

The Texts of the Convivium

THE OTHER DIMENSION, MAN'S LAST DESTINATION AND HIS AUTHENTIC VALUES

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1. Death: don't be afraid there's good news about it

When they think of death, many people are scared and look away from it. If there's somebody who wants to speak about this theme the people who are most attached to life cross their fingers, the politest ones just don't give any personal contribution to the discussion.

This sort of people should not be distressed with untimely considerations for which they are neither ready nor mature.

The ones who are able to face the topic serenely and with the proper interest form a clear idea of three things, just to start. In the first place: death is inevitable, so it's no use to think of something else. In the second place: it's very useful, on the contrary, to get ready for it. In the third place: Metastasio is right when he says, "It is not true that death / is the worst of all evils..."

We can give very good news to people who are willing to pay attention to us. The first good piece of news is that whatever sufferings may precede death (illnesses, injuries, tortures and the worst we can think of), passing is in itself soft and sweet: an exalting, positive experience.

The second good news is that we survive – and we don't survive just getting along somehow as it often happens on the earth. According to the logic of life beyond life we survive in a more and more qualified way, that is in a more and more perfect, happier and happier one.

2. We can get data on passing and on life after death from a precise phenomenology

How is it possible that we can speak concretely about death and what comes after it? Some "demonstrations of the immortality of the soul", even the concepts of Plato's *Phaedo* which represent their starting point, sound too abstract.

If it is a reality, survival is a fact. So we had better take phenomena into account. And the emerging phenomenology is that of the mediumistic communication. There's evidence of these invisible and, let's say, quite mysterious interlocutors who present themselves to us as dead people's entities.

Such evidence which seems to come from life after death reveals itself in agreement with the witnesses of the living people who have projected themselves out of the physical body (out-of-the-body experiences or astral projections).

And they are much more in continuity with the witnesses of other subjects, who after a clinic death of a short duration, have been able to have an insight into the condition of the hereafter and have then come back to describe it in an undoubtedly concordant way (near-death experiences).

This is not the place to judge if this matter is acceptable or not. I have done that in many other occasions. I can only say that if facts are certain and conclusions correct, they have important consequences about our last destination and the meaning of our earthly living. From them we can also draw the criteria to perceive, from among all the things which interest and involve us, what man's authentic values are.

Passing from this earth to the other dimension has been said to be soft and sweet in itself. But what comes after? The witnesses of the ones who present themselves to us as disembodied souls seem to be quite similar and when they sound different they complete themselves with one another, as they come from different ultramundane conditions.

Perhaps not even a single case is in itself entirely convincing. If we consider all the cases together and compare our and other people's experiences we will get a sort of puzzle whose pieces fit together in such a way as to give an extremely interesting mosaic.

3. The condition of our souls after passing depends on how we live on this earth and on the quality of our thoughts

Let's see in short, the steps of the passing of a soul to the other dimension. There is the experience of going through the well-known tunnel, at the end of which we find ourselves, most of the times, in an agreeable landscape, where we meet a "being of light".

This may present itself as an old wise man, a saint, an angel or even a god, different from religion to religion, and anyway an authoritative and reassuring personage. The being of light welcomes the disembodied soul and tells it about its new condition.

Then it helps the latter to evaluate its own life spent on the earth. The new-comer receives, in this way, further help from an overall view of its own earthly existence.

So the newly deceased person soon learns an essential thing: the life awaiting us in the other dimension has been prepared by ourselves here with our behaviour.

Furthermore, the quality of our thoughts is more important than our actions. Actions are a consequence of thoughts, which are the most important thing because they immediately mould the spiritual world to which we will completely have to belong, and to which we in fact already belong as spirits.

So the ways of our future existence in the other dimension will, we may say, be the direct consequences of how we have lived on this earth.

Passing to the other dimension, a beautiful soul starts an existence of light and happiness. A soul which gets beyond full of an excessively negative dross condemns itself to a desolate and painful condition of darkness and solitude.

There may be, in many cases, experiences of a real desperation there; but in the solitude the soul will have the possibility of thinking of its own mistakes to make amends for them.

Trusting in God and his angels, the expiating soul will create the subjective conditions for good spirits to intervene effectively to improve its state little by little, to bring it finally into the light of a more positive existence.

The experiences of desperation create a sort of hell, where the eternity of pains seems to consist of the awfully lively impression that the same condition should last forever. But, as it seems, it is only a subjective mood, which will give way to a feeling of hope as soon as the soul has realized that it must repent, ask forgiveness for its own faults and put itself in our good Lord's hands.

At this point, hell is turned into purgatory, a mental place of painful but trustful redemption, where the dross of wickedness and even of mere egotism is burnt up to the moment when our sinner has to become "pure and willing to ascend to stars".

When I was a boy so many priests and nuns still indulged in frightening descriptions of souls damned in hell or condemned to the fire of purgatory. I hope they no longer do that so much: if their purpose was that of getting us to do well showing the negative consequences of behaving badly, that way of doing was quite psychologically heavy.

As I am convinced of all this, I don't certainly want to do any kind of terrorism, when I point out that thoughts prepare, in fact, the soul to an existence of light or darkness, according to the positive or negative marks we want to impress upon them.

Consequently, already on this earth, we must avoid evil and do good. And even before, we must *think* well: it is useful to get used to good and positive thoughts, which are in themselves effective and productive of a reality on the spiritual level. It's good for the soul to be generous, patient and mild, and above all full of love.

It's no good to be too much attached to worthless things, to false values and transient pleasures.

4. In the perspective of life after death earthly values are questioned again

What is discussed and objected to, here, is wealth and power, beauty and sense satisfaction, living long but not well, honours and fame... And the most synthetic judgement is always that of *Christ's Imitation* (1, 1, 3), which completes the very famous saying in Ecclesiastes (1, 2): "Vanity of vanities, and everything is vanity, but loving God and serving Him only". And here is another conclusion which the *Christ's Imitation* draws from it: "The utmost knowledge is walking into the realms of Heaven through the despise of the world" (ibidem).

The religious perspective of these words receives a wide confirmation from the phenomenology of the mediumistic communications. The hereafter is a religious world "par excellence". The farther beyond it is, the more it is God's reign. In the deepest, worthiest messages ultramundane life is described like a spiritual journey, like the one that Saint Bonaventura would call an "itinerary of the mind into God".

The *Christ's Imitation* considers even science one of the transient values of the world – or of the instrumental ones at the most. I think that its judgement is too strict towards all humanistic values, including culture and art. And it is at this point that some doubts arise. Does Christianity really condemn, or at least undervalue, the things that man has very much at heart?

We must well distinguish "having" from "being". We lose what we own, first or later, but "being" remains, because it represents our inner self. At death's door we are compelled to leave, even suddenly, houses, cars, bank accounts, powerful offices and positions; and so we leave also our body together with its beauty and ability of physical enjoyment which had already been impaired by ageing. But now is it possible to leave our science and culture and any form of creativity, in a word, our way of being, in a similarly sudden way?

5. What about humanism and culture? Certainly there is a lot of room for them in the first (astral) spheres of the hereafter But then...?

Our way of being is something we always carry with us, and it will keep existing in a way which is not too different in an astral setting, where we don't only keep our memories, affections, ability of reasoning but even our old appearance. Our sense of self-identification gives place to a bodily image similar to that of the physical body left on the earth. And in the same way as we see ourselves in the bodily shape, so we find ourselves in an oneiric-mental environment similar to earthly environments.

How can we explain such an antropomorphism? It is similar to the one that we find even in earthly life in the dreams which we have every night. Earthly images form themselves within us spontaneously because of our mental habits, that it is hard to lose even in the other dimension.

As such inclinations disappear, the disembodied soul will find itself more and more in a pure mental life without keeping the images of our world any longer, unless it wants to recreate them, for special needs. A need that our soul may have can possibly be that of making itself recognized by other souls that remember it embodied in our world with that particular physical appearance.

It seems that in the first spheres – astral, antropomorphic, earthly-like – of the other dimension we will be able to keep being interested in the things we were most fond of.

There are means of studying, of artistic creation, of travelling and staying in other spheres and in so many other different places of this earth.

Quite too many people are spiritually flat and colourless, without any possible wish of getting the best from themselves, aiming at the most vegetative sort of life possible. Undoubtedly this disposition of spirit will not change for the mere reason that the subject dies. An idiot, five minutes after death, will be an idiot who has been dead for five minutes; the same can be said of any limited and narrow-minded individual, and he will need to work a lot to improve himself.

But an individual urged by a sound curiosity and the wish of knowing, travelling, making experiences will be able to do it whenever he wants. And all this will be very beautiful for the people who are ready to appreciate it.

6. In the further spheres of the hereafter there is a temporary forgetting of the human aimed at the detachment from earthly things

In the first times after passing astral life will a sort of wonderful holiday, where we will be able to do the so many things life had prevented us from doing up to that time for its continuous engagements, limitations, worries and problems of all kinds.

Then disembodied souls enter another phase of their itinerary. It is the moment in which forms dissolve little by little, and memories and even affections fall. The subjects lose their own personalities and empty themselves to get filled with God.

What happens then to the varied expressions of humanism we are so fond of? Are we then destined to leave everything behind, to forget all that we have loved and all beloved people?

Such a conclusion seems to be very depressing not only for the scientist and the artist, but for anybody who aspires to prolong and even eternize love, friendship and frequentation which tied him to all of his beloved.

But it is on this point that our mediumistic communications give us a clear reason of solace. When they are questioned on this matter, so many souls coming to communicate with us, Convivium people, tell us that the process of emptying ourselves is a step in the process of gradual detachment from the so many earthly affections and interests which are an obstacle to our spiritual advancement. It's not a loss but a mere suspension, a temporary quitting.

7. At the end the soul which has emptied of itself to belong only and completely to God will find everything in God and the fullness of its humanity

When those ties have been completely loosened and their very root has been destroyed, there will be no more need to protract this situation of detachment. In the new condition the return to old affections, memories, human values, the fullness of humanism itself will no longer tie us to the Earth, will no longer be a risk, but, on the contrary, an element of greater completeness and perfection.

The souls which have emptied of themselves, of any egotism, to belong to God, will find everything again in God. Each of them will get back the fullness of its humanity.

This is what seems to be the deepest sense of the final resurrection, which finds a perfect example in Christ's resurrection.

Our Lord's resurrection is followed by his ascension to Heaven. Even we, like Jesus Christ are destined to full deification, a deification which will comprehend indeed our human values. Our Lord has ascended to Heaven physically, fully, with his resurrection body, in all his humanity.

This means that, in the same way, our very humanity in its fullness and in all its values, and humanism itself too, are destined to enter God's reign to integrate it.

**8. All this means that at the end
we will find our dear ones:
such a perspective certainly gratifies
the need of a true love
which aims at immortality**

What has been said so far gives the cue for thought and meditation. Before humanism, I'd like to speak of humanity and human relations.

In the perspective of the hereafter, the spirit which must give life to these relations can be expressed only through the word "love", which may have a lot of meanings.

There is the love for the man or woman of one's life, for parents, children and other relatives. There is the love for human beings but also that for other living beings, for things and for spiritual activities and creations. The variety of these forms of love and of all this net of relationships, which are really unique from one person to another, survives in the thereafter, as human relations are re-established after the phase of forgetfulness and suspension of the memories and affections mentioned above.

This is another good piece of news for those ones who have lost a beloved person and aim at finding this again.

The subjective feeling of having just merely lost a dear one, and for ever, without any hope of recovery, may cause so many people to fall in despair.

We know there isn't objectively any reason of being despondent because nobody is lost. But it is perfectly human that the people who don't share this certainty are desperate. They have a reason for that, because each of us is unique, inimitable and not certainly interchangeable: so losing someone is like losing a person that can't be replaced by anybody else.

Love requires immortality. People who love one another want to meet again. The fact that in the end we will find again our dear ones, who were only apparently lost, gratifies a deep need of our spirit.

**9. Even from now on this Earth
we can start the process
of enlarging and deepening
a love, which in the end
will embrace everybody altogether**

Love for humanity, if it isn't abstract, starts with our fellow-creatures: the ones who live next to us. But if it starts there, accordingly, it is certain that it should not end there.

Our love and interest are too often limited to a very small circle of people, whereas we don't care for the others who are extraneous to us.

Familles! je vous hais! Foyers clos; portes refermées; possessions jalouses du bonheur! (“Families! I hate you! Closed homes; shut doors; jealous possession of happiness”). This idea, which Gide curses, is a very mean one, a very badly interpreted sense of the family. It may refer to the worst of bourgeois families, not certainly to Christian families of which it can’t even be the slightest caricature.

There is a tendency – and even a logic, I should say – which gets us to enlarge the sphere of our affections and friendly relations more and more.

A man and woman love each other and marry, and there seems to be nobody but they two in that moment, all the rest of the world lies outside. Then they have children and love all of them. After a number of years children get married, and the love of the couple who set up the family is extended to grandchildren. No new love spoils the pre-existing ones, which fully integrate one another.

When we love somebody in a deep way, our love extends to the people that they love. Their families and friends are mostly accepted: so the circle of friends and affections grows larger and larger.

We have had the experience of many unknown friends who were like behind the corner, completely unsuspected, and after the first meeting we were attracted towards them by something irresistible as if we had always been acquainted with them. This is the example of the enlarging of friendship which can be extended unlimitedly like an oil spot.

If love really takes fire in us, it’s normal that it ends up by extending, just like a fire, from one person to another according to the different bonds and relations which tie them. If this experience takes place in the best suited way, there will finally be less and less limited love experiences and larger and more universal ones.

An authentic love wants to embrace all and each one altogether.

If I really love a man or a woman, I like to know everything of them and have a complete share in their lives with an attraction and in an empathy which make me enjoy and suffer what makes them happy or sad, really identifying myself in their projects, dreams, hopes, expectations, frustrations, successes and conquests.

It is beautiful to enter other people’s lives, their spiritual itineraries, of course not for a morbid curiosity or a taste for gossip, but to follow everything with love, to live everything as a personal experience, feeling that even other people’s lives belong to us, as well as each person belongs to everybody, since we all are substantially only one being.

We are, indeed only one being: like the so many flowers, leaves and fruits of the same huge tree, which develops and grows on common roots and is fed by the same vital lymph. What is important is to be conscious of all that.

**10. In the end everybody will be dear to us
and we shall love everybody
altogether and distinctly in God
in an eternal communion, that will be
a full and absolute participation**

But how is it actually possible to develop such an awareness far beyond our unfortunately well-known human limitations?

In moments of great serenity and peacefulness in the presence of vast landscapes and suggestive natural sights, in some sleepless nights in which we keep awake working, thinking or praying, we have the feeling that our solitude is peopled by innumerable beings.

These are moments of intense communion with God and humans. But how could we love everybody and completely take part in each person's life? We should really have a heart as wide as the universe.

Might all this ever become possible, in a condition different from that of us men and women living on this earth? The psychology and phenomenology of spiritual life speak to us of cosmic experiences, during which a subject feels to be one with the whole of existence and perceives an immense quantity of things in an extremely enlarged vision. What prevents us from hypothesizing a condition in which these experiences may become much more attainable even if not properly normal?

There are other experiences of extreme intensity, that one has in borderline situations. A fall in the high mountains may last a number of seconds through which the mind may be crossed by an incredible quantity of thoughts, contemporarily or in a swift succession.

Again: in situations of danger or near death, when one has succeeded in escaping it, there may be a panoramic vision of one's past existence similar to the existence witnessed by the entities telling us how their passing to the other dimension took place. Even in the latter case the events are recalled in a very vivid way in a sort of movie in an ultrarapid succession if not even in a simultaneous way.

But even in such extraordinary experiences human limitations are still present. It seems that an authentic and fully universal love can express itself in a corresponding attention to all beings only if the subject has reached – let us say – the condition of an omniscient God. Only a God who contemplates all things, all beings and all events in a contemporary vision may devote all his attention and therefore an infinite love to everything and everybody.

May such a condition ever be realized? Certainly not with our human forces. But God, in his infinite love for us, may wish to give himself to us endlessly. He may come, in such a way, to give himself to us after making us, little by little, more and more receptive of such a superhuman and overwhelming grace.

**11. God's love pushes us
not only to love others
but also to love ourselves in a rightful way
and all this aims at immortality
both for us and everything that makes up
our living personality and humanity
in the spiritual and cultural sense**

The love for the others is the wish that they survive together with all that makes up their personality in the most positive sense.

Consequently God's love is not only the source of the love for others, but also of that rightful love that we owe to ourselves. Loving ourselves is, in the same way, to wish that everything that makes up our human personality in the most positive sense will survive.

The rightful, orderly love of ourselves is, on the contrary, the wish that all that we are will not only survive beyond the gates of death, but will increase and develop so as to reach its perfection.

These are people, who when they are near death, are desperate because they don't want to leave material wealth, that is what they *have*. But our real wealth, the one which we will take with us, is what we *are*. So many men have worked all their life to store up a patrimony of lands, real property, industrial shares and so on. But so many people

haven't worked less, even if in a different way, in order to *be* in a certain way; in order to develop their own sensibility and to put up a patrimony of science and culture.

If when we die we leave our material wealth on this land, should we also give up spiritual wealth?

It really breaks our heart to have such a perspective, and we whole-heartedly hope it won't be so.

Will our faculty of reasoning be always intact? And that of will? And that of creating both on the aesthetic and operative level? And knowledge? And memory? Knowledge is committed to memory: "There in no science / if you don't remember what you have understood", says Dante. And Montaigne: "Memory is the receptacle and the case of science".

Here is the utmost importance of memory: to remember what we know of the present, but also to remember what no longer exists. Science includes the knowledge of the past: it is also historical consciousness. And how on earth, to know the past not only in the general outline but also in details is considered so important, above all in the development which historiography has reached nowadays?

Chronicle itself has got its unquestioned fascination and value. How did people live in other ages? Even very detailed chronicles of towns and villages are available to us (like the one of Montaillou in the Pyrenees, XIII century, analyzed in a large and suggestive volume by Edouard Le Roy-Ladurie).

People who love such a kind of studies and are sensitive to the needs and motivations which gave life to them would like such a chronicle, such detailed memories to be available for any epoch, town, family. They would like the memory of the past to embrace it in all its particulars. Even more, they would like such a memory to be not only total, but perfect and, even more, to be of such a kind to make all that has happened in the millennia of human history always alive and topical.

I dare add that knowledge would be perfect if it made all that has happened in the millions of years of cosmic evolution come alive and present.

People who reject such very peculiar view and frame of mind and taste – which are indeed very peculiar – will find what has been said so far foolish and even a little odd. But they had better not express such a judgement that would be perhaps too careless. So many forms of sensitiveness aren't understood by other people until they have been matured personally, and this takes time, work and passion.

12. The love for our humanity requires even our common patrimony of spiritual and cultural goods to survive death and aim at an infinite perfection

If I wish my personal survival, I must never forget that we humans form only one being all together. Therefore the wish of my escape from physical death is, at the same time, the wish that all people survive: and not only any man and woman, each with his/her own cultural and spiritual patrimony, but all together, collectively, with all that we can call our common spiritual and cultural richness.

Science and artistic creations are part of this human patrimony. Even the individually acquainted knowledge and individual creations are part of this common heritage.

All this common patrimony wants to be saved, and to be increased unlimitedly. Even science and knowledge do so, and it is the same for technology itself that gives us power on things. It is a power that wants to be unlimitedly increased, but always in the

respect of divine will, to help God himself in the creation of the universe, so that creation is brought to its perfect accomplishment with the contribution of men.

So the final aim of science is omniscience, and that of technology omnipotence. The human artist, in his limited microcosm imitates the divine Artist of the universe. Aesthetical creativeness aims at realizing greater and greater expressions of beauty. Therefore it aims at infiniteness and eternity, as all the perfectible expressions of the spirit do.

Art itself contributes to the wealth of that creative work that God performs. And it also aims at immortality. Let us remember the *Non omnis moriar* of Horace (“I will never completely die”, that is “Something of me will remain forever, thanks to my poetical work”) and his *Exegi monumentum aere perennius* (“I built a monument more lasting than bronze”).

Each author has a special love for his own works. But no author would like to create something only for himself, to enjoy his work of art in the solitude. Each author creates also for the others, so that other people may appreciate and enjoy, then participate. This means that also the love for one’s own works comes to be a love for a patrimony that can be shared. Even in this case the author quits himself and reasons in community or even universal terms.

Ruskin points out that when we build we believe to do that for eternity.

One would save the works of art from destruction and preserve them from any danger. One would even resurrect the works of art of the past which have been lost or destroyed. No lover of music would accept the loss, the definitive oblivion of some masterpieces. And if the great works of architecture, sculpture, painting, of minor arts themselves went lost, wouldn’t that mean an irreparable loss for the whole mankind?

Now the masterpieces of architecture have their precious frame in a quantity of houses, streets, small and large squares, and it would be a real pity if these too were destroyed by the foolishness of war or by that of so many modern urbanists. A great monument detached from its natural surroundings of old less grand but typical buildings suggests the quite irrational and even melancholy idea of a cathedral in a desert.

So great art has its humus in popular art and in that unceasing aesthetical creation which is formed by language, festivities, home decor and furniture, costumes, memories, legends, and any act of life and anything that can be transmuted into beauty.

Anybody would preserve the smallest work of art from death if he really loves it. People would like to preserve even the funniest stories, even the witty expressions. If a work is loved, it is loved in all details. Any note sent out by any, even secondary, musical instrument of an orchestra is necessary in order to realize the whole beauty of a symphony. The history of a country, the biography of a man are loved in details. Even a scientist loves details. Universal truth never leaves details behind.

**13. This common patrimony is creation
and all humans are called to love it
and to contribute to its accomplishment
helping the project of God
who loves it above all things
as a new growing absolute
that is put into being day by day**

Any form of science, technology and art helps us to get out of ourselves to enjoy “cultural goods” which are common to everybody. These goods are very dear to us as they are to a lot of people. Well, they should be dear to everybody. And little by little

they will be, as far as the spiritual maturation of each person is realized in a larger and larger perspective.

Such goods are values. And the sum of values is creation, that God, the Supreme Value, carries out with the very cooperation of us humans.

Creation is the sum of all good, interesting and lovely things. What is negative in universe is not creation, doesn't come from God: all negativity is, on the contrary, anti-creation; it is a force opposed to divine will and interferes with the creative action in all possible ways.

Creation is everything good and vital which is present in the universe. Creation is the dynamic presence, in the universe, of God himself. And God loves his creation infinitely. Therefore He gives himself to it totally, so as to make it perfect. Obviously such a perfection hasn't been reached yet, but the creative process is still going on amid thousands of difficulties and obstacles in a continuous fight with the forces of evil.

When we speak of creation, we have to think of what it will be when it is accomplished. Only at that time it will be possible to say: "God has created the world, and has created a world as perfect as He is, a new Absolute".

At this time creation is a process still in progress. To be precise, it would be more correct to say: "God creates the world" than "God has created the world".

"The glory of the One who moves all things / goes and descends through the universe / more somewhere and less elsewhere", says Dante at the beginning of the Paradise. Paraphrasing these lines, we might say that in the present universe not everything can be judged as creation in the same way: some beings are "created" more than others, according to the various presence of God in each of them, or – we might also say – according to the relative perfection of each creature.

The world will be perfect in the end, when it will be accomplished, that is fully created. And it will totally be God's reign and the prolongation and completion of Christ's body.

Full love of God means full love of his creation. Full love means to be more involved in creation than in one's own things and cooperate to it by aiming at the triumph of truth and promoting any expressions of beauty and good. Any form of scientific, artistic, humanistic, social and political, technological, economic and spiritually oriented commitment is the consequence of this meaning of love, according to each person's vocation.

All this is creation, collective work, our common creature. In this way the incarnation of God takes shape in us and in the universe: the incarnation of that God in germ: of that growing God, whose mother is mankind itself.