a precognition regarding the shipwreck of the "Titanic" or the outbreak of a world war. One would have to assume that it was he who sank the liner, that it was he who unleashed the world conflict. For the sake of not admitting the relativity of time in an eternal present that gives itself wholly en bloc, they end up by attributing truly supermagical and even less probable powers to a psychic person.

Here we have confirmation of the very ancient philosophic conceptions, by which every now and again a thinker becomes inspired and discovers at least a partial truth.

Let me explain myself a little better: it may be that when a theory is absolutized and applied to interpreting every aspect of reality, it is not exact in everything, but well fits a certain limited aspect of things at a certain level.

Already in the 6th century B.C., the Greek philosopher Parmenides conceived Being as a One-All where happenings and facts that we call present, past and future are all compresent in eternity.

Parmenides and his followers (who together make up the famous Eleatic school that flourished in Italy along the Tyrrhenian coast of present-day Basilicata, which at that time formed part of Greater Greece) defined the Becoming as illusory.

This affirmation may seem somewhat drastic. We men who evolve in the course of time feel that becoming is very real. But let us, at least ideally, place ourselves in the dimension of the eternal: and we shall see that the events are all compresent like the pages of a book in which one can read – a little at a time – all the events it talks about, but then, closing the book, one can reconsider it as a unitary whole, while in our spirit there immediately takes shape the panoramic vision of the entire story.

There is a dimension of eternity in things. And, at least in the West, the philosophers and even the theologians who endeavour to gain greater insight into it more or less base themselves on Parmenides, are inspired by him.

Thus a Plato, albeit limited to his "world of ideas", which is eternal.

Thus a Plotinus, limited to his vision of the Nous or Logos, i. e. the divine Mind.

But also the Christian theologians when they consider the Second Person of the Trinity.

Here we are in any case concerned with the level where the Being is connoted as eternally present and absolute Consciousness. Of this divine Mind, where events are coeternal, Dante, returning from Paradise, tells us that there he saw “Bound up with love together in one volume, / What through the universe in leaves is scattered “ (*Paradise*, XXXIII, 85-87).

At this point mention, be it even brief and inadequate, should also be made of the doctrine proposed by the masters of the Cerchio Firenze 77. They present themselves as entities that come to us humans from the other dimension to offer us their teachings.

One point of their doctrine that seems to me to merit particular attention is the one where they speak of an eternal present that for them is the sole true reality, the sole absolute. All is eternal Consciousness. Becoming is illusory, just like that of the frames of a film which creates the impression that something changes as it runs along, whereas in actual fact each one of these frames remains exactly as it was before.

Certainly, lived as it is by the subject, each personal existence seems a fine and good reality for as long as it lasts. The story (or “fable”, if you prefer) is something that “I hear told ever since I have been in this world”, philosophizes Trilussa in his delightful poems written in Roman dialect. All these decades may be illusory, but they seem somewhat long in passing.

The teaching of the Florence Circle insists on another point that seems to me to be equally noteworthy. In the end all the human existences, each with its imperfect and separate subjective consciousness, will eventually merge with the divine Consciousness at the moment when ultimate perfection is attained. This would confirm to us the truly absolute and therefore fundamentally unique character of the Consciousness. In the absolute Consciousness each individual consciousness is thus maintained forever with the totality of its live memories. The contribution of research and creativity that each has made towards that universal end remains identified and actual in the eternal Consciousness.

Here we have a form of individual immortality that is thoroughly compatible with the merging of the individuals in the whole: the individual is maintained, does not become dissolved, is never abolished as an individual in the choir where each voice is essential in its diversity, in its singularity.

It seems that in the end time must merge with the eternal, with the absolute Consciousness, where everything is remembered in the most vivid and concrete manner, with all details and nothing is either lost or abolished.

In that omniscience, which is full perfection and felicity, we shall find once more all the persons dear to us and, with them, everything else that is dear to us, everything that has aroused our interest, everything that we loved, everything that represented a value for us.

Here we have a beautiful immortality: far more beautiful and seductive, I would say, than the one we are promised by the Indian ascetics we considered a little while ago.

And where is it that contemplation of the Brahman would take us? It seems to me that contemplation of a reality that reveals itself to be much vaster and similarly valid, cannot but include the contemplation of the most originary divine Principle as an integral part. Or, better, as a central part: contemplation of the creatures undoubtedly remains something peripheral with respect to the self-contemplation of God in his first Principle.

So far we have considered two different levels in the Divinity itself. The most originary level seems to be the one in which the Divinity is still enclosed in contemplation of itself: this corresponds to the Brahman and, in the Christian ambit, to the First Person of the Trinity.

But God comes out of himself with an act of love: and thus, from pure self-consciousness, he becomes consciousness of the creatures. As has already been briefly

suggested, the absolute Consciousness is a second mode of being of God derived from his first and originary mode of being like the Son from the Father, the one coeternal with the other. It is the Second Person of the Trinity: more precisely, the Son or Verb or divine Logos, the divine Intelligence of all things. It is the absolute Consciousness that gives its sense of being to all things.

At this point the pattern has to be completed with the mention of a third mode of being of God: the mode of God as Creator, as Spirit who vivifies, brings to life all the existing and acts in the creation to lead it to its fullness and ultimate perfection.

The reality of this third mode of being of God – derived but essential – is attested by religious experience. Even Hinduists recognize when by the side of the Brahman, i. e. God enclosed in the contemplation of himself, they place God the Creator, or the same God as creator: the latter can best be defined as a different level, or mode of being, of a Divinity that is always one and the same.

This more active God (or divine mode of being) is often called the Lord Ishvara. At other times it is identified with Shakti, spouse of the God. Whereas the originary God (Shiva, for example) remains immobile in contemplation of himself, she creates the illusory mirage of the world by dancing around him.

Unlike the Hinduist God, who creates a large number of universes, though all are ephemeral, the monotheist God creates only one universe, but far more consistent and perfectible. The creative action brings into being a positivity that aims at greater good, the ever better and, ultimately, perfection. But this only if no negative force interferes with the divine project.

The negative tendencies take shape in the creation inasmuch as the creation may freely determine itself and therefore also in a negative direction. Negativity, or sin, is when a creature encloses itself in itself, thus ignoring the fact that only in God can it find its origin, its end, and its law.

Death derives from sin, at least tendentially, because the creature that ceases to sustain itself with God becomes arid and moves towards its annulment.

God is only harbinger of good. He does not bring about any evil, not even for the purposes of a greater good. Evil derives from sin, which only the creature can commit.

The work of God consists of a single and eternal act that is love and donation of being and unlimited good. God's one and eternal act ends up by becoming articulated into interventions that are innumerable and vary from one situation to another, above all by means of certain creatures.

These are the creatures in whom the divine glory shines forth more strongly. These are the creatures who render themselves more transparent to God and therefore become better vehicles of his presence, value, good and beauty.

But not all the creatures respond in the same manner to the divine appeal. In the creature there is a constant temptation to see its centre in itself, suffocating the vocation of serving God that is deep within it. However, the creature is always free to decide whether or not it wants to adhere to God.

The problem that now arises is to see how the divine Consciousness can found the freedom of initiative of each creature. The other aspect of the problem is to see also God's freedom at the level of the Third Person of the Trinity. As we saw, this is the level at which God operates to create the world. And creating the world means also redeeming it, transforming it to render it better and, in the limit, perfect.

When one resolves everything in the universal Consciousness of the One-All, one runs at least the risk of not according due importance to that freedom.

To some people it seems that the absolute Mind has foreseen everything in full detail and has already written the entire script of events. Each man would thus limit

himself to obsequiously reciting his part. He would move not so much as an actor, but rather as a puppet.

In this perspective, together with the freedom of human action, there would thus be denied the very contingency that characterizes the moving of the other living beings, i. e. animals and plants, and to some extent even inorganic substances, their molecules, atoms, electrons and so on. Contingency means spontaneity, not necessity, not determinism, not strictly mechanical causality. Observation of the phenomena always ascertains some margin of contingency. Now, where does this margin of contingency end up?

The history of the universe unfolds as in a great book that has an author. If the author has written every word of that book, where does the contingency of everything that happens end up, where does the relative freedom of action of the human personages end up?

Let us come back to Berkeley's *esse est percipi*: nothing can exist unless it is thought. My relative, subjective and imperfect consciousness of being human gives sense of being to the little that I see and hear and perceive in general in the things that appear to me. The absolute Consciousness, on the other hand, gives sense of being to everything that exists and happens in every place and at every moment of temporal becoming. It gives sense of being to every event as it is, in everything that it is.

Does this mean that the absolute Consciousness, by the mere fact of thinking all these facts and events, denies them any kind of contingency, any kind of freedom right from the beginning?

I have likened the entire history of the universe to a great book, work of an author. Now I ask myself what really happens when somebody writes a book, above all a narrative work.

I am an amateur storyteller who has never published anything, but every now and again I write a little story or a sketch or a minicomic as a hobby and solely for the purpose of relaxing a little. But there is one thing I have noticed: every time a narration is live, its characters slip the lead, get out of the author's control and create their story almost by themselves. The writer is left with nothing other to do than to take note of what they say and do. This experience of mine as an unpublished story-teller is confirmed by innumerable cases of authentic writers that I know about.

And thus the evolution of the universe, with the story of man that crowns it, receives its sense of being from an act of infinite, eternal and absolute consciousness that nevertheless leaves its contingency to each phenomenon of nature, leaves freedom to each human act. And, even before that, on its own peculiar plane, leaves space for the sovereign freedom of action of God, who is the supreme Author and Protagonist of the whole of history.

5. In time towards eternity

Western humanity has become excessively immersed in time. It has absolutized it as such. It has uprooted it from eternity: only eventually to understand that time as such is devoid of consistency, is ephemeral and empty.

Now the pendulum is swinging the other way: eternity is being rediscovered. But it is a similarly abstract eternity. What is time without the dimension of the eternal? And what is the eternal without the dimension of time?

With Emanuele Severino, we are today rediscovering Parmenides. This philosopher of Greater Greece, who lived at Elea (on the Tyrrhenian coast of present-day Basilicata), affirmed Being but denied Becoming.

Anything that becomes, as Parmenides argued, passes from being to non-being and from non-being to being. For reason this would be an inconceivable absurdity! Being is therefore immutable. Becoming is pure illusion, as also the passage of time.

We are told that when Diogenes heard about these arguments, he made no other reply than to start walking. He did something very real, something readily possible in concrete terms, but extremely difficult to insert in a logic that concerns itself with abstract, non-becoming realities like concepts.

This logic can give us a symbolic representation of movement, but will hardly grasp it in its concrete expression: just as a railway timetable that lists the stations on one and the same immobile page with a useful graphical expression of the voyage, but will hardly represent the movement of the train in a live form.

That becoming is illusory, just like the multiplicity of the forms of life, has been affirmed since time immemorial by Hindu spirituality, especially by the important vein of this spirituality that moves from the Upanishads and arrives at the Yoga, passing via the Vedanta.

So far, however, we have come face to face with an eternity that denies time. But this is not the case of the religious vision of Jewish, Christian and Islamic monotheism. The God of monotheism is creator par excellence. He is creator in the strong sense: he brings into being a consistent creation, where even time has its reality. Here the beings of the world become, change, evolve. What is immutable, on the other hand, is the sphere of the Absolute: the sphere of the Mind of God, which has always known all things.

“Thou knowest me right well”, says the Psalmist to God, “my frame was not hidden from thee, / when I was being made in secret, / intricately wrought in the depths of the earth, / Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance; / in thy book were written, every one of them, / the days that were formed for me, / when as yet there was none of them” (139, 14c-16).

According to Catholic-Christian theology, divine prescience does not in the least contradict human free will. God knows what each man will do of his own free initiative: he does not determine it. However, the fact that our “future behaviours” are “already written” would not leave us a great deal of freedom. We shall come back to this problem a little later, always with a view to conciliating prescience and freedom, necessity and contingency, eternity and time.

Even modern physics arrives at the idea of an immutable eternity. I should like to express this concept in an explicit and relatively complete manner by citing a passage to be found among the first few pages of Giuseppe Arcidiacono’s *Oltre la quarta dimensione – Le nuove frontiere della fisica* (Il Fuoco, Rome 1980, pp. 17-18). This illustrious teacher of advanced mechanics at the University of Perugia starts from the premise that common sense and classical physics agree in representing to us a three-dimensional space (length, width and height) where every reality moves and becomes in accordance with a succession that we clearly distinguish from “space” itself and call “time”

Very differently, as Arcidiacono continues, “in the light of Einstein’s modern physics, this very simple and natural idea of independent time and space has proved to be incorrect and we have arrived at the extraordinary conclusion that time is intimately connected with space, seeing that it behaves as if it were a ‘fourth’ dimension of space.

“That is equivalent to saying (but not all realize this) that we no longer have a space like the one we imagined, namely characterized by a continuous passage of the present from the past to the future, from being to non-being. It is not true that there ‘exists’ only the present, whereas the past falls into oblivion, because it no longer is, and that the future does not yet exist. This is only an illusion of our limited senses.

“In actual fact, space and time form a single entity that, as sustained by the great mathematician Fantappiè, ‘exists’ in its totality of past-present-future as a single whole. Here, then, we see that one of the most advanced and abstract theories of mathematics, namely the theory of ‘hyperspace’ (i. e. space of more than three dimensions), a theory that was considered to be pure science fiction when it was first proposed, comes to constitute an integral part of physics, renewing and revolutionizing it to its very foundations and bringing it to its twentieth-century successes”.

This conclusion of modern physics receives ample confirmation from psychic research: in the ambit of the phenomena that parapsychologists call “precognition” or “clairvoyance in the future”. Many subjects not only have a vague foreboding of future events, but a precise vision complete with many details.

The first explanation that a sceptic tries to give is that he foresees certain facts by chance. Now, the probability that a subject should foresee certain facts by chance is already minimal; but that they should be foreseen in an exact manner and furnished with numerous details is a probability that is not far short of infinitesimal.

Let me give some examples from the two volumes of case histories collected and commented by Ernesto Bozzano under the title *Luci nel futuro – I fenomeni premonitori* (Lights in the future – The premonition phenomena) (Casa Editrice Europa, Verona 1947).

There are various cases of forecasts, even repeated, of numbers drawn for call-up (to select by chance those who have to report for military service) or for Lotto (a form of tombola), and even at the roulette table.

There is no lack of biographical detail about Charles Brigg-Carrer, the most fortunate gambler of all times, who died in 1938 leaving his wife a patrimony of some eighteen million dollars (of that time!) won at roulette, baccarat, lotteries and racing, relying on his capacity of making infallible forecasts.

Many owners of gambling houses tried to keep him away by any possible means, with prosecutions and threats, and eventually decided to pay him a substantial monthly sum. Their revenge was that in the end they succeeded in inducing a grave form of persecution mania in him that soon degenerated into manifestations of unbridled madness. One day Brigg-Carrer inflicted a grave injury on himself and died the day after (II, pp. 20-24).

In the course of a mediumistic experience, Charles Schwartz learnt many years before that he would be elected a US senator in Missouri: even that, following wholly unforeseeable circumstances, happened in 1869 (II, pp. 33-34).

There are precognitions of accidents: some seem to be intended to help the subject save himself. There is also a true abundance of premonitions of infirmity regarding either the subject himself or a third person.

Another of Bozzano’s books, *Guerre e profezie* (Wars and prophecies) (same publisher, 1948), concerns itself with real and true forecasts of events of great political importance that can be attributed to chance only with extreme improbability.

Here I want to limit myself to underscoring only that the probability that so many future events can be foreseen with so many details either by pure chance or by logical inference seems altogether infinitesimal.

In 1933 Mr. E. Oaten, Director of the psychic review *The Two Worlds*, reported what follows. A relative of his had told him to have dreamt that within the space of three weeks another lady among their relatives, a certain Mrs. B., aged 55 years and seemingly in good health, would die. She also said that the funeral service would be conducted by a Congregationalist pastor and that thirteen people would be present, whose names he wrote down as soon as he heard them pronounced.

And it all happened as she had foretold. The pastor of the Baptist church to which Mrs. B. belonged was absent on leave. The funeral was therefore conducted by one of his colleagues from a nearby Congregationalist church. And by her graveside there were present the very thirteen people she had mentioned, arranged in the selfsame order in which she had seen them (I, pp. 87-89).

In 1893 Mr. Haggard, British Consul at Trieste, dreamt that he had been invited to lunch by the German Consul, who took him to a large room full of keepsakes from East Africa. He there noted a fine sword with a gilded hilt and, turning to the French Viceconsul, said that it was probably a gift from the Sultan of Zanzibar. At this point they were joined by the Russian Consul, who commented that the hilt of the sword was too small for a European fencer to handle it. As he said this, he raised his arm above his head, agitating it as if he were brandishing the sword.

All this punctually happened six weeks later, following an invitation by the German Consul. His British colleague entered a room equal to that of the dream where he had never been before. He had a feeling to be in a familiar environment, but succeeded in recalling the dream only at the moment in which the Russian made that selfsame gesture. He had already told the dream to his wife, who was by his side on that occasion. He immediately reminded her of the vision he had had, and then, to their great astonishment, mentioned it also to all the others (II, pp. 91-94).

Considering precognitive phenomena as a whole, it is practically impossible to see how they could be attributed to fortuitous coincidence. Another reductive hypothesis is that the subject himself unwittingly exercises an invisible influence on the external realities, thus determining certain events. One can imagine such an influence to be exercised on a roulette ball, but it is truly unthinkable that it could determine the death of a person following a railway crash and, above all, that it could cause the sinking of a transatlantic liner or even a world war. No such destructive power has ever been attributed to any witchdoctor or jinx!

We are therefore left with no other choice than assuming that the future already gives itself - if this is the proper expression - in a fourth dimension of time: which, considered from a superior point of view, seems not future and merely potential, but actual and contemporary.

That the passage of time is relative and illusory is affirmed also in the teachings of the entities of the "Cerchio Firenze" (Florence Circle). These speak to us of a total Reality that is unique, non-becoming, immutable and wholly compresent in the same eternal moment. It is an absolute Reality that those masters call the absolute Consciousness. The Florence Circle affirms that the becoming and development of the individual consciousnesses eventually makes them merge with the absolute Consciousness. Therefore the temporality of the consciousness, its consisting of a succession of lived experiences, is not something absolute. Merging with the absolute Consciousness, each one of us eventually arrives at seeing all things and events in a wholly contemporaneous vision, where there is neither a "before" nor an "after".

In a certain way this is an experience that is not dissimilar to the one we could have when, having arrived at the top of a mountain, we turn our eyes downwards to contemplate the path that has brought us there to re-voke the succession of the moments of the climb and the various adventures and alternating frames of mind in the unity of a single look that panoramically beholds everything in one and the same instant.

Nevertheless, the contemporaneous vision of many series of successive events could not be truly adequate unless I were not to represent them also in their concrete development, in their succession. When each one of us becomes absolute Consciousness, he will relive, be it even in contemporaneous vision, the succession of events of his own life and, at the same time, of the lives of all the others.

And thus the spiritual itineraries of the individuals and the films of their individual existences eventually end up in the divine Consciousness. This hypothesis seems necessary in order to relativize the existence of the individual with respect to the divine Being, the only one to whom absoluteness can be attributed. An individual who does not merge with the others in the eternal would remain eternal in itself and become configured as another absolute that continues to survive on its own account and in full independence, thus determining a metaphysical fracture destined never to be resolved.

But this should not in any way mean an emptying of the multiple, contingent, finite, temporal and existential reality of us men and, more generally of all creatures.

That at a certain moment of the temporal succession, in a certain place of the world, a bee comes to rest on a flower for a moment is a minimal happening that the absolute Mind nevertheless assumes in eternity.

An ephemeral existence like that of a wave that breaks in a few instants against a reef is rendered eternal, notwithstanding its ephemeral nature, by the divine Consciousness that never changes, in which all events are brought into being and compresent in one and the same instant without duration and without end.

What the Yogis talk about, as also Parmenides, and what we find also in the teaching of the Florence Circle, is an eternity that devours time. At this point one feels the need for an operation of the opposite sign. Time has to be saved. Time has to be recognized as possessing the autonomous dimension that is its due: and similarly as regards contingency, multiplicity of the existing, unique and unrepeatable and creative singularity of each, the work of man in the course of history, and also human free will.

Let us come back to the previously mentioned Psalm 139: “in thy book”, it says, “were written, every one of them, / the days that were formed for me, / when as yet there was none of them”.

That “were written” or have already been written” is a fine poetic image, but which it would not be appropriate to take more literally than is strictly necessary.

If the script of what I shall say and do has really been “already” written, I would be left with nothing other than the role of an actor: of an actor strictly subordinated to a troupe leader, or director, who does not tolerate even the least improvisation.

It is therefore essential that eternity should not be an “already”, or a past, with respect to time. Eternity and time have to be compresent. In other words: if it is God who writes the work, if my action is not to be limited to mere recitation of a part that has already been written, my action and the writing of God have to be contemporaneous.

I would thus not be just an actor, but a character, a personage who self-determines himself at the very moment in which the divine Author writes his story.

But can a character self-determine himself, i. e. write his story by himself? Certainly: this is fully confirmed in the concrete experience of writing.

I could here mention not only the experience of the great novelists and playwrights, but also my own experience as a tiny little amateur and wholly unpublished humoristic writer, Every now and again I amuse myself by writing little poems and stories, sketches, minicomedies.

And what exactly do I do? In my imagination I create, for example, three men, or a man and a woman; I then outline the characters; lastly I charge them and let them speak and act by themselves. At a certain point I therefore limit myself to taking note of what they say and do.

This is the recipe for bringing live characters into being. If I were to programme them completely, they would end up by being stereotyped and practically dead.

I am quite convinced that a really live character will get out the author’s control so that the latter has nothing other to do than run after him and take note of what he freely says and does. Each of these literary creatures is undoubtedly its own author, but in a

specific part of its psyche, in a specific “secondary personality” that has assumed autonomous consistency and is by then expressing itself on its own account.

Hence the eternity of the divine Writer must be contemporaneous with all the moments of the time in which we men, his creatures and characters of his story, act and evolve.

Only thus can the creature be rendered autonomous, free in determining its actions at the very moment when God writes the story, not at a moment when one can say that the story has “already been written”.

The moments of our living are successive, they follow each other, but in the face of eternity they are all contemporaneous. “Before” and “after” exist in time, not in relation to eternity.

Anybody who tries to express a concept in an intuitive manner that will strike the eye and the imagination, will continuously look for symbols that can give also an optical idea of it. Let us see by approximation whether there is some symbol that can be of help to us in this sense.

Let us imagine a sector of a circle. The radii are arranged in accordance with a succession. One may say that one radius comes “before” another radius and “after” yet another. But all the radii converge towards a centre that comes neither “before” nor “after” any radius, but is, as we might say, absolutely “contemporaneous” with all of them.

Let us imagine that the radii are like the pages of a book. Our story has arrived on Page 293. An intelligent bookworm could dig a little tunnel from this page to Page 314 and read some word of it. Thereafter it could come back to us, who are still on Page 293, and reveal to us a “future” event.

Would this be an “already written” event? I would say: it is certainly a “written” element. But I would cancel the “already”. It seems improper to me in strictly logical terms, though granting poets every licence to use it in their imprecise and yet strong and pregnant language.

A concrete and live bookworm can do whatever it likes, but once we have converted it into a symbol to be considered in strictly logical terms, it would seem improper to me to say that our bookworm arrives from Page 293 at reading a word on Page 314, passing via Pages 294, 295, 296 and so on.

In strictly logical terms our bookworm, taken as the symbol of the seer who has a precognition, arrives at page 314 directly from Page 293. That is to say, without passing through the intermediate times. Pages 293 and 314 are coexistent, coincident and contemporaneous in the dimension of eternity. The bookworm, i. e. the seer, arrives from Page 293 at Page 314 by passing through eternity, symbolized by the back of the book, i. e. the line that unites the pages and from which they seem to spring forth.

Another symbol: from any one radius one can visualize what there is, what happens on a successive radius by fixing the look on a mirror situated at the centre.

What we have so far considered makes eternity seem the true essence of time, its first origin and its ultimate point of arrival. We are destined for eternity, where we shall realize full being, total satisfaction, true, perfect and never-ending felicity.

In the dimension of eternity we communicate with each, and each can fully hear us. This happens even at this moment with which eternity is contemporaneous.

“Already at this moment...”. But let us put aside the “already”: a word that, if we were to use it here, we might end up by using also in other contexts, where, as we saw, it is less proper. Let us therefore say: “At this moment...”.

At this moment we can speak to God, certain and sure that He will listen to us. But we can also speak with each man who has arrived at the final point where he enters into absolute truth.

We can speak even to someone who has always greatly misunderstood us. In the absolute dimension, where everything comes into the light, such a person will likewise fully understand us.

We can speak to someone who has always greatly opposed us. In the dimension of the absolute he will have repented and changed his mind. He will have asked to be forgiven, will have become reconciled with us. And, let us not forget: he, too, will have pardoned the wrongs that we undoubtedly will have done to him. In eternity he understands us and loves us without limits.

We can speak with all the persons who are dear to us, of whom in the dimension of eternity we may often think without their thinking of us at the same time. But in eternity each one of these persons corresponds to us actually and fully.

We can speak with persons to whom we are devoted: with a spiritual master, with a saint, sure that they will listen to us and that we are in total communion with them.

We can speak with all those who in time still ignore us: with each one, great or humble as he may be, there is perfect friendship in eternity.

Concentrating our look and attention on the dimension of eternity, we can get a foretaste of what awaits us at the ultimate end of evolution.

We shall then know everything: we shall have attained the goal of every science, every philosophy, every historical inquiry.

We shall then be able to do everything, in the positive sense of a will of good, of course, fully in keeping with the divine will, that will no longer have to contend with obstacles to the implementation of what is good, of everything that is of value.

There will be no limit to the expression of beauty. We shall have attained the supreme peaks to which each form of artistic, literary, poetic or musical creativity ultimately tends.

And there will no longer be any limit to our communion with the Divinity at all levels. We shall have reached the highest point to which there tends the religious search of God and the search of the Self pursued by the Yogis.

There can no longer be any limit to our communion with each other human being, with each other existing creature or form of existence.

It may be that a discourse of this kind will leave many people indifferent in certain respects, at least for the moment. And yet we know full well that each one of us is capable of being enthusiastic about something: what exactly he is enthusiastic about will depend on the personal situations. Letting ourselves be attracted by and become involved in this discourse depends on the capacity of each to become interested in and enthusiastic about the various individual activities and forms of life and human commitment.

It is a capacity that undoubtedly develops, expands and deepens to the extent to which we let ourselves be attracted by the eternal that is within us and constitutes our profound and true being, our metaphysical home, the only place where we can really rediscover ourselves.

6. Does becoming merge with the eternal?

The mediumistic teaching of the Masters of the *Cerchio Firenze 77* (Florence Circle 77) is undoubtedly interesting, rich and profound. Having expressed this highly positive overall valuation, I have to add that, in all sincerity I just cannot appreciate it to the same extent in all its parts. However, each one of us does what he can. And, since I want to avoid recalling the other stimuli I received from it, let me say right away that I found the aspects of this doctrine that I am about to mention to be particularly congenial to my way of thinking.

It will however be appropriate to add another word or two of explanation. I am not particularly concerned with defining what the Masters said; what interests me, rather, is to identify the core of truth that is expressed in it.

And therefore let none of those who are thoroughly familiar with the teachings of the Circle sit down in front of me and fix me with the severe look from above a teacher's desk to mark with a red and blue pencil all the imprecisions I may be guilty of. Please do not re-arouse within me ancient scholastic anxieties not yet assuaged even after so many years. Nor let them jump up to tell me: "To be precise, Kempis (or Dalì) intend to say this or that and not what you seem to think!" The observation could be perfectly correct: but would not take account of the fact that my interest here, rather than historical, is theoretical in the strict sense. I shall however make every effort to be honest even as far as the references are concerned.

The truth I am trying to grasp is necessarily a truth that such appears to me. And it is I who attest it: there is nothing to be done about that, because there is nobody else who could verify objectively whether my interpretation is right or mistaken. The burden of judging therefore rests on my weak shoulders of a very imperfect judge.

But now let us come to the point. Physical science has noted the relativity of space and time. It thus comes to theorize a "fourth dimension", where everything that we see happen in the course of a temporal succession seems compresent.

A confirmation in this sense comes to us from parapsychology when it sets out to analyze the phenomena of precognition or, as it is often called, clairvoyance in the future. The foreseen facts are at times so precise and detailed as to render practically absurd the assumption that they may be due to pure chance. Here, too, we are obliged to postulate an "eternal present".

The Florence Circle provides full confirmation of these conclusions. It speaks of a single total Reality that is non-temporal, non-becoming and wholly compresent in one and the same eternal moment. It is an absolute reality that is completely identified with what the Masters call the absolute Consciousness.

Each reality ultimately resolves itself in an act of consciousness or content of consciousness. Here we have an idealist principle that the Florence Circle adopts as its own and, as it would seem to me, rightly so. If we only think about it, a reality not brought into being by a thought is something inconceivable. Nothing can exist other than in relation to a thought that gives it sense of being.

Someone might ask on what basis we can arrive at such certainty. I would reply: we obtain it to the extent to which we develop and deepen a particular sensitivity within ourselves. We are here concerned with a particular type of metaphysical sensitivity. It is the type of awareness that comes to express itself in the idealist philosophies, which in the limit reduce every reality to consciousness, all being to thought.

It is I who give sense of being to the planet on which I live. Now, before I came into the world, before man or, rather, any kind of being appeared on the earth, did the earth exist? Certainly it existed, and with it the entire universe: it would be devoid of sense to affirm the contrary. But what thought conferred sense of being upon it? I would say: divine thought.

It is the absolute Consciousness that gives sense of being to the realities as they are in themselves. Postulating an absolute Consciousness is necessary in order to confer a sense of being upon any kind of reality that can be found beyond the act of consciousness with which each one of us perceives, signifies, interprets and judges it.

Otherwise, what would we perceive, signify, affirm...? Something that is not there? In that case, what sense would there be in affirming something that is not there? Or in setting oneself the problem of or discussing a reality of which, already *a priori*, we say that it does not exist, that it is devoid of reality?

The Florence Circle reduces reality to the series of lived experiences that each individual has of it: it resolves it into the succession of impressions, sensations, sentiments, thoughts it develops in the intimacy of each one of us.

Each has his own interior film. But have all these film cameras really shot, grasped, attained something of an external reality? The position of the Florence Circle here seems clearly idealist inasmuch as it reduces every relative and finite reality of this world to a series of frames.

In a film certain scenes can also be obtained by means of fakes. A naval battle can be simulated also with model ships launched into a small basin and making them move in those few square metres, with the same effect as would be obtained by shooting real and far more disastrous scenes. Whenever total simulation proves possible, it could be done even without the models, saving a great deal of money for the production. A complete illusion would lead to total economy of the external means.

An up-to-the-hilt idealist conception will thus seek to explain the whole of the life of a man by identifying it with a long series of interior events, a kind of long dream that, indeed, lasts all his life.

If I were to adopt a vision of this kind, I would in the limit arrive at saying: there are only my lived experiences. There is nothing outside them, there are not even any other men; there is only I, and everything I see is nothing other than a dream of mine. Just as the illusion I feel of being the undersigned so-and-so with his own name and surname, with his anagraphic data and personal existence in full development.

A toothache may be as “illusory” as you may wish, but is very real for as long as it lasts. And there is little point in labelling it philosophically in one way or the other. But it would be helpful to use an analgesic or seek the help of a dentist, no matter how “illusory” they may be.

And what is a dream that lasts the whole of one’s life other than that very life? If I were to be born under a “curse” (as it was put rather cruelly once upon a time), I would have to bear my handicap, my illness, my malformation, my pains for several decades that would seem to me to be truly interminable: and it would be of little consolation for me to think that all this is an illusion. A lifelong illusion is far too similar to an entire life.

According to the Florence Circle, the illusory character of the individual existence of each of us derives from the fact that the external world does not exist, even though our subjectivities refer to it and therefore postulate it continuously, at every instant.

It is clear that here the solution remains suspended: we only know that a dream is a dream when we wake up.

Today I dreamt I was a butterfly, we are told by the never-lacking Chinese philosopher. But what is it that I am now: a man who has dreamt he is a butterfly, or a butterfly who is dreaming that he is a man?

I shall wait for the final awakening, the awakening of the awakenings, the very last one: and then I shall at last know in a quite incontestable manner not only what is reality and what is dream, but also whether the dream was wholly an illusion or only partly so: only to a certain relative extent, as we might say (just as it could have been an image that was not altogether false, but only deformed).

But to come back to our problem: at the time of the great re-awakening I shall also know whether and to what extent the famous external world has some reality of its own.

The Florence Circle teaches that every temporal succession of events is illusory. If it is not to be founded on pure air, any affirmation has sooner or later to be proved. And when is it that we could prove to ourselves that becoming is illusion? We could do it only at the moment when we come to merge with the immutable being, with the eternal

present of what has been called the fourth dimension, of what we might call the absolute dimension of things.

The masters of the Florence Circle insist on affirming that the interior itinerary, the film of spiritual and conscious life of each individual will merge with the Absolute Consciousness. It will be upon this final merging with God that each subject will find the Truth that is the ultimate criterion of judgment of every relative thing.

In the divine Consciousness each one of us will also re-live the whole of his past as if it were present once more, and for ever. This will be an eternal present, circumscribed within an instant that will no longer change, where there will no longer be either duration or tiredness.

Each one will contemplate once more and for ever not only his own life, but also that of every other subject as if it were his own.

When all of us merge into one, each one of remains and remains for ever. Each lives eternally also as an individual. Each rediscovers himself. And rediscovers the entire life of each, every moment of it. We re-live it in the present.

Nothing is therefore lost. With our memories there return the old affections, even though they may be sublimated in a new vision in which every limit is transcended.

The ultimate goal of evolution is lived in a supreme instant that no longer changes, where time enters eternity. The last instant of temporal becoming comes to coincide with the eternal instant. At that final and eternal moment each individual enters the One, becomes the Absolute and becomes also all the others, though remaining himself in his individuality, in his personality, which arrives at absolute fullness.

There we shall encounter our dear ones, so that all will remain united in God, where earthly love becomes elevated to an infinite power. And each will remain himself, with all his memories, with all the evolutionary path he has covered.

Each one will be identifiable in his singular and unique personality. And there will never come to lack the pleasure of being in several persons that is so essential in every form of human love, friendship, understanding, where unity is realized in plurality.

Love extends to the children a couple have in common, just as it extends to everything they have in common. To the friendships of the loved person and to everything that person loves. This circle gradually becomes larger. Thus, in the limit, some day we shall all be beloved.

Contemplated in that supreme vision, the ephemeral is no longer such: though ephemeral, it yet becomes eternalized. Each fleeting instant is lived forever in a vision that will never become annulled. Everything passes and yet nothing passes in that ultimate and eternal instant.

Everything is rediscovered there. Everything that was finite returns there and, in its own manner, assumes an infinity, an eternity.

Everything that was dead will rise again. Will rise again in God. The beautiful word “resurrection” can be found, and not by chance, among the ones that Master Kempis dedicates to the “Overcoming of limitation” (cfr. *La Fonte Preziosa* [The Precious Source], Edizioni Mediterranee, p. 83).

When “this illusion” that is my individual life “merges in the reality of God” (p. 4), it undoubtedly reveals its ephemeral and therefore illusory character, but confirms itself to be an illusion of very long duration. And it is as such that it is lived forever as an integral part of the eternal Consciousness.

“This illusion” thus confirms itself as illusion of individual life. It confirms itself as illusion of feeling oneself a distinct individual prolonged for such a long time. And it also confirms itself as illusion of feeling relatively free in one’s own initiatives.

If all this is an illusion, we don’t really have much ground for complaining. It is an illusion that is undoubtedly equivalent to a relative reality. Notwithstanding its relativity,

it is a reality that in some way is rendered true by the eternal act of the divine Consciousness.

Human history thus seems to be the interweaving of the stories of many imperfect and, albeit imperfectly, free men: free, be it even in a limited manner, to decide their actions, that is to say, endowed with free will, no matter how limited and fluctuating it may be. This feeling free already constitutes their freedom upon which the absolute Consciousness confers an absolute validation.

God's eternal Consciousness assumes the temporal consciousnesses with all their becoming, with all their various imperfections, as its parts. No matter how ephemeral it may be in its continuous becoming, my individual existence acquires an absoluteness of its own in the fact of being comprised in the divine, absolute, eternal Consciousness.

For as long as it lasts, everything that forms part of my individual "feeling" is reality. For as long as I feel happy, or unhappy, I am really so. Thus I am really free in my action for as long as I feel myself in it and to the extent to which I feel myself in it.

In its eternity the absolute Consciousness comprises and assumes our individual consciousnesses. But one can also recognize the peculiar contents it possesses of its own.

What could be the peculiar contents of the absolute Consciousness? As I have already suggested in some way, every time we set ourselves the problem of "how things stand", every time we affirm that "things are like that" or deny that "things are like that" or debate about them among ourselves, we invariably postulate – as it were – that there is an "objective state of things", that they have a "reality as such".

If we were not to make this assumption, what sense could there be in our affirmations, even in the negations, the doubts, in any discussion regarding this matter?

Again: what sense could there be in a reality if not in relation to a thought that thinks it, if not as a term or as a phenomenon of a consciousness that brings it into being, that confers sense of being upon it?

There is thus a being in itself, a being of things as they really are in themselves; and such a being gives itself precisely in relation to a Consciousness that is well distinct from our subjective human consciousnesses. Being is such in relation to an absolute Consciousness.

To bring things into being as they are, the absolute Consciousness has to think them as they are in all their details, without any further residue of inadequacy. The divine Consciousness can no longer be external to things, it has to coincide with them. The divine Consciousness must be a single whole with the intimate and true being of the things of this world.

All this means that when we eventually merge with God, our personalities will obtain not only knowledge of all the things of this world, but also full possession. Is not absolute knowledge by definition the perfect unity of the knower and the known, of the subject and the object? In this sense, therefore, our final merging with the absolute Consciousness is a merging with absolute being, makes us become one with Being.

What higher destination could be conceived for us? What goal of greater perfection? Could we ever be capable of arriving there? And could we all arrive there?

One of the reasons, and not the least, why recourse is had to the theory of reincarnation is that it is held that a single life on earth is not sufficient for an individual to learn everything there is to learn. Thus he is accorded an entire series of lives, deeming this plurality to be necessary even assuming that the individual does not waste his time, i. e. that he proceeds constantly in a positive direction, without either delay or backwards steps.

Another solution could be to conceive our existences as being bound up with each other in such a manner that the good done by each one is valid also for the others, so that each one may also benefit from the conquests and progress of the others.

Here we have the concept expressed by a particular article of the Christian faith: the “communion of the saints”; here we have the idea expressed by the symbol of the vine and the shoots.

According to this conception and manner of feeling, it is not necessary for each one of us, to be at one and the same time a pioneer of all the sciences, of all the arts, of all the forms of the spirit, of all the possible political, economic and social initiatives. The intuitions and implementations of each man bear fruit also for all the others. Sooner or later there will come the moment also for each one of them to adopt the realizations of those who proved to be the pioneers of mankind, each in the field where – as we may say – he has specialized in a distinct and different role in accordance with his singular vocation.

I have referred to the teachings that come to us from the mediumistic communications and it will not therefore be out of place if I here recall, be it even very briefly, what I have been able to note with a certain constancy in the course of other experiences of the same nature.

Many times I found myself conversing with an entity that had not known anything about either our language or our rather complicated facts. But the entity had to no more than to concentrate a little, possibly after I had advised and invited it to do so, in order to learn the Italian language in a few instants and to express itself in Italian to the point of being able to correct even transcription errors and engaging in discussions about grammar. And that is not all: in an equally brief time the disincarnate soul learnt also my situation to the point of giving me equally appreciable valuations and advice.

How can one explain learning at this almost instantaneous speed, where all the normal mediations have been put aside? It would seem that in a case of this kind there comes to be constituted something like a composite psychism. The entity, which arrives knowing practically nothing about us, becomes enriched, becomes integrated by a psychic factor provided by us human subjects.

This operation takes place with the facility with which blotting paper absorbs the ink of a written text to the point of reproducing its very words. The example of the blotting paper was suggested to me by an entity with precise reference to what could happen at the end of time, at the moment of the resurrection, when the disincarnate souls will again make contact with our world and will appropriate unto themselves the fruit of scientific progress, the conquests of the arts and humanist achievements of every kind realized in the history of mankind covering such a long series of millennia.

Such a reception will take place when situation and times are mature. But it is as well that as of this moment the spirits should prepare themselves for this final palingenesis that, being incapable of being planned, could arrive like a thief in the night.

Far too often the mental horizons of people seem far too limited. Many people have a stingily and melancholically materialist vision of things. Many others, deluded and traumatized, seek refuge in a spiritualism of evasion from this world, from its commitments, its temporal responsibilities. The breath of their spiritualism is short in both cases.

A spirituality that sets out to orient men towards an ultimate goal conceived in the sense I am here trying to clarify has to include a strong humanist motivation. Such a spirituality is made of immense love also for all the created and finite beings of the world, for all the forms of the spirit and, what is more, also of life and human commitment at every level.

The necessary maturation implies enlargement of the horizons; and also refinement of one’s religious and philosophical, scientific, historical, artistic, technological and politico-social sensitivity; is total humanism, integral and harmonic growth of the personality of each one of us.

7. Trinity and incarnation: dogmatics to be rediscovered

The vision that many of our friends have of historical Christianity seems schematic to the point of simplicism, even cut with a hatchet: the Gospel, they say, that's fine (except for the asperities that, to avoid attributing them to Jesus, they ascribe to "interpolations"); even the early days of Christian preaching are alright; but then there came the dogmas that ruined everything.

And thus Christianity came to be gradually burdened with the superstructure of Catholicism. For these friends of ours Catholicism is equivalent to the stratifications of many deforming incrustations on a live and valid core – primitive Christianity, in fact – that remains imprisoned and suffocated beneath them. Ergo, Christianity has to be liberated from the dogmas.

I, too, must confess that I suffered the fascination of this concept when I was very young, a concept that seemed to me highly suggestive in its false clarity. But then I reflected better in the course of an entire life. Because I was in good faith and full of good will, I do not exclude that the Lord, who never abandons anybody, gave me some illumination.

I arrived at the conclusion that Catholicism is far less ... foolish than it seems to many people. The dogmas of the early centuries, the ones deemed to be most urgent and substantial, are all centred on the Trinity and the Incarnation. These are not questions of little account.

The Gospel, the Good News, is the announcement that we men are destined to eternal, perfect, divine life. Now, only a God can communicate such a life to us: but a God who is truly such and in the strong and full sense; and, further, a God who truly participates in our condition, and this in the most real and effective manner.

Indeed, the Christian God presents himself with these characteristics. But the deforming interpretations came to the fore: and hence the need for the Church to better define certain contents of her teaching. If it is true that God is the absolute principle from which all the realities and the sense of being of each is derived, it was equally necessary for the Church to clarify her own manner of understanding Him.

The Christian God is the Creator God who incarnates himself in Jesus Christ to deify all men and all created realities. First of all, it is therefore essential to affirm that this deifying action springs from God in the most real and strongest sense.

Religious and spiritual experience in general, together with the speculation founded thereon, conceives God in accordance with a plurality of aspects, moments or modes of being.

To the ascetic of the Upanishads, the Vedanta and the Yoga God appears as the pure Self that precedes any manifestation. For Hindus it is the Brahman. In the Neoplatonic Trinity it is identified with the One. In the Christian Trinity it can similarly be likened to the First Person, the Father.

In this originary mode of being, God seems pure subjectivity, abstracted from any content of thought and phenomenon of consciousness. As far as this aspect is concerned, which is truly the most originary, God is grasped in a very particular spiritual experience, the one that the Yogis call *samadhi*.

But there is also the devotional religious experience, wherein God is grasped in a very different manner: he is no longer God as such, immersed in the contemplation of himself, but the God who turns to outside himself and creates, participates and donates himself.

Hindus call this God in various ways, including Lord Ishvara or also with the name of Brahma, clearly distinguishing him from the Brahman referred to above, who is more impersonal and abstract, as I said before.

Grasped in the aspect of creating Divinity, active with his grace in man's intimacy, this mode of being of God can be found in particular gods like Vishnu or Shiva, whom their respective devotees identify with the supreme God.

At other times this creating Divinity is counterposed to the God absorbed in the contemplation of himself and, as compared with this immobile and inactive God, seems to be the Spouse or Paredra or Shakhti who dances around him and with her movements generates the creatures of this world, whom the Indian mentality attributes a consistency that is more illusory than authentically real.

It is in this active mode of being that God appears as the Creator. In the Neoplatonic trinity he is connoted as the third mode of being that, derived from the first two (One and Nous), is called Soul of the World. In the Christian Trinity, similarly, it can be made to correspond to the Third Person, the Holy Spirit.

The pure principle that is above any other mode of divine being is the God of the Yogi, who attain Him through the experience of the samadhi that has already been mentioned.

The creating and active God wholly projected outside himself is the God of the religious, who attain Him through the experience of the Sacred. Lastly, we should recall yet another mode of being of the Divinity, the one with which philosophical speculation is essentially concerned.

Part from experience, only the most abstract thought arrives at conceiving God as the absolute mind that gives sense of being to all the realities by thinking them all together and above becoming, a in an atemporal, eternal dimension, where there are compresent all the events that we call successive, i. e. past, present or future.

We can find this God of the Philosophers conceptualized, above all, in the thought of Parmenides and then, after the passage of many centuries, Spinoza. But we can also find him expressed in the World of the Ideas of Plato and in the Nous of Plotinus. In the ambit of the Christian Trinity it is to be identified with the second Person, with the Logos or Verb.

As we have already seen, widely differing thought traditions have attributed a plurality of modes of being to the Divinity. The reason is that they grasp a wide range of different aspects of the Divinity:

- 1) Self-Consciousness that contemplates itself;
- 2) Absolute Consciousness of all the existing and all events in the world;
- 3) Creative action in the sphere of the relative and the becoming multiplicity.

These are aspects that seem different to such an extent that one could be tempted to attribute them to different divinities.

But what would this mean for the unique character of the Divinity, i.e. the fact that it is solely one? What would this mean for monotheism, which seems to correspond to the loftiest maturity of the experience of the Sacred?

The unique character of the Divinity can be saved only by attributing different modes of being, planes or levels to one and the same divinity. This seems to me to be the most profound reason that induced a certain vein of Hinduist thought to distinguish the Brahman from the Lord Ishvara and the originary God from his Spouse, and also the reason that in the West inspired both Neoplatonists and Christians to articulate the complex concepts of their respective trinities.

I would however tend to recognize a considerable advantage to the development of Christianity's Trinitarian dogmatics: here the less originary modes of being of the Divinity – the Son or Logos or divine verb, the Holy Spirit – are not exactly "inferior"

with respect to the originary principle: they “proceed” from it, but are not “emanated” by it. Son and Holy Spirit do indeed derive from the Father, but not as, for example, light and heat derive from the sun, becoming less powerful as the intervening distance becomes greater.

If things were to stand in these terms, only the Father would be God in the full sense. The Son would be a kind of under-God, just like the Neoplatonic Nous with respect to the One from which it emanates. The Holy Spirit, for his part, would be an even more subordinate divine figure, just like the Neoplatonic Soul of the World with respect to the One and the Nous.

With respect to the Father and the Son, a weakened Holy Spirit would be not just a different mode of being of God, but almost another God, and the same could be said of the Son with respect to the Father.

On the other hand, ever since the early centuries, the development of Christian Trinitarian dogmatics affirmed the principle that each Person of the Trinity is as much God as the others. In Christianity, therefore, we have but one and the same God, who seems such in all his strength and fullness at every level, in each of his modes of being.

It is said that comparisons are disagreeable. They even seem a veiled form of publicity. But here I shall limit myself to giving the floor to the interested parties so that they may themselves define their conceptions. Let us compare the idea that Christians have of the Creator God with the idea that Hindus in general have of the Lord Ishvara or of the Shakhti or, in any case, of the Creator God as they themselves conceive him.

It is not without reason that the creating of the Hinduist God seems – even on the admission of the Hinduists themselves – generator of illusory and phantomatic universes, whereas the Creator God as conceived by the Jews and the Christians, and then in their wake also by the Muslims, seems to bring into being a creation that is far more real and consistent and valid and ontologically dense.

In Judaism and Islam there is the vision of a single God, who is such in the strongest sense, and there are no problems in harmonizing the uniqueness of such a God with a plurality of different modes of being. In Christianity, on the other hand, there is the problem of conciliating this strongly concentrated unity with a plurality of modes of being. And the solution reached by the development of dogmatics seems to me to be very satisfactory.

The profession of the faith of the Council of Nicea (325 A. D.) proclaimed a trinity of divine “hypostases” or “persons” that does by any means diminish the unity of God. The Son, “begotten” by the Father, is of the same “substance” and, as compared with the Father, is “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God”

Thus, the First and Second Council of Constantinople (381 and 553 A. D.) and the Synod of Rome (619 A. D.) affirmed the full divinity of the Holy Spirit in an ever clearer and more precise manner. Other subsequent councils developed connected ideas and highlighted significant implications. The decisions of the various councils were provoked by theologians who can be defined as heretics and prepared by theologians who can be defined as orthodox. Here we are concerned with thematics of great complexity and I shall not therefore attempt to summarize even very briefly in this brief note, which only seeks to be a truly panoramic synthesis.

Though fully aware of the inadequacy of both the concepts and the language, I have taken the liberty of saying something about the trinity and should now like to pass on to the theme of the Incarnation. Trinitarian dogmatics help us to affirm that divine life comes to us from a true God.

Eternal life is donated to all creatures by means of us men, to whom responsibility for the entire creation is entrusted in a manner that is altogether particular.

Now, if this responsibility is to be concretely discharged, the true God has to communicate himself wholly to man: the true God has to turn himself into true man. God has to incarnate himself completely. He has to assume all our humanity. The incarnation of God in human nature cannot consist of a fiction or deception, cannot reduce itself to an appearance, as the Docetists would have it.

The Christian revelation affirms the incarnation of God in the individual human nature of Jesus of Nazareth. God incarnated himself in Jesus as God in all his unity. This incarnation is nevertheless “appropriate”, i.e. referred in a particular manner to the Second Person of the Trinity. What does that mean?

I set myself the problem for a long time, arriving at the conclusion – though always, be it clear, a provisional one – that what incarnated itself was precisely the absolute Consciousness of God, i. e. the divine Consciousness inasmuch as with its act it gives sense of being to all the realities.

In the individual man this Consciousness no longer gives sense of being to the totality of things as they are in themselves, but only to a very small part of things as they appear to that particular subject, as they are lived by him.

In making itself human consciousness in Jesus Christ, the divine Consciousness is no longer infinite, absolute, eternal: quite the contrary, it becomes enclosed within narrow limits, gradually changes a part of its contents as time goes by, evolves and “increases in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men” (Lk 2, 52), suffers on account of every traumatic impact of physical reality and everything that can hurt the body and have negative effects on the sense organs and the nervous system, suffers not only physical but also moral pain, sometimes tremendous and to the very limit of tolerability. In substance – and here we have a substance into which we should gain greater insight, together with all its implications – the dogmatics of the incarnation attribute to the man Jesus a human consciousness with all these limits and with all this capacity of suffering.

At this point one will therefore be inclined to ask: if the personal consciousness of Jesus has all the limits of the incarnated condition, how can one identify it with the absolute Consciousness? How can one identify the two consciousnesses in the unity of one and the same person, as happens when the incarnation is rendered “appropriate” in a more particular and specific manner to the Second Person of the Trinity?

I think that we can find an answer by considering not only the temporal evolution of the consciousness of the man Jesus, but also the culminating moment of that evolution, where it attains ultimate perfection and merges with the divine Consciousness.

That would be the supreme moment in which time enters in eternity. Eternity can be defined not as a succession of moments without end, but as a single moment, eternal inasmuch as it is subtracted from becoming.

A becoming individual existence that merges with the eternal Consciousness is wholly re-lived in contemporaneousness and, as regards the succession of its moments, in the unitary vision of the eternal present. And is nevertheless re-lived in all its dramaticity.

I can try to express this not by any means easy concept with the help of an image: having reached the top of a very high mountain, we can stand there and contemplate the entire route that has led us there, all of it in front of our eyes; and thus, with a single look, we can re-evolve the succession of the adventures we had on the way and also the painful moments, the moments when we felt discomfited and desperate and alone.

As Enea said to his companions to give them courage at a particularly black moment of their odyssey: “Perhaps some day we shall be pleased to remember all this” (*Forsan et haec olim meminisse juvabit*).

Apart from the fact that it commits the entire Divinity in all its dimensions, in all its aspects or moments or modes of being, the incarnation of the divine Verb in Jesus is not only appropriate to the Logos, Second Person of the Trinity, but takes place thanks to a very particular and specific intervention of the Holy Spirit, as the Credo tells us. It is the action of the Spirit that confers its particular power upon the incarnation, a power that affects, involves and transforms the human nature and, through it, each and every reality.

Therefore, though the subject of the incarnation is the divine Consciousness, the means by which the incarnation is implemented and carried out is the divine Spirit, the divine and deifying energy. The Spirit descends on the prophets and the men of God and vivifies Christ in a most particular and unique manner. And, just as the spirit of Moses was poured on the seventy elders of Israel (Num 11, 25), so also is it effused at Pentecost on the first Christians by Christ risen and ascended to heaven (Acts, ch. 2; cfr. Joel, ch. 3), to animate the Church in the course of the centuries, to constitute the interior leaven of mankind and civilization.

The incarnation redeems the creation from sin. In creating, God gradually withdraws to leave all their space to his creatures. The creatures can thus self-determine themselves in any direction, even a negative one. Their free action thus weighs on the course of the creative process, the creatures may turn their back on God, may ignore him and even kill his presence in some way.

They will certainly not kill God as such; nevertheless, to some limited extent, they can also hide him, hinder him, suffocate him in the modes of his making himself present at the levels of the relative, the temporal, at the level of cosmic life and our human life. Together with its negative consequences, sin conditions and crucifies God himself.

Now, God's incarnation in human nature and, through man, in every reality is intended to recuperate the creation from sin, so that the creative process may resume its proper course and attain its fullness, i. e. the outcome that sin has compromised.

But man's cooperation is necessary if God is really to be able to incarnate himself in human nature. Speaking of the collaboration of man, I do not have in mind solely that of the man Jesus. I do not intend to refer to the human will of Jesus, recalling that He submits it to the divine will that expresses itself from deep within him. I intend to refer to all men of good will and particularly to the men of God to whom there is entrusted a special role in the history of salvation.

The advent of Jesus does not seem an isolated fact: it was historically preceded by the entire religious evolution of the people of Israel, the patriarchs, the judges, the kings, the prophets. The ascent to heaven of Jesus was followed by Pentecost, which marked the beginning of the history of the Christian Church.

As far as a more ecumenical horizon is concerned, one could recognize a particular function in connection with salvation to each spiritual tradition, no matter whether it can or cannot be labelled as Christian.

To take another small step forward, we could now ask ourselves whether in an even wider sense the incarnation is not a truly universal process in which each man cooperates to the extent to which he succeeds in according space to the divine presence deep within him and in his entire being.

For the general run of Christian theologians, the incarnation is intended to redeem men and, through them, all realities from sin and therefore from every form of evil. If there were no sin, the incarnation would be pointless.

Here I would prefer to align myself with the thought of those who, on the other hand, sustain that the incarnation would be appropriate even in the absence of sin and evil. According to them, the incarnation in this sense is intended to bind men more closely to God, so that they can pursue further perfection in deification.

The incarnation seems a grandiose process that involves humanity and all creation as a single whole. It is a process that defies every aspect of reality, renewing it from its very roots in order to give rise not only to a sanctified humanity, but also a new heaven and a new earth.

Bringing the creation back to its proper course, the incarnation leads to its completion, helps it to attain its fullness, integral perfection. It is a perfection that is pursued also by means of the sciences, the arts and every form of human commitment and work, though these have to be sanctified and assumed in the kingdom of God if they are to acquire all their sense and be fully implemented.

In this perspective the incarnation seems to be a process that is undoubtedly centred on the figure of Jesus Christ, but rendered possible by the collaboration of all men, be it conscious or otherwise. Implemented by the cooperation of all, the incarnation resolves itself to the benefit of all: it enables each one of us to realize the maximum good, to attain ultimate perfection.

It is true that God wants “in the fullness of time... to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1, 10), but the Apostle Paul adds that we are all destined to attain “to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (4, 13) and therefore he exhorts us to “grow up in every way into him, Christ, who is the head” (v.15).

Let us consider the infinite love of God, the gift without limits that God makes of himself. In this light it will be appropriate to assume that He is not jealous of himself and wants to concede himself not partly, but totally, so that in the end he may truly be “all in all”, as Paul puts it most incisively and pregnantly (1 Cor 15, 28; cfr. Eph 3, 18-19).

It is true that our capacity of receiving God in all his perfection is extremely limited, but everything is possible for God. It is a question of accepting his grace and cooperating. And he will do the rest, if he so wills.

But he certainly wants all of us not only saved, but also perfect. If he did not want this, he would absurdly contradict the infinity of his love.

We could draw another conclusion from all these considerations. Referring to Jesus Christ, we spoke earlier on of a final merging of the human consciousness – limited and progressing through temporal becoming – with the absoluteness of the divine, atemporal, non-becoming, eternal Consciousness that embraces all things, giving them sense of being as they are, where all the event we consider to be successive seem compresent.

In Christian theology Jesus is the incarnate God and is the only human being of whom one can theorize this ultimate merging of the human consciousness with the divine Consciousness.

But now let us assume that the Divinity, by its own infinite grace, communicates itself totally to us and becomes totally received by us. In that case one may think of the possibility that all our spiritual roads, that all the different itineraries of all our human consciousnesses will ultimately merge with the absolute Consciousness.

When we merge with the absolute Consciousness, we men would all arrive at the truth without losing our individual personalities: if nothing else, these would be maintained in re-implementation of the individual lives, each moment of which would be re-evoked. We would thus become all one, but without ceasing to be many and different.

The process of the incarnation would thus become completed for each one of us just as it was for Jesus, who would then truly to the “the firstborn of many brothers” (Rom 8, 29) in the most extensive and strongest sense.

Trinity and incarnation are two profound mysteries that have caused the veins and the pulses of theologians and saints to tremble. I am wondering whether talking about them in such an uninhibited manner is not a little too superficial, almost at the confines of arrogance.

But I do not think that respect for the mystery has to induce us to leave it where it is. After all, coming to grips with it is a sign of attention and love, always provided that it is done without the pretence of clearing it up once and for all, possibly reducing it to its most simplicistic terms, thus emulating those I recalled at the beginning.

We must never lose sight of the fact that all knowledge, no matter how far it may delve into the heart of reality, always remains knowledge of the mystery. May God pardon us and use our clumsy attempts and errors as stimulation for rediscovering the forgotten dimension, the profundity whence life draws its truest sense.

8. Some good inspiration from Gnosis

In the margins of Judaism and Christianity there flourish spiritual traditions and schools of thought that bear the Gnostic-theosophic imprint: they are the various historical editions of the Kabala and Gnosticism, which continue in their later and more recent offsprings.

For me, seeing that I want to proceed on a more “orthodox” line – if I may call it thus – the teachings of both the one and the other have to be received with a certain prudence. I say this only as a general remark and for reasons that I could not discuss here without departing far from the theme I set out to develop.

Rather, I here want to examine some suggestions that these doctrines could give us. Orthodoxy can receive considerable help from these apports to find its way out of the blind alleys where it has lost itself on account, above all, of an excessive literalism or, if you prefer, fundamentalism.

It is well known how greatly the so-called “heresies” enrich theological thought and give it sustenance of life. It will therefore be useful to revisit them here, especially the parts that are compatible with orthodoxy. One can thus utilize them, albeit to some limited extent, in the same direction as orthodoxy and for the same ends.

There is a Christian Gnosis and also a Jewish Gnosis of even earlier date as a secret doctrine that the various authors, including some of ancient times, attribute to an even more remote epoch. The latter is known as Kabala, i. e. Tradition. It has the Zohar as its most authoritative text.

Gnosis wants to be “knowledge”, and that is the meaning of the Greek word by which it is known: we are here concerned with a knowledge that, rather than being discursive, is essentially intuitive. The Kabala accentuates the mystic inspiration of a knowledge conceived in this manner.

Gnosis is intuition of a totality, and this is even more valid when we pose ourselves the problem of how it is possible to have some knowledge of God. The intellect by itself is incapable of grasping the essence of the Divinity, which can be embraced – and then only very imperfectly – by virtue of a divine illumination, which man can assist by a concentration of spiritual forces.

But the types of spiritual experience can be very different. The one to which Christian Gnosis proves to be most sensitive is an intimate experience that, albeit inadequately, we can in first approximation define as “mental void”. It is intended for the perception of the divine Principle in its purity, with which, as many ascetics tell us, the pure intimate principle of every spirituality of man identifies or tends to identify itself. Here we have the theme of the famous Brahman-Atman identification of the Upanishads.

Christian Gnostics call this first and originary Principle of the Divinity “Silence” or “Repose”.

The Jewish Gnostics (or Kabbalists), for their part, have a more live and active idea of the Divinity: they identify it with the Creator God. But at a certain point there

intervenes the influence of different traditions, which undoubtedly go back to the aforementioned Hindu spirituality. I am referring to the well known vein that springs from the Upanishads and passes through the Yoga and the specially monistic Vedanta (Shankara). It is certainly due to these indirect but visible influences that even the Kabala concentrates its attention on what appears to be the truly originary mode of being of the Divinity. It thus comes to formulate the idea of the En-Soph.

What is the En-Soph? It is God in the state that metaphysically precedes not only any of his manifestations, but also every act he can perform without issuing (stepping out) from his absoluteness. It is God at repose before creating and, rather, before becoming articulated into other modes of being of his divinity (which we shall see a little further on). The En-Soph, the “without end”, the infinite, is also the indefinite, the ineffable. One cannot call it either Being or the One. It has neither form nor image, and not even attributes. It is without will and without intention, without idea and without word.

The problem that now arises is how a God conceived in these terms can create the world and operate in the very heart of his creation.

Various Indian spiritual traditions attribute this active part to a divine entity that is not exactly originary, but derived and of an inferior degree. It is the Shakhti of the God, his Spouse or Paredra. To her there is entrusted the task of creating and acting in the world that the supreme God, totally absorbed in the contemplation of himself, could not absolve. But this entity can also have other names: related to the Brahman, it may be called Brahma (attention: don't miss the slight spelling variation!) or Lord Ishvara.

Such an undoubted dualism becomes even more accentuated by the Christian Gnosis, which distinguishes the Father, innate, unbegotten and perfect, from a Grand Arconte or Demiurge or Head of the World, whom it identifies with the God of the Bible. Everybody knows that the Gnostics have but littler sympathy for the biblical God, of whom they stress the anthropomorphic connotations and an irrational and questionable behaviour. The contestation of Jahweh, or Elohim if you prefer, goes hand in hand with their contestation of Judaism, of which the Gnostic would like to liberate Christianity in order to make it more similar to the philosophies and religions of antiquity that they find far more congenial.

Furthermore, the creation, given the results attained up to the present, which may seem very modest, cannot but be – as the Gnostics would have it – the work of a very imperfect God. If not an altogether fiendish God, as conclude those who stress above all the sum of the evils and the sufferings of this world. Due to a suggestion unwittingly given by Mazdaism, ancient religion of Persia, the supreme God is related to the God of the Bible more or less in the same manner as Ahura Mazda, supreme Principle of Good, is related to Angra Mainyu, Principle of Evil, the equivalent of Satan.

A dualism of this kind may underlie the position of the Gnostic “Christians”, who interpret Christianity in their own particular way, but is wholly unacceptable for the Kabalists, who are “Jews” in the most authentic sense and faithful to the spirit of the tradition. Such a dualism would conflict with their classical monotheism.

The Kabala, rather, relies on the angels, the theology of which had taken an ever stronger hold in late Judaism. Even Christian Gnosis, for its own part, had developed an ever more intricate metaphysics of angels and demons and arcontes and eons and other entities intermediate between heaven and earth.

Fantasies apart, here we have the geniality of an idea that seems far more convincing as a logic instrument to weld the one and eternal absolutely transcendent to the becoming multiplicity of the relative, finite and imperfect things of this world.

These intermediate entities are conceived as vehicles by means of which the creative energy of God becomes transmitted to the various levels of existence in order to bring it into being.

The Kabala places the Sephiroths, the divine attributes, at the apex of this hierarchy. They are the branches by means of which the lymph deriving from the trunk becomes transmitted to the twigs, the leaves, the flowers. Vitality, trunk and branches constitute a single whole. The Sephiroths are thus united with the En-Soph like coal and the flame. In relation to the Divinity, rather, they are identical and yet distinct.

It is by passing from one Sephira to the next that God as such becomes the visible God. And it is through the angels that he renders himself present and at work throughout the creation. The divine Spirit thus emerges also from the intimacy of each human subject – since each man is entrusted to his angel – and, similarly, of each people.

The angelic entities are innumerable and govern every manifestation of life. They can act in the divine, evolutionary direction as vehicles of God, whom they genuinely manifest and announce, are his authentic messengers (as, indeed, is implied by the Greek noun *o ànghelos*, which means “the messenger”). But they can also act in an involutory sense.

There is an ancient manner of distinguishing good from evil that seems a little too clean-cut and simplified and, as I would be tempted to add, also a little ingenuous and crude: it takes no account of the infinite shadings of the real or the range of all the possible intermediate situations. This to my mind Manichean mentality of seeing all things in white and black reflects in the classical division of the angels into good and bad, into those who are faithful to God and his messengers and vehicles, from whom there are distinguished only the unfaithful and villainous, those who have abandoned him once and for all to remain damned in all eternity.

A more careful and mature consideration should induce us rather to discern a great variety of attitudes, none of which is ever wholly and solely good, just as none is evil in the pure state.

Let me recall in this connection that Dante divides the angels not only into the two classical categories of the good and the evil, but also has a third group: they are angels who neither rebelled definitively against God nor were faithful to him, but decided to mind themselves, to live only for themselves (see *Inferno*, Canto III).

This attitude, undoubtedly, is also to be condemned: and it is not without reason that the Poet reserves an infernal condition for these “slothful” angels, though he does not actually place them in the inferno. The choice of living solely for themselves and not for the Creator is already in itself an option of sin. The creature falls into sin when it detaches itself from God and seeks only its own ends, self-absolutizing itself. Existing individually in one’s own singularity, on the other hand, is not merely negative.

God has created us manifold and different. Each one of us is unique and unrepeatable, cannot be interchanged with any other. Diversity is the selfsame glorious irradiation of the creation.

In this idea, which has to be maintained with great clarity, Judaism and later Christianity are at the very antipodes with respect to the mentality of ancient Indian derivation that identifies the root of evil with multiplicity, diversity, existence itself. In biblical terms, existence as a differentiated way of being creatures is a divine gift.

Gnosis depreciates the creation to the point of identifying the Creator God with an inferior entity that, all said and done, seems to be not all that respectable and also a blunderer in his work and his clumsy and negligent if not altogether guilty failures. The Kabala, on the other hand, remains faithful to its Jewish inspiration also in exalting the creating God and his work.

In the Jewish vision, which was later developed further by Christianity, it is for pure love that God brings his creatures into being, donating them the good that is Himself, donating them every prospective good.

At this point we can borrow from the Kabala an idea that is very characteristic of it and seems to be truly full of interest: the idea of the *Zimzum*. Literally, this word means “concentration”, “contraction”.

According to this concept, the creation is made up of autonomous, consistent, ontologically dense, very real beings, not at all evanescent like those that crowd the empirical world in the conceptions of a Hinduist stamp. A creation conceived in this strong sense is rendered possible by God’s withdrawing into himself.

When creating, God indeed withdraws from the world to give a space of its own to each of his creatures. To create finite beings, God, though infinite, in a certain sense renders himself finite: he limits himself.

Though up to this point he could only be characterized as the All, he now becomes part, becomes one of the personages of the evolutionary history of the universe, even though he is its protagonist and, in the last resort, winner of all the negative forces, the triumpher who will establish his kingdom over the entire creation.

The God at work in the creation ends up by incarnating himself in his very creation. Incarnation is a concept extraneous to Judaism, though what has here been said in some way opens a road for it.

On the other hand, one could not deny that the figure of the Messiah as it is proposed on several occasions by the historical candidates for this role in the later development of Judaism (from Isaac Luria to Sabbatai Zevi and those who subsequently renewed this claim) seems invested with divine attributes that are not dissimilar from the ones that Christian theologians recognize to Jesus.

In any case, the intermediate energies we spoke about seem to be vehicles of the presence of God and of his incarnation. We could designate them also with the name of “angels”, a term that has been rendered comprehensible by a long tradition.

In the case of the incarnation of God in a man, moreover, we shall always be free to choose a name that suggests an impact on the human of a superior force that proceeds from the Divinity in a more immediate and powerful manner.

Just like all the intermediate forces, including the negative ones and those concerned only with themselves, the angels have a way of operating similar to that of the empirical realities of the world. Their action takes place in time and seems articulated. In a certain way it is just like the action of any living being: it becomes explicated in a temporal succession of acts by means of what we might call a multiplicity of members with different functions, but coordinated from a centre that gives it all unity and continuity.

As compared with the action of the peripheral articulations, the central impulse that gives life to any organism seems more independent of contingencies. We can imagine a kind of scale of organisms and subtler energies that at one end act on more empirical matter with all its diversifications, thus operating in becoming, and at the other end receive all inspiration from the Divinity itself.

Now, how should divine action be conceived? I would exclude that it is possible to depict it symbolically like the action of an artisan who creates, for example, a table by cutting with his hatchet some branches from a tree, or even the trunk itself, subsequently reducing it to planks that are to be planed, glued and nailed together. That would be far too anthropomorphic an image! But the anthropomorphism of those who consider that the Divinity performs its work in successive temporal moments would seem to be more or less of the same order.

If anything, I would be inclined to conceive the divine action by comparing it with that of a soul that keeps an organism together and from deep within mysteriously guides its development.

And what would be the most appropriate manner of conceiving the acting of the Divinity? I would say: imagining an action that perennially maintains itself equal to itself, though constituting the principle of operations articulated in time at a more material level.

The idea of emanation comes to our aid at this point. For Philo divine action, absolutely spontaneous, is infinite, without repose and perennially equal to itself, just as the nature of fire is to burn and that of snow to cause cold.

Greater insight into this concept of emanation was later to be gained by Neoplatonism. Developing a concept of Philo, the Neoplatonists saw every reality primarily derived from what they call the One. It is God in his originary modality of pure contemplation of himself. This primordial mode of being of the Divinity can be more or less identified with the Brahman of the Upanishads and the En-Soph of the Kabala.

The One emanates the Nous, or Logos, i. e. the expression of itself that is the divine Consciousness inasmuch as, in a single eternal look, it contemplates all the created realities of the world, giving sense of being to them by means of its eternal act of thought.

How could one conceive any reality as existing if nobody thought it? The true reality of things in themselves, in their objective nature, receives sense of being only from an absolute thought that thinks them not as they may appear (for example, to human subjects who know them imperfectly from outside), but as they really are.

The third mode of being of the Divinity, likewise derived from it by emanation, is the Soul of the World, i.e. God as active principle that animates the creation and moves it forward.

What Neoplatonism proposes as the third mode of divine being can be likened to the Third person of the Christian Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

Thus the second mode of being, the Neoplatonic Nous or Logos, bears a considerable resemblance to the Christian Logos, the Second Person of the Trinity, also known as Verb or Son or Image of the Father, conceived by the theologians as the divine Consciousness that embraces in a single look all the facts and events of the world that take place in the multiplicity of spaces of temporal becoming.

For its part, the first and originary mode of being of the Neoplatonic Trinity, the One, can clearly be likened to God the Father of Christianity and, also, as already suggested, to the Hinduist Brahman and the En-Soph of the Kabala. Even the Gnostics place the divine Father at the centre of their attention.

As regards the manner in which the various modes of the Divinity are related to each other, however, we may note that some very considerable differences seem to divide Christian theology from all these other conceptions. In the ambit of the latter each derived mode of being emanates from a more originary mode of being in such a manner as to seem weaker than it or, as we might say, clearly inferior.

In Hinduism this is the case of the Spouse of God or the Lord Ishvara with respect to the Brahman.

And also in Neoplatonism as regards the Nous with respect to the One and as regards the Soul of the World with respect to the Nous.

In Christianity, on the other hand, the Son is no less God than the Father from whom he proceeds, and the same has to be said about the Holy Spirit in relation to the other two more originary Persons.

But emanation (if we want to borrow a term from Neoplatonism that Christian theologians do not like) is far from implying a weakening.

Thus, if we want to conceive the creative act of God as just one, neither temporal nor becoming, but eternal, it is perfectly licit to borrow this idea from the Neoplatonic idea of emanation, though formulating a clear reserve: the divine act of emanating is anything other than a weakening but, quite the contrary, is extremely powerful.

The image of the sun whose rays become ever weaker as the distance increases proves to be highly inadequate. If the creatures are imperfect, this is not due to any weakness, is not due to any weakening of creative activity: rather, it is due to the imperfect receptivity of the means on which the creative work acts and by means of which it operates. In other words, it is due to the imperfection of the intermediate realities through which the divine presence, the divine acting and also the divine emanation is vehiculated.

But even the means has to grow, must gradually become more adequate. Each is called upon to become an ever more receptive vehicle by not closing himself to God, but rather opening and abandoning himself to Him, collaborating with Him. The progress of the creation and its completion depend on the cooperation of the creatures.

If the divine sun shines but little in our dwellings, this is not due to the weakness of its rays, to a pretended lack of power, but only to the fact that we shut our windows far too well.

The divine Presence is very close at hand and extremely powerful: welcoming it within us, making it transpire and irradiate, bringing it to all depends on our capacity of aperture, of abandon, depends on our readiness to become channels of this Presence and its announcers, its “angels”.

From God creativity emanates wholly in one and the selfsame eternal act. But it falls to the intermediate entities to canalise its and render it operative in all the particular situations. The attributes of the Divinity thus operate at the highest level: the Sephiroth (if we want to call them by this name), which are the diversification, the branching out, the becoming relative and temporal and multiple of divine Act that is absolutely simple and equal to itself at its origin.

There is a wide range of intermediate entities that from the closest proximity to God descend right down to the material levels and call upon us human beings to become vehicles of the divine Presence, of its Action on all the material realities of which we are entrusted, as it were, with the administration: namely its dominion in a spirit of service, as we can read in the very first pages of the Bible.

Concluding this rather rapid review, Gnosis and Kabala:

- 1) stress that we can engage in metaphysics only by means of intuitive knowledge;
- 2) even in a Western context, they resume and develop the idea founded on a particular mystic experience that the originary mode of being of the Divinity is ineffable undifferentiated that contemplates itself in perfect transparency to itself;
- 3) by attributing a diversity of modes of being to it, they make us see that the Divinity can both contemplate itself and create a universe at one and the same time;
- 4) by means of the idea of emanation they make the existence of the universe derive from an immutable creative act that is thus consonant with the Divinity and no longer conceived in anthropomorphic terms;
- 5) by means of the conception of an entire hierarchy of intermediate entities they construct a logic bridge to make a diversified creative action derive from an eternal and unique divine act.

All these are ideas that Gnosticism and Kabala profess in common, albeit with different accents. Exclusively attributable to the Kabala, on the other hand, is the idea of the *Zimzum*, i. e. the withdrawal of the Divinity to accord the creatures an authentic space, a real consistency that can hardly be eliminated, so that the destiny of the entire

creation, its completion, its total redemption or otherwise depend also on the availability and the effective help of each created being.

The contribution of these extremely genial ideas can be extremely valid, always provided that we know what can be usefully drawn upon and the proper doses of this drawing, in short, when we place ourselves in a proper and adequate frame of mind.

Second Part

REDISCOVERING THE ANGELS

We speak of the angels as purely spiritual beings or, if to some extent material, endowed with a peculiarly subtle, ethereal materiality: substantiated by the peculiar materiality that is closer to spirit than any other.

Now, to the scientific mentality that has dominated the last few centuries the reality of these beings seems something impossible not only to affirm, but also to verify.

Our scientific civilization, offspring of Galileo and Descartes, does indeed tend to conceive the beings of the world as formed of extended, compact and inert matter.

A vision that is opposed to that of primitive-archaic man, to whom all reality appears rather as animated.

It should however be said that modern twentieth-century physics considers matter to be made of energy. Energy is something that bears a far closer resemblance to the soul (breath, principle of life). In a certain way we here have a scientific confirmation of what men had always felt by intuition, though often representing it in very fanciful ways.

Primitives attribute a kind of personality to all things. Even a kind of consciousness. This means that every reality is underlain by an entity that, be it even in a wide sense, can be defined as angelic.

Here we have a first, barely sketched and provisional conclusion that should nevertheless not surprise us greatly.

1. Everything that exists receives sense of being from a consciousness

**But if we do not want to fall
into forms of pantheism
the consciousness
that gives sense of being
to every reality
has to be conceived not as single
but rather as articulated into a multiplicity
of autonomous consciousnesses:
in fact, angelic consciousnesses**

At this point I have to ask my readers to pay particular attention. Try to concentrate your thought on what I am about to say. And not so much your capacity of thinking in conceptual terms, but rather your capacity of meditating, of feeling certain things, living certain experiences.

If we want to meditate, we have lay aside all distracting thoughts and create silence deep within us. And it is in this great spiritual calm that certain experiences have to be tasted.

I am wondering how there could exist a reality that nobody thinks, of which nobody is conscious. I am waiting for an answer not in terms of logical conclusion, but rather of awareness.

I look around in the room where I happen to be. There is a bed, a wardrobe, a table, chairs, pictures and various objects. I see all these things, and for me they exist. When I reflect well, when I fully realize in terms of meditative concentration, I simply cannot conceive how a reality could exist independently of a thought that brings it into being, gives it sense of being. It seem unimaginable to me that something could exist without being thought.

Once I have got up and dressed myself, I leave this bedroom and shall not return there for the rest of the day. For a long series of hours I do and see other things and shall therefor no longer think of my room. What has happened to it: has it disappeared into nothingness to come back and exist once more only when I think of it again?

If that room exists only inasmuch as I think it, it exists only as an image of mine and therefore only as it appears to me. It exist very imperfectly, in a very limited manner. And it exists only in a temporary manner. What, therefore, shall we say about its real, complete and permanent existence? This is possible only if there exists a thought that is no longer subjective and fluctuating, but permanent and adequate to bring it into being as an objective and continuous reality.

Would this thought be the selfsame consciousness of God? The eternal, universal consciousness of all things and all events? Fundamentally I would say: Yes, that is so.

And thus every reality is resolved in the divine absolute Consciousness. God therefore exists: as total Consciousness that is but one with every thing or being of the world. Here we have a One-All God. And the angels? What need is there for them if the divine Consciousness is more than enough?

I would say that the angels are needed if we want to avoid falling into a kind of pantheism, where the world becomes entirely absorbed in God and no consistency as such is accorded to any existing being or thing.

But let us assume rather that we want to adopt a theistic conception that maintains both the transcendence of God and the autonomy of the creatures. In this very different framework no reality can be reduced to God, but each one exists in some way for itself: exists as itself, in its own autonomy, in its own singularity, in its own becoming.

Now, the consciousness that gives sense of being to each reality cannot think it in its autonomy if this selfsame consciousness is not articulated into a multiplicity of autonomous, individual and becoming autonomies. And thus we have once again found an appropriate collocation for the angels.

**2. The religious phenomenology
of primitive-archaic man
attributes a consciousness
and a quasi-personality
to every being
even when it is purely material**

**And the most powerful beings
end up by being connoted as gods**

I had posed a problem in terms of meditation and then engaged in a metaphysical speculation. At this point I should therefore like to reconsider the question of the existence or otherwise of the angels in terms of religious phenomenology.

One may ask oneself whether there really is a multiplicity of consciousnesses corresponding to the multiplicity of beings of the world. The sensitivity of primitive-archaic man offers a confirmation.

Primitive man dialogues with things. For him the world is a multiplicity of presences, of consciousnesses that surround him and even loom over him, that observe him, or comfort him, or menace him, or obsess him, or communicate him a sense of continuous insecurity. He wants to interweave positive personal relations with these presences, relations that are of advantage to him.

To give some example, let me recall what a German explorer wrote about the vision that the primitives of Borneo have of nature. For them “the whole of nature, men, beasts, plants, dry leaves on the ground, the air, fire and water, everything is animated, everything can feel pleasure and sorrow. The native of Borneo carefully avoids... to irritate the soul of the things around him”.

Primitives do not make a great distinction between an individual and the species to which it belongs. For them the problem often is to appease the genius of the species, so that it will not seek revenge for an animal killed while hunting, and that it will be propitious for hunting or fishing, understanding that man hunts and fishes solely for the strict needs of survival: to placate hunger and to provide himself with skins against the bite of cold.

Staying with a tribe of Red Indians, a Frenchman had thrown away a mouse taken in a trap. A little girl picked it up to eat it, but her father took it away from her and started caressing the dead animal. When asked why he did this, he replied: “I do it to placate the genius of the mice, so that he won’t torment my daughter for having eaten this one”.

Other testimonies show that the natives of the Truk Islands in Micronesia have to assure themselves of the good dispositions of the bread trees before they harvest their fruits. Among others, they try to avoid everything that could offend the sensitivity of the tree: hence the prohibition to wash oneself in its vicinity, to light a fire, or to build houses or boats.

In British New Guinea no native will dare to cross a dangerous river before having solicited its favour by means of a prayer and an offer. And in many cases it is not to the god or spirit of the river that he addresses it, but rather to the river itself as a conscious entity capable of listening.

Among certain Indonesian tribes food is offered to the instruments in use. And, to give another example, they talk to a gun as if it were a living and hearing being. But the habit of seeking the good dispositions of the weapons and the various instruments is very widespread among primitive peoples in general, where it is a common usage to address

invocations to carts and canoes, to bows and arrows, to cords and strings, to anchors, to trees, to hives and bees, to rain, hail and lightning.

I have cited this information from a book by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl entitled *Le surnaturel et la nature dans la mentalité primitive* (Supernatural and nature in the primitive mentality). I should now like to recall a book edited by Alfonso De Nola bearing the title *La preghiera dell'uomo* (The prayer of man).

This volume contains prayers addressed not to the monotheistic God or the Supreme Being or the gods that merit this qualification in the more proper sense, or to the deceased ancestors, but also to many other different entities: mountains, swamps, soil here or soil there (among the Mangios of the Ethiopian highlands), the Spirit of Virile Energy (Fang, former French Congo), the sacred baobab (Bobo, Sudan), the Rain Mother (Rwala Beduins), the magic lance (Giur, Southern Sudan), the soul of rice and the spirit of incense (which is addressed "Oh Incense", Malesia), the spirit of the mountain X, the spirit of the forest Y, the spirit of the spring Z (Lolo, China), the fire or Fire Mother or Supreme Fire Mother (Teleuti, Siberia; Tartars of the Abakan; Mongolia), the Thunder Bird (Navahos of Northern America), the Great Beaver invoked before setting out to hunt beavers), and so on.

All these entities are creatures of a Supreme Being whose originally gives form to the entire universe. The cult of men should be addressed to such a Being, to the originary Creator. But it then happens that they prefer to propitiate the inferior powers: namely the ones on whom their life depends in a more direct and more immediate manner. And thus it is that the inferior power tends to become absolutized: it tends to assume the connotations no longer of an angel, but of a god. But we are here concerned with a false god, with an idol, a creature that usurps the place and the prerogatives of the Creator.

The supreme (i.e. transcendental) celestial Entity remains in the background of the scene, where the inferior powers act as protagonists. The Creator remains like a passive spectator. He has absolved his function of bringing the world into being, he therefore grants himself repose and gives free play to these powers, connoting himself as *deus otiosus*.

3. With the monotheist revelation-revolution the supreme heavenly Entity reclaims his position as sole God

**Before the sole true God
there can be no "gods"
but only "angels"**

**What is the function
that angels have in such a context?**

**They have to render possible the manifestation
of the one and eternal God
in the multiplicity of situations
of space and time**

Monotheism is a revelation-revolution that puts things back into order. The one God, originary Creator, reveals himself as the One who does not leave creation halfway, but continues it so that it may attain its perfective completion.

Religious cult, adoration, is due only to God, first principle and ultimate End and supreme good.

Before such a God there are no longer gods, but only angels: i. e. irradiations of his light, vehicles of his presence, announcers and messengers, ministers in his service. God is one, immutable, absolutely simple. But he is the active Principle that makes the creation of the world move forward everywhere and at all times in the multiplicity of spaces and situations and through the succession of the epochs.

By means of the angels the One turns himself into many, becomes many, brings his manifestation into being. The divine breath thus exhales multiplicity. What is more, there is also promoted an evolution of this multiplicity, until multiplicity is realized in absolute unity in everything.

In the various traditions, and in a manner that varies from one religion to another, from one philosopher or theologian to another, there recur certain definitions that contribute to better clarifying the figure of the angel.

How are angels defined? They are “messengers”: in Greek *àngheloi*, which is the translation of the Hebrew *mal'eak*, derived in its turn from the Cananean verb *la'aka*, “to send a messenger”: a verb of Mesopotamic derivation already found in the Ungaric texts.

In the Mesopotamian religion some ten god impose themselves on the other semi-divine beings and relegate them to a subordinate position as their ministers (*sukkai*), courtesans, ambassadors, and messengers. In a first moment there comes to be placed above these dominant deities a supreme God Marduk, of whom the others are conceived as epiphanies; and then El, surrounded by the court of his “sons” or the “assembly of the stars”. In some way we here have an anticipation of the figure of the angel that was to undergo a particular development in Judaism.

Still in the Mesopotamian religious vision, whereas the supreme god creates the prime elements of reality, the gods utilize them to form the world as it is made and to govern it. Although derived from the supreme God, the gods are multiple cosmic forces, and also becoming forces.

Some angelic function can also be attributed to India's Deva and the spirits or genii of the Chinese tradition, whose nature presents an extreme variety similar to that of the powers venerated by the primitives that were briefly mentioned above. In the vision of Zoroasterism, Ahura Mazdah, the good supreme God, is served by seven archangels (*Amesa Spenta*), who dispense all good, prosperity and wealth and also reward just men. Now, though these entities are, on the one hand, entities that are a kind of grand genii of elements or positive and beneficial forces of nature (animals, fire, metals, soil, water, plants, light), on the other they seem manifestations of the supreme God, collaborate in creative work and in this sense anticipate characteristics that were later to be attributed to the angels of the monotheist religions.

Greek religion offer us the paradigm of heavenly messengers in the figure of the god Hermes. More generally, however, in it there recurs the idea of the *dàimones* as divine or semi-divine beings intermediaries between the superior gods and men. According to Plato, the demiurge, after directly forming the souls, entrusts to the minor deities the task of forming the bodies. For Aristotle, such a mediation between the divine and the human is absolved by the intelligences that move the heavens.

Between us and an ineffable, unknowable Divinity separate from our existence, Apuleius sees an abyss that would remain insurmountable if the demons were not to perform their mediation.

Later, the Neoplatonists sought to reduce the innumerable variety of the sacred powers to the unity of a monotheist vision, to which there tends the best religious sensitivity. Especially Proclus (5th century A. D.) was to conceive the angels as the emanation of the gods, who would otherwise remain unknowable. The divine energy

thus comes to be articulated into the angelic energies, which are the selfsame manifestation of the gods and can therefore take their name. What Proclus calls the “angel gods” come to form a complex hierarchy.

The Bible speaks of angels with a frequency that becomes even greater in the New Testament. Here I shall limit myself to recalling the passages where one or more angels appear to Abraham (Gen, ch. 18 and 22), to Lot (Gen, ch. 19), to Jacob (Gen 32), to Moses (Ex, ch. 3 and 4), to Joshua (Josh 5, 15), to Manoah and his wife called upon to be the parents of Samson (Judges., ch. 13), to Elisha (1 Kings 19, 5; 2 Kings 1, 3), to Isaiah (Isa, ch. 6), to Zechariah (Lk 1, 11), to Mary elected to become the mother of Jesus (Lk 1, 26), to the shepherds at Bethlehem (Lk 2, 8-15), to Mary Magdalene and then the other women at the sepulchre (Mk 16, 5; Lk 24, 23), to the disciples of Jesus after his ascension to heaven (Acts 1, 10-11), to the apostles imprisoned by the High Priest (Acts 5, 19-20), to Philip (Acts 8, 26), to the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10, 3-7), to Peter in prison where he has been put by order of King Herod Agrippa (At. 12, 7-10), to Paul on the ship that takes him to Malta (Acts 27, 23-24), to John in the course of the ecstasies that were to find their witness in the Book of Revelation (Rev 5, 2).

In the subsequent history of Christianity there is no lack of angels who appear in human form to reassure, comfort, counsel, inspire, assist us humans, welcome us in the beyond at the moment of passing over. Witnesses of these interventions and the others I shall mention below can be found in two volumes: one by Hope Price, the other by H.C. Moolenburg, which in their Italian editions bear the respective titles of *Angeli custodi* (Guardian Angels) and *Incontri con gli angeli* (Encounters with the angels).

According to credible testimonies. In 1914 at Mons and in 1918 at Béthune, apparitions of great hosts of angels (the “White cavalry”) protected units of the British army in danger of becoming surrounded by the Germans, whom they disconcerted and even terrorized. Similar episodes are reported in the Russo-Finnish War (1939) and in the Yom Kippur War (1973) between Israel and the Arabs.

How should we interpret these apparitions? How should we classify them? To begin with, we cannot exclude that we are here concerned, at least on considerable part, with manifestations of deceased men and women who formerly lived on the earth and who, though not angels by nature, appeared to such on account of the functions performed at least in those circumstances.

These presences are expressed by whispering words intended to be words of warning in case of danger. They can also be expressed by means of songs and choruses of superhuman beauty. At times they even seem to be rather consistent and tangible. They can heal the infirm and, to give another example, pull a drowning person to safety. They can exert strong actions on matter, like deviating a bicycle, a motorcycle or even a car, or stop them, lift them into mid-air and then deposit them gently on the road in order to avoid a serious accident. In parapsychological terms one could say that this constitutes a particularly powerful psychokinetic phenomenon.

What is acting on the physical level is at times not an invisible force, but rather a human figure that subsequently disappears.

Would we in this case have a phenomenon of materialization? Could somebody, without either wanting or even knowing it, be acting as medium, furnishing the necessary psychic energies?

By way of hypothesis, one could also assume that the entity manifests an energy it possesses of its own. The energy that theologians call grace is in its selfsame concept something that exceeds, and sometimes very greatly so, the natural human potential of the beneficiary. And, if the intervention of the angels can be defined as a supernatural intervention, one should not be astonished when it proves to be a particularly powerful intervention.

Certain presumed angels appear in the form of common persons like many others, dressed in the ordinary manner of our epoch. But others – especially those who are objects of visions – appear in the form of the angels as represented in the Christian tradition. They have wings and often shining armour and swords. They can present themselves as very tall figures, up to two metres and even three.

How do they give rise to these images? They certainly do not need wings to fly, since they are spiritual creatures and can therefore move to wherever they want, covering even very great distances with the speed of thought and rise to any height without having to overcome the force of gravity. Nor do the angels need those archaic armaments. It is reasonable to think that their combat, their work in general is very different from that of corporeal beings existing in nature. One may therefore think that the classical image is more than anything else intended to satisfy the expectations of people who traditionally conceive the angels in that form.

We may here be concerned with disincarnate souls who intentionally assume the form of angels in order to satisfy these expectations. But it could also be that the image comes to be formed thanks to a spontaneous psychic process: the living person is accustomed to conceiving the interventions of the other dimension as incursions of angels; and it is thus that a manifestation originating from the beyond would spontaneously assume an angelic form.

One could also imagine that the subject of such an intervention is a psychic formation determined by the contraction of the human thoughts focused on the angels. The concentration of all these thoughts can give life to a mental reality that can end up by assuming a consistency and initiatives of its own. Such initiatives could assume force to the point of determining phenomena of true materialization.

Lastly, we cannot exclude that these mental concretions are brought into being both by the thoughts of men and divine energies; let us say, by divine Spirit, who would essentially contribute mainly to the substance of the phenomenon, whereas the winged and armoured angelic forms that the phenomenon assumes derive from thoughts of men and their particular culture.

A concentration of divine and psychic spiritual energies can give rise to a materialization, as I have just said. Now, a low degree of materialization could assure that the psychic form – in this case of one or more angels with wings – is visualized only by clairvoyants. And possibly not by just a single individual, but rather by two or three or many sensitives together, at one and the same time. A more advanced and stronger degree of materialization, on the other hand, would enable the angelic form to be seen with the bare eye also of persons other than clairvoyants.

The encounter with angels infuses in those who benefit from it a sense of profound serenity and beatitude that can last for many weeks; it confirms and strengthens his faith, confers a new significance upon existence and profoundly transforms the person. The angel truly seems a divine envoy.

Coming back to the Bible, one should note that in its most ancient books the angel is identified with the selfsame presence of God, as his invisible prolongation. His transcendence and distance even from his own people came to be accentuated only at a later stage. And one can readily understand that, by way of compensation, ever greater prominence was accorded to the intermediary function of the angels. Their hierarchies were articulated and some individuals were distinguished and called by name, Raphael, Michael, Gabriel.

In the New Testament the angels assist Jesus, they serve him, comfort him in his passion. Later they show themselves to be at the Service of the Church. According to the eschatological prophecies of Jesus and the Revelation, they are to play a great part on the Day of the Lord.

It is, above all, in post-biblical Judaic literature (let me recall especially the Book of Enoch, the Books of the Jubilees, and the Dead Sea scrolls) that the discourse about the angels is developed. The angels are assigned by God to governing the forces of the cosmos. Each human person and each people are entrusted to an angel, who began to take the place of the ancient protector god. Mention is also made of angels of the wind, the thunder and, the clouds, as also angels of hail, hot and cold, the seasons, the sea and the rain. Not only the stars, but the entire universe came to be placed under the protection of the angels.

In the vision of the Gnostics, the angels are demiurges emanating from superior entities, the eons, and contribute to the creation of the world and its government as if they were second-order divinities. Saint Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (2nd century) objected that the angel was a creature, not a creator, a title that had to be reserved solely to God.

Saint Augustine (4th and 5th century) accentuated the free will of the angels. In contrast with Platonic philosophy, he also denied all truly creative action to the angels that could improperly qualify them as divine beings.

There is a justified concern in the Church that the angels should not be connoted as gods. It is always this selfsame concern that induces the Church not only to deny the angels all creative capacity, but also every identification with the stars, the sun, the moon, the planets (to which the gods of the pagans were likened).

The Pseudo-Dionysius (5th and 6th century) affirmed that the angels constitute a hierarchy. The concept was taken up by Proclus and developed with some diversity by Pope Gregory the Great. Though some detail may seem to be excessively schematic, the idea that the inspirations and forces that emanate from the Divinity pass from grade to grade until they eventually reach men to illumine them, purify them, render them better and assist their ascent would seem to be more readily acceptable.

Saint Bonaventure (8th century) insisted on the tripartition, three by three, of the nine angelic choirs suggested by the Pseudo-Dionysius and put it in relation with the divine Trinity. And added that man can elevate himself by virtue of the mediation of the nine choirs.

Saint Thomas Aquinas held that God manifested himself, degree by degree, right through the angelic hierarchy to the multiplicity of the existing.

Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) stressed that it is the angels who mediate the Infinite and the finite, bridging the abyssal distance between them, so that man could ascend to total union with God.

In the eastern Church, again, Saint Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) speaks of uncreated divine energies by means of which God makes himself present as a single whole. It is precisely the angels who manifest this energy. And it is thus by their mediation that man participates ever better in supranatural knowledge and progresses along the road of deification.

In Islam, in the Koran and its comments (*tafsir*), as also in the sayings attributed to the Prophet (*hadit*), the angels are likewise conceived as intelligent spiritual beings. They are the numberless myriads of pure spirits immersed in the adoration and contemplation of God. But they are also the souls of the elements; they are the spirits of the places, the mountains, the deserts. They govern the earth and the heavens, acting on the forces of nature, the winds, the clouds. They can continue the creative work, like the angel Israfil, who introduces the breath emitted by the Spirit into the creatures. As intermediaries between Allah and men, moreover, the angels not only look after men's vital functions, but also help them to rise to God to achieve the perfection to which they are destined in him.

In his total transcendence, Allah makes himself known through the mediation of the angels, who manifest the divine names. This revelation of God saves man and transforms him from deep within.

Among the mystics of the modern age, Jacob Boehme expresses an emanationist conception of a Gnostic-Theosophist imprint and therefore tends to diminish the transcendence of God with respect to the angels. He identifies them with the revelation of God, with his manifestation. They are God's thoughts and ideas. Without them, God could not express himself, could not be understood.

The thought of Rudolf Steiner likewise bears a clear Gnostic-Theosophist imprint. He, too, speaks of a spiritual hierarchy articulated into a variety of angelic orders. Their lowest degree consists of the spirits of the four elements: earth, water, air, fire. Above these there are the angels that can be defined as messengers of the Divinity among men. Higher still there act orders of angels that are ever closer to God, participate ever more of Him.

According to Steiner, God employs the angels for the purpose of creating and maintaining the world. With respect to God, they are like the arms, the hands, the fingers that a person uses for working.

Through the angels, God, pure Spirit, acts on matter, just as in us humans the will acts on the members of the body .

The faith and cult of the angels came to lack with the Protestant reform. Attention to these beings was however maintained alive by many people of a mystic tendency, first and foremost among them Jacob Boehme (1575-1624). And by poets like Paul Gerhardt and Henry Vaughan (17th century). By philosophers as, in the 15th century, the "Platonists of Cambridge". By the philosophers Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) and Louis-Claude de Saint Martin (1743-1803). By the poet, painter and etcher William Blake (1757-1827), and the philosopher Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854). All considered, this tradition of fidelity to the angels did not prevent their sense being gradually lost in European culture. Due to the influence of rationalism, above all, the angel for us tends to remain more than anything other a literary figure, a moralizing voice, an archetype of beauty, a pure expression of nostalgia in something in which we no longer believe.

The sense of what the angels really are as presence of God is being lost even in the Catholic environment. They are becoming ever more humanized, especially in the figurative arts, which tend to represent them as young men, or as children, who distinguish themselves on account of a beauty clearly inspired by pagan models. Angelology decidedly entered a crisis in the 20th century. There is a tendency to reduce the angel to a mere symbol of Transcendence and of its action in the world.

The last few decades have witnessed a rediscovery of the angels that is now making headway almost with explosive force. It has led, among others, to a wealth of studies and publications of every kind, also and above all of a Theosophist-Esoterist imprint. The latter range between the existential and the fantastic and, in all truth, do not always seem to be of the high level that the theme would require, and yet they bear witness to a very live human interest. One should also recall a certain cinematographic production, where – particularly in the film by Wim Wenders entitled *Il cielo sopra Berlino* (The sky above Berlin) – themes of traditional angelology are being reposed: the angels are in our midst, though without being of our world.

Forerunners of this renewed interest for the angels are the poets Rainer Maria Rilke and Paul Claudel, the Orthodox theologian Sergej Bulgakov and the philosopher Henri Bergson. Jacques Maritain, Romano Guardini and Karl Rahner dedicated particular attention to the angels. While the second Vatican II Council produced only few references, the supreme magisterium of the Church recalled the reality of the angels and their function through the Popes Pius XII, Paul VI and John Paul II.

Two thinkers and scholars seem to assume particular significance in this present-day resumption of studies concerning the angels: the French orientalist Henri Corbin (1903-1978), who was of the Islamic faith, and the Italian Massimo Cacciari, Professor of Philosophy and former Mayor of Venice.

In Corbin's thought the mediation of the angels is necessary to enable us to speak of God in a manner that is neither agnostic (God is unknowable and ineffable) nor anthropomorphic (God can be fully defined in our human terms). Rather, it is by means of the angels that the invisible and hidden God reveals himself in multiple and always imperfect theophanies that nevertheless express an authentic, personal manifestation of God.

For Cacciari angels are "necessary" if man is really to understand and realize himself. In particular, they enable him to know the spiritual realities in a manner that is not abstractly intellectualist, but vitally participative. The world of the spirit thus becomes the object of an analogic knowledge, a knowledge in mystery. We are here concerned with a symbolic and yet immediate knowledge, because truth gives itself in the symbol as in a mirror and in enigma. In the symbol we thus glimpse even the Invisible. While the demon hides things behind his phenomonic appearance, behind his illusory image, the angel reveals this very thing through the symbol.

**4. The angels are innumerable
and also of extreme variety:
from the spirits of nature
to the guardian angels of individual men
and those who protect churches, cities, nations
and every human collectivity**

Daniel saw the on a throne of fire surrounded by a court of a thousand thousands and ten thousand myriads of beings. Many different traditions thus speak of an immense number of angels.

These do indeed appear to be innumerable, since each is the point of consciousness of a modality of the existing: star or planet, mountain or lake or sea, spring or river, living species or people, city or village or church, plantation or meadow or forest, human individual, or single animal or plant, organ or apparatus or system cell, molecule, atom, electron and even more microscopic particles in the direction of the infinitesimal.

We can thus speak of an extreme variety of angelic entities at many different levels. The archaic religions tend to identify each star or planet with a god. But even a mountain can have its spirit, as also a river and even the sea. A place can have its *genius loci*. There is frequent mention of a spirit of fire, a spirit of the wind and also of each individual tree and its species. These are generally called spirits of nature.

As we already saw, all things are animate in the vision of primitive-archaic man, each is endowed with a quasi-personality, they are gods or demons or genii. Individual and peoples can show a greater or lesser aperture vis-à-vis the supreme Entity. And wherever there is less sensitivity in this connection, these energies may seem more autonomous, right through to the limit of total independence. But where, on the other hand, the idea of the supreme Entity becomes ever stronger, these energies tend to become increasingly connoted as energies of an angelic nature at the service of the supreme God or the sole God.

Even the spirits of nature can thus be characterized as angels. Here we have a conception that is rather familiar to peoples of antiquity; it is a vision that is being repropounded to us men of our day and age, for example, by the experience of Findhorn.

Findhorn is a small village on the Scottish coast, where Dorothy MacLean and Peter and Eileen Caddy, a married couple, went to live in 1962.

Possibly as a consequence of meditations, at a certain moment Dorothy began to hear a voice deep down within her that told her things seemingly inspired by profound wisdom, so that the woman ended up by letting herself be wholly guided by it. The situation of these three people became unexpectedly difficult when they found themselves without work. It was then that the mysterious interior voice advised Dorothy and her friends to start cultivating the land.

Little by little, the voice seemed to become the direct expression of the spirits of nature of that place. These energies self-defined fields of energy, intelligences of individual living species, forces that make the individual beings of nature grow, each from the seed that is its project.

As Dorothy tells us, “the spirits of nature taught them a little at a time how to manure the soil, how to sow, how to treat each variety of herbs, vegetables, legumes, how to nourish them, when and how to gather them. Our vegetable garden began to prosper and bear fruit”. And we are here concerned with fruits that were, indeed, extremely bountiful.

The angels also explained to them that the radiations emanated by the gardener contribute to the growth of the plants, that the emotional forces of those who look after the vegetable garden can be a true nourishment for the young plants. Certain persons stimulate this growth, others slow it down, and some even block it altogether. Gardens, they kept on telling us, need love and tenderness just like children.

The expressive form of these discourses may well be defined by a humming of Dorothy’s psyche, but this should not by any means induce us to exclude the distinct reality of a source of inspiration. Why, indeed, should we exclude that the substance of the message may come from these spirits of nature? From that particular type of angel?

Dorothy MacLean speaks to us of individual angels or, put into Indian language, of individual “Devas”, each assigned to an individual species or vaster form of life. There are thus named a “Deva of the apples”, a “Deva of the rain”, an “angel of the countryside”. Lastly, a “Lord of the elements” that presides over the manifestations of the wind, the sun the soil, the water.

Vicente Beltràn Anglada, a Spanish clairvoyant, writes that “there does not exist any phenomenon in the life of nature, including those that we call parapsychological or paranormal, in whose occult motives not find the activity of a Deva or a group of Devas”. And again: “The Kingdom of the Angels is extraordinarily dilated and satisfies the expressive needs of nature from the elemental level, where the chemical structures of the atoms are created right up to the high levels of the solar system, where the Great Archangels and the powerful and illusory Mahadevas realize their incomprehensible mission.

Geoffrey Hodson, a great British theosophist and clairvoyant, speaks of innumerable “angels of nature” that are to be found everywhere, in the trees, in the flowers of the meadows and the gardens, in the stones, in the metals and the gems of the mineral kingdom, in the clouds, as “animators of every form”. They are the objective reality of what in the popular legends, the fables, the infantile imagination are called gnomes or spirits of the land, sylphs or spirits of the air, undines or spirits of the water, salamanders or spirits of fire.

Here we have a great variety and innumerable quantity of elemental spirits, each of which, rather than presenting itself as a Something, operates like a Somebody, says Anglada, concluding that the marvellous architecture of the universe is thus brought into being by “a surprisingly organized angelic power”.

Albeit in a wider ambit, Hodson affirms the very live and active reality of the guardian “Deva” of the home, of the Deva of music and ceremonial, of angels that inspire beauty and art, constructor and healer angels, all of whom act as vehicles of the supreme divine initiative.

Dante speaks to us of angels assigned the task of moving the heavens. These are not to be identified with themselves, but are rather their motor intelligences. Each related to its star like the chariot driver to his chariot or a pilot to his boat.

The philosophy of an Aristotelian stamp, which Dante adopts as his own, distinguishes matter from spirit in a very precise manner, and therefore regards the pure spirit that guides a star or a planet as clearly distinct from the materiality of the star. Primitive-archaic thought ignores such clear conceptual distinctions, because it sees all things in a participative key. And thus the primitive-archaic mentality tends to identify the star with the intelligence that guides it and each material reality with the point of consciousness that gives it sense of being.

Rather than coinciding with the existence of each individual reality, the angel constitutes its most profound and true being, inasmuch as it is the link between each existence and the Being that founds everything and is the absolute Root of all realities. The Christian tradition, as also the Mesopotamian tradition before it and, more recently, the tradition of Islam (to limit ourselves to just a few examples) are agreed in envisaging a guardian angel for each man.

It seems that the best inspirations, including the clearly divine ones, come to us through this guardian angel. In Gnosticism there comes to the fore the motive of the human soul that has to tend towards uniting itself with its divine angelic counterpart. There are those who, re-expressing this idea in the terms of the conception of Carl Gustav Jung, speak of the meeting of the personal ego with the Self. Man is induced to localize the active presence of the angel in the profundity of his being, at the root of which there dwells the Divinity itself.

On the other hand, an angelic counterpart can be attributed not only to each human individual, but also to each form of existence: where the angel is always the divine presence that operates for the good of each reality, collective ones included, good being here understood in a perspective of universal good.

The guardian angel is an *alter ego*, a friend and spiritual master. Very close and yet invisible, it guides the soul with discretion and gentleness, inspires and illumines it, though without forcing, without abolishing its liberty.

The Jesuit Francisco Suarez (1548-1617) specifies that the guardian angel exerts six types of action on each individual: he removes external and internal dangers that menace our body and soul, induces us to do good and to avoid evil, attenuates the temptations of the demons and helps us to chase them away, submits our prayers to God, prays for us, corrects and punishes our errors so that we may become converted.

Apart from individual guardians, the Assyro-Babylonian tradition also honours good demons as protector genii of individual homes, temples and cities. The Bible speaks also of angels of nations. We only have to read Deuteronomy, Chapter 32, Verse 8: “When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God [in Latin: *juxta numerum angelorum suorum*]”.

And an angel said to the prophet Daniel: “The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, so I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia and came to make you understand what is to befall your people in the latter days... But now I will return to fight with the prince of Persia and when I am through with him, the prince of Greece will

come... there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your chief” (Dan 10, 13-21).

Revelation (ch.1-3) cites the message that Jesus, having appeared to the apostle John, addressed to the angels of the seven churches.

The apocryphal Book of Enoch enumerates seventy nations, attributing its particular angel to each.

Many different authors of the Christian East attribute the guardianship of each man to individual angels, as also of each human community, each kingdom and nation, city and province, church and monastery.

The Persian mystic Sohrawardi (12th century) speaks of an “angel of humanity” (identified as Gabriel). He lives and operates in the intimacy of each individual man and yet transcends them all, since he constitutes the ideal and perfect nature of man.

The poet Friedrich Hölderlein (1770-1843) speaks of “angels of the fatherland”: a kind of tutelary numen of one’s native land. Indeed, he ties them to the land in far too exclusive a manner, with the consequence that their relationship with the divinity falls into oblivion.

Rudolph Steiner speaks of Archai, *Zeitgeister*, Spirits of the Time, who influence the common mode of feeling and therefore of acting in the everyday life of each people and civilization. He speaks of the soul of a people as entity that has an autonomous existence of its own. An archangel keeps vigil over the destiny of each people, whereas individual people are entrusted to single angels. There is a continuous interchange between the individual angels and the archangel of the collectivity, thanks to which the archangel can inspire in his angels both particular thoughts and the impuls to act in a corresponding manner.

Can a precise individuality be attributed to the angel? Elena Petrovna Blavatsky affirms that the angels (or Dhyani-Chohan or whatever else one may want to call them) do not have individuality in the sense that induces a man to say “I am myself and nobody else”. Between men and other beings of the earth there is a separating distinction, that cannot however be found among the angels: angels are distinguished more in terms of hierarchy than individuality.

The angels lose their individuality to the extent to which they become immersed in the divine Being that is their most fundamental and true being. More than having an individuality of their own, they are the individualizations of the one God in the multiplicity of the existing.

Existence is articulated in a hierarchy of units, each of which comprises and is made up of smaller units. And it is thanks to this articulation of the angels that each reality is intimately animated at every level.

Every reality is indeed animated: even the ones that more than others appear to be constituted by inert matter. A subatomic particle is energy, just as the atom and the molecule are energy; and also the collectivities of the living: colonies of unicellular animals, bacteria, microbes, anthills, beehives, bird nests, families and branches of mammals, societies of men, cities and states. Each of these entities acts in an autonomous and coherent manner inasmuch as the individuals of which it is made up are organized and vitalized by a kind of collective soul.

There is something that operates between the collective soul of any aggregate of individuals, or even of cells or simple molecules, on the one hand, and the Divinity on the other: it is precisely the intermediation of the angels that vitalizes everything, because it communicates, transmits, vehiculates and infuses being and life.

**5. The angel is immediate
and yet imperfect divine presence
because this presence has to filter
through the imperfection of finiteness
and the negativity of evil
present in the world**

Each angel is the selfsame presence of God. The angels of whom we are told the name always have the root El, “God”, in this name: Michael is thus “He who [is] like God”, while Raphael means “God heals” and Gabriel means “My power is God”. In the Bible God can speak in the first person through the representation of the angel (human figure, at times regal, or a burning bush, or a column of clouds, or a column of fire, and so on).

Dante’s Paradise opens with the famous three verses: “The glory of Him who moveth everything / Doth penetrate the universe, and shine / In one part more and in another less”. This means that God is not always present in a full and perfect manner in his creation, in things, in events. The same may be said of the presence of God in his own angels.

In the Bible the figure of God is sublime and yet it appears excessively conditioned by the culture and human mentality of the various authors of sacred book. God still appears to be far too circumscribed in the figure – be it even as majestic and august as you wish – of a great barbarian king.

These imperfections, these human limits, this excessively human aspect may depend on the immaturity of the biblical writers. But one cannot exclude that there is something of the imperfect, the limited and the partially aberrant even in the very action of the divine manifestation that is expressed through an angelic presence.

In other words, God expresses himself through the angel, who is a creature, imperfect and evolving like the creatures of this world in general.

If even the angelic entities through which the Divinity expresses itself seem imperfect, no less imperfect and, rather, even more imperfect should prove to be the entities through which values express themselves, where God undoubtedly makes himself present, but not exactly in the first person.

In human life there may become incarnated values that were originally very positive, but these values are as if they had become polluted on the way. Let us think of a little stream that, having come from the purest of sources, sees its waters become polluted as it runs along on account of the detritus that it gradually encounters and carries with it.

This is an attempt to explain the imperfection of the angels. But ultimately there is also something else: there is the deviation of the angels, there is their sin.

The angels have a function, which is that of bringing the divine presence into the variety of the situations of the world. Nevertheless, they can deviate from their function and, let us even add, their institutional tasks. In a political ambit there is always a great deal of talk about “deviated secret services”. Transferring this analogy to a metaphysical plane, one could, not by any means improperly, speak of deviated angels.

6. The evil present in the world is attributed to the original sin of men

**And yet many forms
and potentialities of evil
existed already in the creation
before the appearance of man**

The Bible tells us about an original sin committed by the progenitors of mankind, and all evil derives from this sin.

Men are undoubtedly entrusted with the very particular responsibility of administrators of the creation. Many evils that afflict the earth can be attributed to men. One has to do no more than think of the dramas of ecology and how poor management of the planet could ultimately provoke its end.

But saying this does not by any means imply that many potential evils did not already exist in the world before man made his appearance there. We need only think of the terrible law of the struggle for survival and the large fish that eats the small fish. And then there is that cruel instinct by which, for example, an insect paralyses a larva and then lays its eggs in its flesh, so that its offspring may have a supply of fresh food in the course of its entire development. All the egoisms, all the snares and perfidies of which human nature is capable are already present in the species that precede it in an evolutionary sense.

Evil cannot be attributed to God. He is supreme Good. His work is good, and good without a shadow of evil. God is not machiavellian. He does not employ diabolic means. He cannot in any way be either confounded or contaminated with the devil.

Archaic religions, and even the Jewish religion at its first uncertain steps, envisage God like a powerful barbarian king, always victorious, merciless with his enemies. He is a figure that for the archaic mentality represents the highest ideal of what people want to be, of what is called “glory”. The glory of being the strongest, of winning and subduing and dominating and “laying down the law”. This idea of glory bound up with the exaltation of power is expressed also in an aspect of cruel viciousness that does not in any way contradict the glittering and terrible royal image of that personage.

Faced with such a sovereign, people assume the attitude of subjects who never question, but simply approve everything, even the objectively most doubtful actions, because the will of who “lays down the law” is of itself law.

Counterposed to the concept of God as a great king is a weaker but more rigorously moral God: a good God, a Mother and Father God, a God who is only love and effusion of good.

The creation of a supremely good God is good as such. One cannot attribute to him the creation of a world in which there already exists every root of moral and physical evil, every possibility of suffering. Nor can one conceive God as a giver of evil, as a Creator who distributes to his creatures, be it even for good purposes or for his own mysterious designs (as many people say), rations of decidedly intolerable evil.

Every creation is multiplicity, is temporality, is in some way material. But one cannot attribute to God the intentional creation of a matter degraded to the lowest of the low.

I have no intention here of denying that the creation of matter is “good” as such. On the other hand, though God is pure spirit, the creature is always in some way material. And its materiality is always positive. The important thing is that the spirit should triumph over matter in such a way that matter becomes spiritualized in every way, i.e. transformed into a vehicle of the loftiest spirituality.

But matter becomes degraded when it limits and imprisons the spirit. Degraded matter cannot wholly derive from God. It could be the result of a parallelogramme of forces, as it is called in mechanics. Or, more precisely, a polygon of forces of extreme complexity. One of these forces is the divine creativity. We are here concerned with a divine presence conditioned also by negative, involutory forces. A God whose “angel” is opposed, humiliated and, in the limit, crucified.

It is reasonable to think that in the course of evolution each living species with all its potential of egoism, dominion-seeking and violence could emerge as the resultant of a parallelogramme or polygon of positive and negative forces. The divine action, alias the angel, undoubtedly forms part of it.

God’s incessant action is a force conditioned by others and limited, if not altogether crucified. It is a force that seems to come to lack, but is then resurrected to triumph over all adversity, over every “gate of hell”, to extend God’s kingdom everywhere.

God as such, in his absolute sphere, is omnipotent; but he is not yet such in the sphere of his space-temporal, cosmic and historical manifestation. He will be so at the end of time. For the moment we invoke that his kingdom may come on earth (where it is as yet present only as a germ) as it is in heaven (i. e. in the absolute sphere, where it has always been fully implemented).

**7. It is more reasonable
to trace the presence of evil
in the world
including pre-human evil
back to a sin
that precedes that of men:
to a sin of the angels
the only truly original sin**

How can this relative impotence of God be explained? This *kénosis*, this emptying of himself? It is explained by the fact that God is limited by his own creatures.

God does not create the world by means of a series of acts, as if he were a human artisan or a kind of engineer who little by little – by means of a series of inspirations,, corrections and re-thinkings – draws up a project and then implements it step by step, carrying out a series of partial and successive operations.

One cannot attribute a succession of acts to God. There are those who admonish God because, having decided to bring into being certain creatures rather than others, he did not foresee the consequences of their possible behaviours and did not therefore decide to refrain from executing the project in question. Now, imagining this or that creature and then deciding to implement either that particular project or another implies a succession of acts that is certainly not in keeping with the absolute simplicity of the divine Being.

Argumentations like the one that could be attributed to Giovanni Papini (concerning Lucifer) and Johann Gottfried Herder (regarding Adam) lose sense in this perspective: “When God created Lucifer, or also Adam, in his omniscience he could not but know that the angel or our progenitor would have sinned and thus bring trouble onto the heads of all of us. Thus God, too, bears responsibility for the evils that derived from it. For He himself wanted them”.

One should imagine a God who first devises and designs Lucifer or Adam; and then realizes the implicit dangers; lastly, considering the dangerous nature of the

proposed creatures, he decides not to go ahead. A wise man would act precisely in this manner. But would not a God who first thinks this and then does something else be just a little too anthropomorphic?

God is one, absolutely simple, eternal, non-becoming. Divine creation is a single and total act. In this sense we can symbolically represent divine creation by means of the figure of an immense waterfall of truth, love, value, good. It will be up to the angelic hierarchies to carry the divine energy to the multiplicity of different space-time situations as if it had to pass through a thousand rivers and streamlets.

God donates himself to an infinite extent, bringing into being creatures who will receive in accordance with the receptivity of each and also in accordance with the attitude of aperture that each one assumes.

And it is also reasonable to think that God, pure spirit, will create spiritual beings in the immediacy of his manifestation.

Here a comment made by Saint Thomas Aquinas seems to me to be altogether precious: among all the created beings, the angels are more similar to God; so that the creation would lack something essential if it were without the angels (*Summa theologiae*, 1, q.50, a.1). In our musical language, a universe without angels would be an unfinished symphony.

Nevertheless, these spiritual creatures that we call angels no longer have the simplicity of the divine Being and not even its pure spirituality. They only participate in it: but within limits that become smaller and narrower as each creature becomes centred on itself, crystallizes and, as we might say, materializes. This is precisely what constitutes the original sin of the angels.

Only the Creator is pure spirit. Only He is absolutely bodiless. Creatures, on the other hand, including even the angelic creatures, inasmuch as they enter space and time, inasmuch as they are capable of successive choices, inasmuch as they are multiple and becoming, are always to some extent corporeal, material beings, be it even of a subtle materiality of the highest vibration.

The Second Council of Nicea (787 A. D.) recognized this type of ethereal materiality of the angels, which in any case is very familiar in the vision of primitive-archaic men and their mental categories.

If later a Thomas Aquinas arrived at denying them all materiality (even any matter that could be defined as spiritual), this would seem to be attributable to the rigidity of his intellectualist conceptual framework of the Aristotelian type and the excessively precise distinctions that follow therefrom, formulated in terms of continuous out-outs, of “is” or “not is”. In the case in point: “If it is spirit, it *is* absolutely spirit, it absolutely *is not* matter”. Result of an excessively schematic application of principles of formal logic to the realities of this world, which in actual fact are far more shaded than pure logic suspects.

The Franciscan school of John Duns Scotus already showed greater elasticity, a greater sense of nuances, and therefore in a certain way filled the abyssal distance that in Thomism remained between men and angels, between the corporeity of men and the presumed non-corporeity of the angels.

In other words, God immediately brings matter into being even in the creation of the angels; and matter as such is good, is something very positive. Only that it can suffer degradation, becoming ever more dense and coarse rather than remaining subtle and ethereal.

It seems interesting to compare the theological conclusions regarding the materiality or otherwise of the angels with the ones drawn by the previously mentioned Geoffrey Hodson, a clairvoyant of a theosophist orientation, from his own perceptive experiences: “The angels differ from us in many characteristics, the most important of

which is that they do not have a physical body and normally are therefore invisible for us. The matter of which their bodies are made is more subtle than the matter that forms our body. Its vibrations are beyond the visible spectrum, so that our eyes do not react to them. But we have other eyes that enable us to see them: the eyes of the soul. If only we wanted to open our interior eyes, our angelic companions would become visible, because they are present everywhere; the air around us is full of invisible beings of many races and ranks”.

The subtle, ethereal matter of which angels are made can degrade, though not by divine will, but as a consequence of an attitude of the creature. In other words again: sin does not give rise to matter, but rather causes its degradation, causes the crystallization that makes it assume an ever lower vibratory tonality.

The negative attitude that a spiritual creature can assume is that of self-sufficiency, the desire to stay by oneself and live for oneself, forgetting one’s true origin, considering oneself sovereign, separate, existing apart and for oneself. It is the egocentrism of the creature that in some way leads it to detach itself from the Source of all life to become arid, to set out on a road that, if travelled to its end, has death as its ultimate arrival point.

The sin of the angel is the one that leads him to turn himself into a god of himself, so that his devotees call him by that name and to some extent make him the object of a cult that should properly be reserved to the supreme God.

One may say that the original sin is pride: it is the turning of oneself into god, as if the true God did not exist, as if He were not the Creator, the true Good and the All of each creature.

When an angel sets himself apart from God, it is always sin, even when it is not motivated by actual wickedness or true enmity felt for the Creator. Origen speaks of “uncertain angels” who have taken side neither for the Creator or against Him. In the antechamber of the inferno, i. e. the place where those guilty only of small sins receive their punishment, Dante places the “...Angels, who have not rebellious been, / Nor faithful were to God, but were for self” (*Inferno*, III, vv. 38-39).

Nevertheless, these angels are sinners and deviated, because the moment of the original sin is precisely this separation, from which there follows the vast range of the possible sins, including those of the most subtle perfidy and most perverse and iniquitous wickedness. The detachment may however be greater or smaller, and the consequences are not all of the same gravity.

The “uncertain” attitude (to use Origen’s words) of a considerable number of angels could be the origin of the phenomenon of the subtle forces that do not act in an evolutionary direction and not even in a decidedly opposed and clearly involutory direction, but assume a neutral position.

However this may be, each and every tendency to stay by oneself, to be a part for oneself, to separate, to self-absolutize himself, induces the angel to turn his back on God, to detach himself from the Spring of life, and therefore to become arid, to descend to a lower vibratory level. And thus matter, as such already in being in the pure angelic state, becomes crystallized. It becomes matter in the heaviest and most opaque sense. It becomes resisting and refractory matter that limits, brakes, imprisons the spirit. In short: degraded matter.

By divine impulse, the spirit moves to reconquer matter and, little by little, succeeds in becoming its soul. And thus we have the evolution of the living species, each of which, as we said, is the resultant of a parallelogramme (or, more exactly, a polygon) of forces, where the divine creativity is one of the forces in play and leaves space to other energies acting in different directions.

The spirit brings into being first the plants and then the animals. In the vegetal kingdom there operates a more elementary and blind instinct of overpowering, so that

each plant opens for itself a pathway to the light as it grows. Denying it to the others that do not succeed in occupying the same space. At least as a general rule, however, that is all. In the animal kingdom, on the other hand, the struggle for survival assumes forms that are far more complex and conflictual to the point of merciless cruelty: an animal devours other and weaker animals and has to render itself ever stronger due to the daily exercise of violence it experiences.

Every form of action finds its most efficacious element in the enjoyment of that action. One can thus readily understand that the sad need for striking and wounding should become pleasure of striking, wounding and raging, causing suffering. Here we have a kind of deviation, a pathology. A cruel need of nature becomes cruelty as an end of its own: in man it becomes wicked will, a taste for evil inasmuch as it is evil.

Be it even somewhat briefly, we have seen: *firstly*, that the degradation of matter derives from the sin of the angels; *secondly*, that the reconquest of matter takes place, little by little, through evolution; *thirdly*, that even evolution creates the premises for certain form of moral evil.

One can now add that the very fact that consciousness has to incarnate itself in degraded matter lays the premises also for physical ill, for pain.

In small and reasonable doses, pain is a spy of danger to which a sentient being exposes itself when it acts in a certain manner. Coming close to a fire, a man feels warmer, but will risk getting burnt when he comes too close. The particular physical pain that the flame causes him warns him of the danger, and in this sense it is very salutary.

But there are also pains that are not necessary in this sense. There are purely negative pains. There are intolerable pains. Let us think of the pains caused by an atrocious illness or by man's own cruelty. Here pain becomes configured as an authentic form of evil.

When one follows the thread of the connections with due attention, one realizes that it is reasonable and correct to trace all forms of evil back to the original sin of the angels.

The sin of the angels explains the first origin of evil: evil inasmuch as evil, in all its negativity.

Evil is negativity, it is not simple imperfection. Evil cannot be reduced to the simple fact of multiplicity, temporality, finiteness. God creates a multiple universe, and this is something good. The creation is "good", as the first chapter of genesis keeps repeating.

Finiteness is the temporary condition of a creation that is likewise destined to infinite perfection, almost germ of a new God in the process of growth. Temporality is a necessary condition for as long as this process is not completed, as long as it does not arrive at its ultimate goal.

The "myth of Anaximander" is summed up in the sole passage of this very ancient Greek philosopher that has come down to us: "The principle of all things is the Unlimited; and what makes them come into being is necessarily the cause of their destruction; thus, at the time fixed therefor, they suffer, each due to the action of another, the punishment and retribution of their impiety".

The philosopher Augusto Del Noce comments and explains that in this vision "every finite reality, precisely because it is finite, has to suffer with the annulment of its singularity the punishment for having emancipated itself from pure being; evil derives from the very finiteness of the existing, the fault is ontological, written in the selfsame structure of the finite existing. Man is guilty inasmuch as he exists"

This tendentially negative manner of feeling the existing, the multiple, the finite, time, history and singularity is characteristic, above all, of Indian thought, but one has to add that it is not by any means absent in Greek thought.

It is opposed by Jewish-Christian sensitivity. There creating is a positive act, just as the creature is positive as such. There evil is far from being inscribed in existence inasmuch as it is existence, but is subsequently introduced by the sin of the creature. There evil is in itself a negative fact, and not just the complement of good.

The fallen angel, the demon, behaves in a negative manner: he sins by pride, turns his back on God, denies the Source of his own being and of all life. In the limit, his sin can become wickedness.

The negativity of the fallen angel cannot be diminished. In no manner or wise can it be reduced to a simple action of hindrance: an action that may prove positive for the purpose of testing men, for the purpose of tempering them and making them evolve better.

Difficulties that man is capable of facing can contribute to fortifying him by degrees: for him they can represent a kind of gymnasium, a form of training, a “war course” to be covered as exercise. But often the presence of evil assumes such proportions as to crush an individual.

Fallen angels cannot be reduced to the “divinities of obstacles” that Rudolph Steiner talks about. Evil cannot be reduced to a pure force acting in the service of progress, as William Blake would have it. The fallen angel is not an agent of God. He is not an actor who, under the direction of God, recites the part of a bad person or a simple antagonist for a good purpose. He is not a priest who in the course of an initiation rite wears a terrifying mask for the sole purpose of urging the candidate to brilliantly pass an initiation trial.

Satan is not a dinner guest of God who, possibly after having drunk a cup or two too much, is ready to bet that even the pious Job, if put to the test, would fall. One must not take literally what is no more than the simple literary guise of a story that takes shape in the psychological magma of men of epochs of the far distant past.

Satan does not perform any providential mission for the salvation of souls, as a Giovanni Papini would have it. His is a help to which, all said and done, one can in all conscience oppose a simple “No, thank you”.

On the other hand, even though some people see him that way, God is not the mad emperor who avidly seeks circus shows and amuses himself by organizing strange contests among men to test their bravery and resistance capacity.

We are made in the image of God: this can and must induce us to tend with all our strength to realizing that excellent Model to the greatest possible extent; it does not authorize us to deform the divine image that is within us, to reduce it to the worst there can be in the degraded physiognomy of the most extravagant and malign men.

**8. References to the original sin of the angels
can be found in the Bible:
from Wisdom to Revelation
from Ezekiel to Jesus Christ himself
to Paul, Peter and John**

**Though indirectly
even the story of Adam and Eve
alludes to the sin of the angels**

An original sin of the angels is adumbrated in a particular manner and with a strong symbolic valence in the apostrophe that Isaiah addresses to the King of Babylon and in the two discourses that the prophet Ezekiel addresses to the Prince of Tyre and then to Egypt's Pharaoh.

The King of Babylon is likened to the fallen angel in a particularly explicit manner. This is what the prophet says to him: "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn, How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God, I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High. But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit'" (Is 14,12-15).

And Ezekiel says to the Prince of Tyre: "Because your heart is proud, and you have said, 'I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods'" (Ez 28, 2). And again: "You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty, You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, carnelian, topaz, and jasper, chrysolite, beryl, and onyx, sapphire, carbuncle, and emerald; and wrought in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. As an anointed guardian cherub I placed you, you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you, In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned; I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and the guardian cherub drove you out from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendour. I cast you to the ground... I brought forth fire from the midst of you; it consumed you and I turned you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all who saw you" (Ez 28, 12-18).

As far as Pharaoh is concerned, Ezekiel compares him to a cedar that divine grace, in its turn symbolized by the abundance of water, made grow in a singular manner. "I made it beautiful in the mass of its branches, and all the trees of Eden envied it..." Now, this tree, "because it towered high and set its top among the clouds, its heart was proud of its height". For this sin of pride God made it cut down and sawn to pieces "so that no trees by the waters may grow to lofty height or set their tops among the clouds and that no trees that drink water may reach up to them in height" (Ez 31, 9-15).

And the Book of Revelation, in particular, tells us about a "war in heaven" between the angels of God, guided by Michael, and the angels of the "dragon". There it is written that "the dragon and his angels were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven... and his angels were thrown down with him" (Rev 12, 7-9).

The author of the Revelation goes on to attest: "...I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and looked and sealed it over him, so that he

would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while” (Rev 20, 1-3).

Abstracting from the yet interesting question of the millennium of imprisonment followed by a brief period liberty in which the devil will be able to strike his last but terrible blows, we may recall the mention that Peter dedicates to the “sinning angels” in his second letter (2,4). Where he literally says that “God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment”.

In the first few pages of genesis the serpent appears as a malign personage already operating in the negative sense who easily induces Eve to sin and, through her, also Adam.

In the final verses of the 26th canto of Paradise, Dante reduces the stay of our two progenitors in the garden of Eden to seven hours, sign of a rather unstable and precarious situation that the pre-existence of the devil had already heavily compromised.

And the story of Adam and Eve also contains elements that make one think of a primordial idyllic situation, a golden and truly paradisiac age, even though no confirming clue can really be offered to palaeontologists or similar scholars. But here they are. *First*, the affirmation that until then the creation had proved to be good, very good, without any presence of evil (Gen, ch.1). *Second*: no violence among animals, until that moment all were vegetarians (Gen 1, 30). *Third*: perfect innocence of the progenitors, who do not realize that they are naked and dress in tunics of skin only after their sin (3, 7.10.21). *Fourth*: there is no toil in Eden before the sin, there is no suffering and not even death (3, 16-19). *And last*: in the midst of the garden, the “tree of life”, the fruits of which may be eaten and give immortality (2, 9.17;3, 22).

In any case, thorough study of the biblical text leads one to conclude that the true original sin was that of the rebel angels. Two authoritative theologians, the Jesuit Fathers Flick and Alszeghy (whom I cite as example of a rigorously Catholic orthodoxy) clearly recognize that “the elevation and sin of the angels preceded the sin of man and in some way were its cause” (*Il Creatore – The Creator*, p. 514).

They go on to affirm that (Jesus was sent by God to destroy the kingdom of Satan to establish the kingdom of God on its ruins” (p.554). They note that the apostle “John conceives the history of salvation (the life of Christ and that of the Church) as a great duel between Christ and his followers on the one hand and the and prince of this world and his allies on the other...” (p. 555). Lastly, they stress that “the primitive community conceived the mission of Christ as a struggle against the devil” (p. 543).

An apparent difficulty may be represented by the words of Paul, who says that “sin came into the world through one man and death through sin” (Rom 5, 12). But attention. The apostle is here concerned, above all, with counterposing Adam to Jesus Christ, because he wants to present Christ as the new Adam. And it remains in any case obligatory to refer to a far more ancient text; the Book of Wisdom.

There it is clearly affirmed that “God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living, for he created all things that they might exist” (Wis 1, 13-14). He “created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it” (2, 23-24).

Even Jesus himself was to say to the incredulous Judeans: “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say?... He who is of God hears the words; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God”. On the contrary as he puts it, “you are of your father the devil, and your will is to do his desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because

there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (Jn 8, 42-47).

Almost as if to comment these words of the Divine Master, John writes in his First Letter: “He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil (1 Jn 3, 8).

And the verses that follow once again develop the motives underlying the words of Jesus I have just cited. In fact, Christ’s actions and his miracles seem to be nothing other than essentially a continuous fight against the devil. We should also remember in a very particular manner the following admonishment of Paul: “Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6, 11-12).

9. Evil is introduced into the creation by the sin of the angels and the struggle against evil takes place primarily at the angelic levels

If the first origin of every evil that afflicts the creation is at the level of the angels, it follows that the struggle against evil has to be fought primarily at the same level.

This is the struggle of the forces of the creation against the forces of destruction. In every kind of combat each of the two antagonists seeks to damage the other. But, if I may express myself thus, I would define the fight of the angels of God against the gates of hell as a peaceful war: a war that is fought by constructing or reconstructing, often in a silent and discreet manner, and yet always with great humility and patience and perseverance. It is a war where the aim is not even to hurt the adversary, but rather to recuperate him, so that good may triumph over everything and all at every level.

Its protagonists, together with men, are the angels, namely the forces by means of which God carries out his creative action in the multiplicity of the space-time situations.

One fights against evil by affirming the Good and bringing Value into being, that is to say, by creating. Redemption continues the creation and is included in it: it forms a single whole with it.

The angels are energies and create by means of an action that can be defined as ideoplastic. What does that mean? Ideoplasty can best be defined by counterposing it to the action of an artisan. The artisan creates the individual pieces one by one and then assembling them into the finished product. The mind that acts in an ideoplastic sense, on the other hand, operates in a very different manner. It does not construct piece by piece, but brings its product into being in a global manner, all together in one and the same act.

The creation of this new being, even its complete creation, could take place in one and the same instant only if there were forces of resistance of any kind. Normally, however, any action it is proposed to carry out in this reality as it effectively is will encounter a set of contrasting forces or even only neutral forces of inertia.

All these are obstacles that have to be overcome. They have to be overcome one by one by means of a succession of partial creative acts. And thus the series of obstacles has its counterpart in the series of the times, of becoming.

In his absolute unity and simplicity, God does not become: he is immutable, eternal. But he irradiates himself into the multiplicity of things and events through the angels. The angels arrive everywhere. True articulations of God, the angels are related to

him like the rays are related to the sun. The rays arrive everywhere, dazzling in some places, more weakly elsewhere, and arrive in various colours according to the diversity of the means they have to cross.

The angels act like a beam of forces that are multiple and becoming, but conditioned and limited. Here they are the manifestation of God: of a God who, eternal and infinite and omnipotent in the sphere of his absoluteness, in this sphere of the contingent is present only in a germinal and therefore relatively weak manner.

Here he is a God whom his own creation limits and hurts and, in the limit, can also crucify and kill him. He is nevertheless a God who in the end will rise again and establish his kingdom over the entire creation. He is an “omnipotent” God in the sense that he can do everything. But not everything all at once. This dilation is explained by the resistance that is opposed by his creatures. Who for the moment and also for a long time yet to come limit the possibility of a creative action by means of the angelic energies

Hence the creative action of God, perfect and full, global and total in the unity of just one and the same act, comes to be articulated in an action of the angelic energies that is multiple, becoming and gradual, energies that one would like to see in constant growth.

Our hope is that the growth of the angelic forces may eventually become irresistible and assure the total triumph of the kingdom of God over the entire creation at every level. In the end “God will be all in all”, because with him there will have merged the angelic forces and, together with them, all the human forces, so that the finite will become infinite and cosmic and historic becoming will enter eternity.