

THE HOPE BOOKLETS

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TOWARDS NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH

- 1. The reasons of a hope**
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TOWARDS NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH

Foreword

The present booklet brings together twelve essays written on different occasions. The first eleven constitute the First Part. The Second Part, on the other hand, consists of just a single essay, subdivided into nine chapters.

This variegated and diverse origin of the twelve texts implies repetitions, inevitable if one does not want to compromise the economy of each individual essay, which can be read also on its own. I can only ask the reader to forgive me.

The essays have the specific reasons of our hope and faith as their subject matter. One may ask oneself whether this has a unitary sense and which. Let me therefore try to give at least a first idea.

Object of our faith is not really survival. All considered, this has become a matter of certainty for us on the basis of what can be brought out by a careful and open psychic research, free from all limiting prejudices.

Admitting survival, object of our hope is rather what could come after: Is there an eternal life? And how can we define it?

Frontier parapsychology, which offered us a mosaic of good indications as far as survival is concerned, is no longer enough in this new and further ambit.

Eternal life is an exquisitely religious theme. The discourse here is not founded on mere experience, but on faith. Does not the letter to the Hebrews (11, 1) say that “the faith is the assurance of things hoped for”?

The same letter defines faith as “argument of things that are not seen” (ibid). Does this mean that we have to believe in something only because we hear it affirmed by some tradition, be it even authoritative, but no longer and, indeed, never due to any experience?

Certainly not. If there are things that we are not capable of seeing with physical eyes, if we have no sensorial experience whatsoever, we can still have what is called “experience of faith”.

Here we entrust ourselves to Someone of whom we feel, of whom we strongly perceive that He is our Creator. After all, the discourse of the faith is always, in its own peculiar way, imbued with experience, because it moves from a “creatural experience” and is sustained by every kind of lived interior experience.

Experience of faith is to feel oneself entrusted to the hands of Him who creates us from nothing for everything; who creates us from nothing for the fullness of the good, the beautiful, the true, perfection and a happiness without limits.

This is what disposes us to recognize that hope and faith have very valid reasons and that it is therefore very “reasonable” to hope and believe in the “new heavens and the new earth” we are promised.

First Part

THE REASONS OF A HOPE

1. Towards “new heavens and a new earth”

All the civilization of our time has developed in the sign of an exclusive attention for the earth and forgetfulness of heaven.

All the giant steps that science and technology and economic and social and political life have made in the space of just a few centuries owe a great deal to what is the characteristic attitude of the men who created the modern civilization.

These men, in fact, concentrated on the study of the phenomena of this world and the pursuit of the ends of this world without any other horizons, suspending all other problems.

And such an attitude, unfortunately, has made modern man become gradually blind and deaf as far as superior instances are concerned. It has made him insensitive to the sacred, incapable of seeing the other dimension.

And thus the great and splendid medal of our civilization has a very dramatic obverse.

Consequently, we find ourselves in a world that is superequipped, but devoid of a soul. We find ourselves in a world that is running who knows where without even setting itself the problem of what are the true ends for which we men have been created, for which every reality has been brought into being by God.

It would seem, nevertheless, that God does not abandon us if we have to interpret many other signs that crowd our lives, especially in recent time, in this far more comforting sense.

An important “sign of the times” is the great need of God felt by many souls. And it is their aspiration to something more about their ultimate destiny.

There is a new attention for the beyond, the problem of which we pose ourselves in terms that are no longer abstract, but of experience. Testimonies of out-of-the-body and near-death experiences are multiplying. They are all experiences that strongly suggest the idea that our soul is a reality altogether autonomous of the physical body and therefore destined to survive it.

There is a renewed interest in mediumism. There is a true flowering of mediumistic testimonies by means of which numerous disincarnate souls (or at least presumed such) recall how they passed into the other dimension and describe life after death and also anticipate what it is already possible to say about our ultimate destination.

There are important phenomena of a charismatic nature. In some way, in short, heaven is once again responding.

In the mediumistic literature of our day particular visibility is acquired, especially in Italy, by the testimonies of those who are known as the “Children of Light”. These are the disincarnate souls of those who died at a very tender age. They are the sons and daughters of many of our friends.

Passed to the other dimension at such an immature age as the result of illness or – more often – accidents, each one has been welcomed by the deceased of the same age and now lives with them in a serene and happy spiritual environment.

The sphere where these souls find themselves together is created by the mind, just like the dreams we have each night. And, just as in our dreams we have the impression of being in places similar to those of the world where our waking life is

taking place, the souls come to find themselves in mental environments similar to those of our planet in the first stages of existence after death.

The spiritual environment in which these children are all together is constituted by nature scenes. They have a vivid feeling of moving between meadows and woods, mountains and sea, against a background of enchanting scenery that in some way has the function of infusing great serenity in the souls and to set them on their way, little by little, to ever greater communion with the Creator of the universe, to the contemplation of God.

It is difficult for a youngster to have had the time to become hardened in sin, vice, negativity in general. In the cases I have in mind, moreover, it is a question of youngsters who have had a healthy and fundamentally religious education, even though it may not always have led to assiduous church attendance and participation in the sacraments.

The sorrow of losing their children has brought the parents once more close to God, and all this cannot but exert a positive influence on the modalities of ultraterrene existence of these young souls. This is due to the reality of the “communion of the saints”; the prayers and good thoughts of the living are of great help in improving the state of the souls bound to them by great affection.

We all form an immense collective body: and whatever good is done or thought by one of its cells reflects on the others and, above all, on those closest to us. And, since the body is a mystic one, it is clear that this nearness has to be essentially understood as the spiritual bond that most closely unites one soul to another.

Each of us carries within himself dross of imperfection and will have to purge himself of it if his soul is really to set off in flight to ever loftier levels to sanctify itself, to enter in communion with God and acquire the divine nature.

It may be that a disincarnate soul will sooner or later have to pass through short and even long periods of more or less painful purification. This does not in any way diminish the expiatory value that good actions or help generously offered to others may have. It would seem that the young souls we are talking about have the possibility of elevating themselves quite a lot by assisting the newly arrived whom they go to welcome in the new dimension, where the newcomers arrive often completely disorientated and needful of guidance, illumination, comfort.

Side by side with the mission of welcoming the new disincarnates, our youngsters have that of comforting their parents and relatives. They often return to visit their homes, where they are invisibly present and stay there as long as possible, compatibly with the other tasks and missions that await them.

To their parents and relatives they send signs of their presence, though these are not always received. But when there are favourable conditions, they communicate with them also mediumistically. This is permitted, as I was assured on all the occasions when I was able to put the question to them. It is permitted inasmuch as it forms part of the signs of survival that can give such great comfort to the parents, to parents who, not by any means rarely, are in the throes of desperation.

This permission to communicate at the mediumistic level is motivated also by another necessity. Apart from the comfort that parents and other relatives may need, in a wider ambit there are the men of our epoch, at least the more sensitive, who long to resume contact with the other dimension, after centuries of oblivion, metaphysical insensitivity, religious aridity, and spiritual obtuseness.

When one speaks of the other dimension, the beyond, one uses an analogic term. It has to be borne in mind that, *first*, the beyond is a mental reality; and that, *second*, the mind is creative. Consequently, each disincarnate soul creates its own beyond in conformity with its own opinions, beliefs, tendencies and mental habits.

Similar souls unite to live together in a common mental environment that consists of a collective creation. This common mental environment comes to be formed like a kind of collective dream. It can be defined as a dream inasmuch as it is a mental creation. But it is, as we might say, a more objective dream. In what sense? I would say by virtue of the consistency it manages to assume beyond the strict ambit of the individual.

The souls who come together to create a common sphere of the beyond for themselves meet spontaneously on account of a certain affinity that binds them. And hence there may come to be constituted a Christian beyond, an Islamic beyond, a Hindu beyond, each of which may be articulated into a variety of different conditions according to the different ways in which a fundamental common belief may be lived and put into practice (and also betrayed).

The men of today, as I said, feel a profound need for resuming the relationship with the other dimension interrupted for so long. But with the other dimension in what more precise sense? I would say: with the other dimension inasmuch as it is more religious, can qualify itself as the dimension of God. In the most proper sense, the other dimension can be defined as the place where God expresses and reveals himself in accordance with his most profound and truest nature.

All speak of the Divinity and define it in various ways, according to their various interests and degrees of maturation, according to what each individual and each group seeks in It and wants to obtain from It. Guerrazzi, an illustrious 19th century writer, observed: "I don't really know that God made us in his likeness; but I well know that men made God in their own likeness and gave him a thorough dressing down".

At this point the problem is to see what God truly is. We cannot capture the truth about God, we can only receive it due to God's self-revelation. The beyond that we feel the need to rediscover is the other dimension inasmuch as it is the most originary place of the self-revelation of the Divinity.

At this point one may therefore wonder: But why look for God, why look for the religious element more in the beyond than on this side? I would reply: This searching the heavens in the dimension of the beyond is guided, is inspired by an intuition that generally is as yet unexpressed and confused and is nevertheless most profound. Men have always connected the heaven of the disincarnate souls more closely with the peculiar dimension of the Divine.

Many disincarnate souls may survive in a negative and, if we want, even infernal condition: but there is also the dominion, the sphere of the saintly souls, the ancestors, those minor and tutelary divinities that some day, so it is said, were men on this earth and after death were assumed in heaven.

An intuition that recurs in widely differing traditions is that men, for as long as they are incarnate in matter, remain prey to all the possible attachments and have to purify themselves of them after death in order to become pure spirits, so that they may eventually sanctify and deify themselves.

This widely held belief finds full confirmation in the contents that emerge from the mediumistic communications obtained personally by the Convivium's experimental group in Rome; and also from the mediumistic communications of others, the content's of which I subjected to a careful comparative analysis.

In such a perspective one can readily understand that an epoch, an irreligious civilization should seek to draw the lost religious element from the other dimension. Great importance may be assumed in a Catholic-Christian context by the selfsame apparitions of the Virgin Mother of God. Her apparitions at Mejugorie are altogether exemplary in this context.

It is likewise in a Catholic-Christian context that we can set the manifestations of the “children of light”. The promoters, the principal exponents of the Hope Movement are in fact committed Catholics, even though they inaugurate a practice that the Church authorities, to say the least, may deem new and unusual.

One can understand certain reserves and also some diffidence, especially after the well known position the ecclesiastic authorities have assumed vis-à-vis spiritism.

Necromancy, i. e. the pagan practice of turning to the dead to question them about the future and ask their advice about the most appropriate manner of furthering one’s own interests, was already subject of special condemnations in the Jewish tradition (cfr. Lev 19, 31; Deut 18, 11). The Christian Church likewise saw and still sees this tendency to put the beyond in the service of earthly ends in a very negative light, and very rightly so.

It also puts people on guard against the perils of communications with the beyond pursued by unprepared people in an ambiguous spiritual climate. This can lead to unpleasant encounters with entities of a low level and results that generally are not positive, not really edifying.

It seems to me that the situation is very different in the ambit of the manifestations from which the Hope Movements drew its origin and assumed shape.

Here there were men and women of our time so arid and devoid of faith and closed in the limited horizons of materialist science and so needful of seeing the beyond return and manifest itself in a tangible and strong manner.

Here there were desperate men and women to whom the other dimension, manifesting itself with power, offered reasons of concrete hope and spoke “words of eternal life”.

The latter is a well known evangelical expression. If gospel means “glad tidings”, the manifestation of the children of light likewise announces the good news of survival and eternal life, likewise proposes itself as an *eu anghelia*: it decidedly proposes itself, let us say, as a “fifth gospel” perfectly in line with those of the New Testament we already know.

It is a gospel for the men of today, men who have lost the sense of the beyond and of heaven. It is a gospel of which the harbingers seem to be men and women, boys and girls, who have passed to the other dimension.

These human beings seem to be elect for a truly angelic mission, if it is true that “angel” designates a function even more than it designates a state different from the human one. “Angel”, *ánghelos*, means messenger. Irrespective of whether or not he is angelic in the strict and proper sense, “angel” is he who announces God. Men themselves are often called “angels” by the Bible. And in this sense the “children of light” seem to be the new angels.

These “angels” are the bringers of the new glad announcement: bringers of an announcement that comes from God and forms part of the self-revelation of God. This self-manifestation of God is one and always the same. It nevertheless becomes multiple and temporal due to the variety of the channels – the angels, in fact – who bring it to men of different traditions, epochs, countries and historical situations.

The men of our epoch have lost every idea of the other dimension. And hence the other dimension manifests itself to them in the most vivid and powerful and evident manner. The initiative is divine and the young entities of the other dimension bring God to the men of today: they once again communicate the forgotten religious element to them.

The humanity of today, and even more so that of tomorrow, will perhaps be indebted to these manifestations for a more profound sense of its own life that may well orientate it once again to God. It will perhaps be indebted to them for a new gospel or

glad tidings of salvation, expressed by virtue of signs that unexpectedly break the closed materialist horizon, similar to flashes passing through the cloud cover that at times denies us the infinite vision of the heavens.

One may perhaps say that certain manifestations will save our epoch. But that would not yet say everything. Certain powerful manifestations could represent an epochal fact also in the sense of preparing future events. And also in the sense of preparing in a certain way what will be the last events of human history and the entire evolution of the cosmos.

In this sense, all the manifestations of grace may be considered as preparation and preconfiguration in various forms of the parousia, i. e. the final and full manifestation of the Spirit, of universal resurrection on the Day of the Lord,

We are here concerned with the last event with respect to which all the events of grace are as if they were steps. It is the final and full deification of mankind and the entire cosmos, when the kingdom of God, which hitherto was limited to heaven and was “not of this world”, will embrace every reality “as in heaven, so also on earth”. We are here concerned with the final and conclusive moment of the creation, when the creation as such will attain divine perfection.

At this point it will be as well to ask ourselves what may constitute the perfection ultimately to be pursued. If it is true that we creatures are destined to attain divine perfection, we can obtain an idea of this perfection only by having a proper idea of God as far as this is possible.

Here we can schematically counterpose two conceptions that seem very different from each other. According to Hindu spirituality, and also according to the spiritual traditions that derive from it in the West, the true essence of the Divinity is the pure Self: the very thing that many ascetic schools call the *Brahman*, and with which they make coincide the *Atman*, i. e. the pure spiritual essence of man himself, and also the pure human self.

A Hindu ascetic of the Upanishad-Vedanta-Yoga vein may also recognize the existence of a living God, of a personal and creator God whom he may call, the “Lord Ishvara” or also “Shakhti” or Spouse of the true and originary God. Every devotion is dedicated to this second form assumed by the Divinity. But we are here concerned with a Divinity subordinated to the originary one, which remains the true God and the ultimate goal of every road of perfection of the human spirit.

It is clear that, if the ultimate goal of every human progress is to attain the Divinity, when the true Divinity is conceived in these terms as pure Atman-Brahman, the ultimate goal cannot consist of anything other than attaining the experience of that supreme condition. And the stable, definitive experience to which the human spirit must tend in such a context will be a state of consciousness wholly cleansed of any empirical content, will be a supreme experience of mental void, where everything will be forgotten and transcended forever.

At this point one may ask oneself in what way humanism can cooperate to make us attain such an ultimate goal. Given a perspective of this kind, humanism is wholly and solely *maya*, is wholly and solely illusion from which the human spirit should free itself.

Very different can be the function of humanism in a vision like the Judeo-Christian one. Here God is not only pure Brahman: He is at one and the same time Father, Son and Holy Spirit; He is God articulated into a plurality of modes of being that are all equally valid; He is God in the full and strong sense, to which there corresponds a strong and valid creation, not a *maya* of phantasmic nature, ready to dissolve like an immense but ephemeral soap bubble.

Only in the perspective of God as creator in the strong sense will the creature feel called upon to imitate the Creator in his omniscience and omnipotence. Only here the artist will feel called upon to imitate the Supreme Artist of the creation and to continue his work.

In the vision of those who recognize the Creator God in the strong sense, humanism cooperates in the building of the kingdom of God, without doubt and in an essential manner. Our selfsame history of human progress cooperates with the history of salvation.

It is in the final resurrection that the two histories encounter each other and converge. Humanism will come from the world, which one hopes may then have attained the highest possible point of its evolution. Salvation will come from heaven, from the other dimension, where one likewise hopes that the souls may in the meantime have realized the highest peaks of Eastern Christian sanctification: of “deification”, to use the language of the Eastern Christian Church, and also, to use the language of the mystics, the “spiritual marriage” with the Divinity.

What is the significance of speaking of resurrection? What can it mean in more precise terms? Comparative mediumistic literature shows us the spiritual road of the souls in the direction of a gradual disincarnation. Such a process aims at detachment from the earth. Such a process aims at detachment from the earth and every carnality, from every egoism and egocentrism, every spirit of avidity and also every rancour. Souls thus arrive at suspending – temporarily, be it clear – the memory even of who they were on earth. They realize a state of total annihilation of their former personality.

Our edifice cannot content itself with restorations and mendings; it has to be destroyed from the foundations in order to be reconstructed. The “new man” who will take the place of the “old man” must no longer have any trace of the former egoistic and sinning will, the will different from that of God. It will have to incarnate the divine will to such an extent as to express itself as the most perfect vehicle of the divine presence, as an authentic and perfect angel of God.

At this point the recuperation of one’s own humanity at every level can no longer constitute a danger for any soul. It will only be a sign of perfection and completeness, and nothing else.

Man’s entire personality is therefore destined to become reintegrated. This is the final resurrection, ultimate act of the creation, ultimate and glorious fulfilment of the divine creation of the entire universe.

Our humanity will be reintegrated to such an extent as to be able to assume once gain, and freely so, its former earthly corporeal form. Clearly, this will be a corporeity transformed by the Spirit in such a manner as to constitute a vehicle of the highest spirituality.

The manifestations of grace that we, notwithstanding everything, receive also in our epoch are intended to represent an anticipation, a prefiguration, a commitment, a down payment of that final and decisive event, where everything that is shown to us in fragments and flashes will be given us in a full, perfect and definitive manner without any limits.

For the persons who loved each other on this earth it is very comforting to be able to think that some day they will again be together forever and enjoy a supreme, divine perfection and an infinite happiness in the communion of the Lord.

But let us also think of all the persons whom we still do not know or, wrongly, do not want to know or to appreciate in the proper manner. There is a divine germ in each one of them that, even though it is far too often suffocated, is destined to total and infinite flowering. The day that is coming, when we shall all recognize each other and love each other in the grace of the Lord, will be truly beautiful.

2. The signs of survival

What parapsychology studies in a specific manner may be defined as psychic phenomena par excellence. They are the phenomena that take place every time that the *psyche* acts in some autonomy from the *soma* (i. e. the physical body) and therefor in pure accordance with its own laws.

The more the psyche renders itself autonomous of the soma, the more it becomes detached and free to obey the *pneuma*, i. e. the spirit. The spirit dwells and acts within the psyche. Now, it is by operating from the intimacy of the psyche (i. e. the soul) that the pneuma (i. e. the spirit) transforms the psyche, brings it more into conformity with itself and, let us say, spiritualizes it. And it is by passing through the psyche, it is through the mediation of the psyche that the spirit transforms even the physical body.

One may distinguish two categories of *paranormal phenomena*. The first, which we may call the *parapsychic phenomena*, are determined by the fact that the psyche renders itself autonomous of the body and acts directly on it.

The others, which we may call *paramystic phenomena*, occur when the psyche does not have the initiative, but rather acts as bridge. Here it is the spirit that acts on the body through the psyche.

Let me give the example of *levitation*. When the person who levitates is a sensitive, i. e. a man endowed with conspicuous psychic powers, the body becomes raised from the earth in just the same manner as a saint lifts in levitation. But on the outside the phenomenon may seem the same.

Nevertheless, in the second case we are concerned with a phenomenon of completely different import. It is an event determined by the pneuma and, in a certain way, by the divine Spirit itself. It is a miraculous fact that has a very different and much wider significance. It is the efficacious symbol of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit that assumes the man in the glory of heaven at all levels, even at the physical level.

Let me also give the example of *paranormal healing*. Healing can be obtained by purely physical means (medicines, surgical treatments, and so on), but can also be produced by psychic means, when the pranotherapist engages his psychic energies to bring about a transformation of his patient's physique.

But when the healing is brought about in a pneumatic and miraculous manner, the acting principle is of a different level: it is the divine Spirit.

And its significance is also very different: unlike a pure and simple psychic healing, a spiritual healing expresses the power that the Holy Spirit has of healing and saving man as a whole, acting not only on his mental faculties, but on the whole of man, including his physical body, in a most effective and concrete manner. It is another aspect of the great extraordinary and resolving fact that in the end all the human will be sanctified and assumed in the kingdom of God.

In all this one begins to glimpse the relationship that binds the dimension of the parapsychic phenomena to that of the spiritual-pneumatic phenomena. The latter act at a higher level than the former, and yet they are both on the same line. The pneumatic phenomena seem to constitute the profound dimension of parapsychic and psychic phenomena in general. And when they give the best of themselves, both come to act on the selfsame physical dimension, so that the entire man may become involved and transformed and, through man, also nature and, in the limit, the entire cosmos.

One may say that *psychic research* is to some extent the antechamber of *spiritual research*, this in the sense that it creates certain premises for it. But it is also the study of what derives from it at the final arrival point. It is also the study of the results at the physical level of everything that spiritual research sees through to the end. Because true

sanctity is powerful, man's deification turns him into a being capable of performing miracles and dominating even physical nature in a prodigious manner.

I believe that we have thus defined in the most ample manner the context in which psychic research operates. And we can now concentrate our attention on what appears to be the most important result of psychic research as such.

It is evident that I am referring to *frontier parapsychology*, i. e. open to the other dimension, and not just a closed and reductive parapsychology, "with or without which everything remains as it was before"!

To my way of seeing, if we truly develop psychic research and carry it forward to the very end, things change, even by a great deal, and at a certain point we come face to face with the vision of a universe that is no longer constituted essentially of matter, but is wholly spiritual.

In the end all the realities seem to us to be constituted by energy and thought. Space and time appear relativized to us. Matter seems to us to be such as to be shaped by thought, to disappear and reappear in other places, to assume widely differing forms: and always in a manner that contradicts the known laws that are exclusively studied by official science. These laws, though valid in their respective ambits, now seem to regulate no more than – how could we say? – an outermost and altogether superficial aspect of reality.

To give a few examples, one might mention the phenomena of *telekinetics*, where even heavy bodies become displaced by an invisible force. Closely bound up with these is *levitation*, which has already been mentioned, where a person is lifted off the ground even to a height of several metres and in limit cases arrives in a certain way at flying, be it even at rather limited heights.

And then there is an action that is exerted on a physical body and provokes reddening, sores and *stigmata* that at a certain moment may also disappear completely.

For the duration of a certain time the human body may become subtracted from the destructive action of fire (*incombustibility*).

It may *emit light* and also the so-called *ectoplasm*: a substance that is as yet rather mysterious, extremely plastic, that may assume various degrees of compactness, eventually to become re-absorbed by the physical body from which it originally issued. One thus has the *materializations*, and also the so-called *apports and asports*.

And then there are the phenomena of *telepathy* and *clairvoyance in the present*, where a subject, even without using the sense organs, perceives even very distant realities as if space no longer existed.

And there are also the phenomena of *clairvoyance in the past*, where the subject relives events that occurred in the past as if time were abolished.

One may also recall the phenomena of *clairvoyance in the future*, where certain future events are precognized with such abundance and precision of detail as to induce us to think of the reality of an eternal present.

We are indeed induced to think of a reality that gives itself wholly en bloc, is wholly compresent. With respect to this reality, the facts that happen in time may be embraced wholly contemporaneously, just as if they were the stations indicated in a railway timetable: successive and yet set out on the same page, all together and capable of being all seen in the unity of one and the same look.

At this point, time seems transcended in eternity and we find ourselves already within a step of the philosophical consideration of God.

Space and time dissolve, while matter becomes dematerialised, reveals itself as fundamentally spirit.

Even before proving itself to be capable of dominating and transforming the physical levels of the personality and the environment, the soul reveals itself to be

autonomous of these levels, namely the physical body, and proves to be autonomous of them to the point of surviving the death of the body.

The first confirmation that the human subject can give to himself of this autonomy is when he goes through one or more *out-of-the-body experiences*. There the soul – to call it thus, with the permission of the psychologists, who do not mention it very willingly – there the soul finds itself projected outside the physical body. And it contemplates this body from a distance, almost as if it were a strange object. And then it has the experience of being able to move at will, and also of transferring itself instantly to very distant places.

A further step forward is taken with *near-death experiences*. These are had when the subject has, let us say, a heart stoppage. For a very brief time he finds himself midway between life and death before he is brought back to life in the reanimation department of a hospital.

In those few minutes or even seconds it seems that the subject comes face to face with the dimension of the beyond. It seems to him to find himself within the framework of a wonderful countryside bathed in light. It seems to him to encounter other souls, even of relatives and friends, who present themselves to him in human form, as if they still had a body.

He also lives the experience of transferring himself instantly and at will to other localities of the earth or to other spheres of the new astral dimension. He feels to have a body-like form and nevertheless feels himself a disincarnate soul with a sense of exalting freedom that will disappear upon his return into the body, felt as forced and wholly undesired.

Witness to out-of-the-body and near-death experiences is borne by men and women still living on this earth. We know these people well and are in a position to assess their psychic equilibrium, truthfulness and credibility. But there are also other cases where the descriptions of extracorporeal experiences are given us no longer by perfectly identifiable men and women living on the earth, but rather by presumed disincarnate souls.

These presumed souls give us their testimonies in the course of mediumistic seances. The mediumistic personalities undoubtedly appear far more phantasmic and ambiguous, so much so that their identification is not always certain in each particular case. All the same, we can always consider all the mediumistic testimonies as a whole and see their essential concordances. And we shall see that they confirm the testimonies of the out-of-the-body experiences mentioned earlier on and reported by living men and women.

The testimonies that can be attributed to deceased undoubtedly tell us something more, seeing that the subjects prove to have made more progress, to have moved further ahead among the ultraterrene experiences: and this necessarily so, since we are here concerned with subjects who have already died and passed beyond.

However, the experiences testified by the deceased, or presumed such, appear to be on the same line as those of the “projectors” and the “returned”, and naturally with further steps forward as compared with the latter.

The experiences testified by the deceased can be distinguished into two great categories: there are the experiences of the *crisis of death*, of how the subject passed beyond and everything that the soul remembers to have felt also in detail: there are, lastly, the further experiences that we may call experiences of *life after death*.

These are all experiences on the same line as out-of-the-body and near-death experiences and, what is more, coherent with each other and confirming each other. Let us rapidly review them.

The soul feels itself projected out of the physical body and it may either feel this suddenly or at the end of a slow and laborious detachment process. It can observe that body as if it no longer had anything to do with it. And it can note everything that happens around it with an indifference that it is at times very marked.

If it thinks of other places, the soul will immediately find itself there: for example, it can thus visit its paternal home and there read the thoughts of its dear ones.

The entity sees living men in various ways: first in the world as they appeared to it when it was still alive on the earth. And then, little by little, ever more as shadows. On the other hand, the disincarnate soul sees the new astral environments as consistent and in a certain way – let us say – solid, even though they soon learn that they are a pure mental creation.

The appearance of the mental environments of the other dimension may recall the earthly ones in appearance, even though they seem more luminous and, as it were, spiritualized.

Anybody who passes from one to the other will often have to pass through a kind of tunnel or, at least, has this impression, lives this experience at the subjective level.

At the end of the tunnel he may encounter a guide: the so-called “being of light” whose mission is to welcome the newly arrived, reveal his new condition to him, help him to carry out an examination of his conscience and to draw up a balance sheet of his earthly life, so that he may right away set out with the right foot along the road he has to cover in his new existence.

Such an examination of conscience can be facilitated by a panoramic vision that may be had, maybe in a just few instants, of the existence spent on earth.

To re-temper the energies exhausted, above all, by old age or a long illness that may have preceded death, and also in order to adapt to the new conditions of life, the person who has just passed to the other side will have to pass a rest period similar to sleep.

This period may be longer or shorter according to the particular case; and it may last even a certain number of years. The years, be it clear, are those of our earthly existence. It may be that the disincarnate will feel them subjectively as if they were a shorter period. However, this is not a deep sleep, but rather a state of relax where consciousness is maintained.

Re-awakening is generally followed by a period of astral life in an environment that may resemble, as we said before, those of the earth. Here the new disincarnate may find himself together with souls of his own family to whom he is bound by particular love. He will, however, always be in the company of souls that in some way are akin to him. He will be able to give free rein to his own desires and aspirations, even to those that he could not second during his earthly life.

If the new disincarnate still sees himself in the human form corresponding to the body he had on earth, if he still sees around himself an environment similar to the earthly ones, this fact is due to his persistent mental habits.

It is due to the very habits that on earth, every time he slept, procured him dreams of similar contents, where he likewise saw himself in human form together with other men and women in a home environment or out on a road or in a wood or on a meadow against a background of mountains, and so on.

But a long vacation may at a certain point lead to boredom. At a certain moment the soul feels of its own accord that the vacation has come to an end and that it will now be best to set out on the road of elevation. Little by little, the beyond reveals itself to be the spiritual and religious world par excellence, where sooner or later one simply has to set out on that spiritual road that on earth is often postponed or eluded.

Many souls, perhaps the greater part of them, already had to purify themselves of their heaviest dross by passing periods of solitude in the course of which they acquired consciousness of this dross and managed to shake it off. But at a certain point the soul feels that it has to realize a far greater detachment from all the earthly things that may have remained attached to it.

The soul feels that it has to despoil itself of everything, every attachment of any kind whatsoever, memories included, because memories may mean nostalgia, frustration, rancour, persistent desire to get one's own back.

The soul must forget everything, its own past and also its own identity.

The soul has to die completely to itself before it can give itself wholly to God. One cannot truly rise to a new and divine life if one does not first pass through an initiation death.

The soul emptied of itself will come to fill itself with God to the point of becoming his vehicle, becoming his "angel" in the etymological sense of the term: i. e. a "messenger" who announces God and manifests his presence.

Such is the process of sanctification that is concluded with the final universal resurrection. But what is this last expression intended to mean?

After physical death, the soul set out on a road of an ever greater emptying and a gradual further death of everything that survived in terms of earthly human personality.

This is a further dying that proves to be very much in conformity with the instance of the necessary emptying of the I. And this emptying of the I, in its turn, seems to be the first step on the road of spiritual ascent.

But this emptying is not an end in itself. It is the mere premise of the subsequent filling, because in the end, emptied of ourselves and of every egoism and egocentrism of ours, we can implement ourselves as expressions of a superior and divine life.

In the end we are destined to implement ourselves in all the potentialities of our being men. In the end there is the total reintegration of our humanity. In other words, there is the resurrection, which can be conceived as the implementation achieved by man and as accomplishment of the entire creative process.

These various affirmations regarding the crisis of death and life after death, which I have here brought together in extreme synthesis, can be deduced both from our own personal experiences of mediumistic communications and from a comparative analysis of the mediumistic communications of others. In all truth, these realities seem to be constants.

I only have to add a brief annotation. While all the rest is confirmed also by the mediumistic communications of others and by mediumistic literature in general, the affirmations about the final resurrection seem to be devoid of this support. Unlike the Bible and the Christian tradition, mediumistic literature has very little to say about the resurrection and even then only in the form of very fragmentary and highly dispersed assertions.

The abundance of these elements in our own communications would seem to be capable of being explained by the hypothesis that, for reasons of spiritual affinity, we of the experimental group of the Convivium succeeded in possibly entering, possibly for the first time, into systematic and constant mediumistic contact with spheres of disincarnate souls of clearer and neater Catholic-Christian orientation, among whom this belief is particularly widespread and felt.

Coming back to the thread of our discourse, it is very difficult to find something really certain on a single case, on a communication taken individually and abstracted from all the others. But when one considers what emerges from the entire complex of the mediumistic communications and compares it with what is brought out by the entire complex of the testimonies of the living who have had out-of-the-body or near-death

experiences, one cannot but be struck by the impressive coherence of the communications and all their parts.

Here we are faced with a great and imposing mosaic, where all the tesserae seem to be in order and fit together perfectly. It is very difficult for all this to be the result of pure chance, the probability of this being the case is altogether infinitesimal. On the other hand, there is a very great probability that all this presents itself thus for the sole and very simple reason that survival is a fact: an attested fact that is confirmed by all these phenomena, by all these manifestations and, precisely, by all these signs.

Can we therefore say that survival has been “scientifically demonstrated”? Can we say that it has been “proved”? “Science”, “demonstration” and “proof” undoubtedly seem to be very committing terms. I think that in psychic research it is never the case to speak of wholly objective procedures that can “prove” or “demonstrate” anything in as perfectly apodictic a manner as one proves, for example, the theorem of Pythagoras.

It is true that in a different acceptance of the term one can “prove” something in a more lived and involving experience. In reality, however, very few steps forward will be made in psychic research until we learn to live the phenomena from within, until this commitment of reliving the phenomena existentially will enable us to develop a particular sensitivity for the paranormal.

From an everyday contact with the paranormal we can develop and deepen within ourselves a specific sensitivity for the paranormal. This is undoubtedly a different sensitivity, but not different in exactly everything from what could be a sensitivity for art, for music, for a particular music of a given epoch or school, or for the human psychology and specifically for the psychology of women or for that of children or pre-adolescents, or for politics, or for the affairs of a particular branch of which one has had experience, or for journalism, or for police inquiries, and so on.

Whoever has not acquired even a minimum of the necessary sensitivity for the given specific field will not be able to substitute it with doctrine, and not even with pure and simple reasonings, which will always remain abstract.

Doctrine, erudition, analysis, rationality undoubtedly serve and are indeed most precious, but only to complete the fundamental intuitions that come to us from delving more deeply into problems by living them: that is to say, by developing the necessary sensitivity by means of a continuous contact with the live reality.

It should by now be sufficiently clear in what limited sense I would dare to say that psychic research “proves” survival. The adoption of this term is in any case hindered by the fact that the word “proof” induces one to think excessively of the proof of a science that is wholly and solely objectivizing. It is surely much better to speak of “suggestions”!. The best word, however, remains “signs”.

The signs, as we may well conclude, are there and are numerous. Indeed, the signs we have at our disposal seem more than sufficient to motivate a more than reasonable belief in the beyond. These signs appear more than sufficient to motivate a well founded confidence in our future survival.

And, lastly, these signs seem more than sufficient to motivate a well founded hope that we shall all be together again with all those who are dear to us and with all that we hold dear when we reach the final goal of eternal life in God.

3. Does the personality survive forever?

This discourse is not for everybody. There are many people, even friends of ours, who do not greatly love either their life or their things, neither their family nor their native place nor their work, nor what they do in general and not even the neighbour with

whom they live in contact. These people long to escape elsewhere, to transfer themselves into more exotic situations further removed in space and time, to become reincarnated, to change even their personality.

They love to have what they themselves call “experiences”. But these experiences are, as we might say, of the “use and dump” type. They are not really intended to enrich their personality. When one throws away everything, personality included, it is very difficult to enrich oneself - in the sense of accumulating a patrimony and making it grow gradually - with the desire of acquiring new goods and the pleasure of administering them and even revisiting them every now and again to contemplate what one already possesses.

This lack of love for one’s own life, the things one has and even the nearby persons leads to a generalized consumerism and at times not only to the throwing away of empties, household appliances and automobiles, but at times also of live persons.

It is a consumerism permeated by boredom. One lives as one sits down in front of the television set with the telecontrol in one’s hands to engage in a continuous zapping, a passage from one programme to another, to enjoy something for an instant and forget it a moment later.

On the other hand, the problem of whether the personality survives is very fundamental for those who love their life.

And there is nothing wrong with loving one’s own life. In the limit we could be some great saints and love God beyond all measure; but if we truly love God, we shall also love everything that God loves. Now, we discover that God loves all the creatures, as also each individual creature, in an infinite manner. Therefore, if we truly love God, we shall also love each creature, ourselves included.

If, then, we love ourselves to an infinite extent, we shall want to realize ourselves to an infinite extent. And each one will want to turn himself into another God. And certainly not in opposition to Him, but in accordance with the very law of the God who wants to donate himself without limits.

In the eyes of God the creation is wholly precious in all its singularities. As Pope Luciani put it, mentioning a proverb familiar to Arabs and Muslims in general: “There is a black night, a black stone and on the black stone a little ant, but God sees it, has not forgotten it”. The positiveness of every expression of the divine creation is something that all monotheists feel in common, i. e. all those who adore the one God, creator in the strongest sense.

And it is for those who share this positive sense of the personality of the individual that the problem of whether the personality survives makes sense.

The question can be subdivided into two aspects. One may ask oneself, first of all, whether the human personality survives physical death.

Here one can always hypothesize that the personality is destined to become dissolved in a subsequent moment. Hence the second subquestion is whether the personality as such survives also in eternal life.

What would be the alternative? There would be, I should say, an alternative that in its turn is twofold: either the end of everything or an immortality, certainly, but of the impersonal type.

In this latter case we would continue to exist, but merged into one like the famous drops of water in the ocean. From the experiences of the Yogis and their like we can also obtain an idea of what would be the ultimate and culminating experience of the entire human evolution: eternal life would consist of an eternal *samadhi*: a definitive experience in which we would become united once and forever with our spiritual principle, the pure Self.

In a supreme and ultimate experience conceived in this manner there would come to lack all the possible contents and phenomena of consciousness.

There would come to lack the personality of each and, precisely in each one, the feeling of being a personality, the concrete experience of being such.

There would come to lack the memory of all past experiences.

Nothing would exist, not even in memory, of everything for which we hoped so greatly and worked and even struggled and for which we made sacrifices and renunciations, including – in the limit – the sacrifice of life.

From this it follows that the best thing to do, the wisest attitude would be not to become passionate about anything or anybody. Everything that has some value for us would be nothing other than an illusion ready to dissolve, to vanish.

That is the attitude of the wise man of the East, the Yogi, the Buddhist *Arhat*. But the Christian saint is the very opposite, he is not only in love with God, but also a passionate promoter and cooperator of His creation, which he likewise loves like God himself.

With all this as the premise, let us now see what experiences suggest the survival of the personality to us.

Even before the experiences of life after death, this was suggested to us by out-of-the-body experiences, also known as astral projections. These are experiences that may be had by persons who are still alive on this earth when they suddenly find themselves projected outside their physical body.

The body is there at a certain distance. It may lie there devoid of senses, but may also act as if it were moved by an unconscious psychological mechanism, it may drive an automobile or play the piano with extreme surety and without committing any mistakes.

But the centre of the personality seems to be displaced and by now localized in the void that has projected itself outside the body.

The new centre of the personality may feel itself like a pure centre of consciousness without form, or of a vaguely spherical form, or again, it may even be endowed with the same form of the physical body of which it seems a “double”.

I cannot here indulge in describing the phenomenon in its various modalities. I shall limit myself to concentrating attention on one fact: the subject who has projected himself outside the body feels himself capable of seeing and hearing as when he was in his body. Rather, even better: if he is deaf or short-sighted, he will now hear perfectly and see equally well without having to put on glasses. At times he may have a circular vision of 360°.

Though his sensitivity proves to be intact and, rather, improved, the subject maintains his own emotive life and feels capable of reasoning well and even better than before. In short, this psyche that has projected itself outside the body proves to be fully autonomous of the physical body.

The subject feels that he lacks absolutely nothing for having a full individual life. He feels that physical death will be something similar to this experience, this flight without return. He feels that he has no need whatsoever of the physical body for surviving. By now he knows that he is immortal.

As compared with out-of-the-body experiences, a further step forward is represented by near-death experiences. These are had when the subject enters for a few instants into a condition of clinical death, though he nevertheless returns from it. On these occasions, though not necessarily always, he may have experiences of astral projections that seem to go beyond the pure and simple out-of-the-body experiences.

Here the subject has the very clear feeling of coming face to face with the other dimension. He sees souls who have passed on, has a symbolic vision of the spiritual

environment of the beyond. He comes back with the firm conviction that death does not exist, that it is only a different condition of life that he himself has experienced to some extent.

Out-of-the-body and near-death experiences are lived by men and women still of this earth. We may know some of them intimately, and can therefore judge their truthfulness and their mental equilibrium on the basis of some first-hand knowledge. Added all together, their testimonies are innumerable, but agree on the essential points.

The testimonies of these subjects, who are men and women very much alive in this world, are fully confirmed by those of the deceased (or presumed such) who manifest themselves through mediums. These deceased tell us not only their experiences during the actual passover, but also those they had afterwards in the various phases of "life beyond life".

Certainly, these experiences go far beyond their near-death counterparts, just as the latter go beyond simple out-of-the-body experiences. It is therefore obvious that they cannot coincide in everything. But they are nevertheless experiences that gradually range deeper along one and the same line of development.

Very well: even in its post mortem manifestations, the personality of the subject seems to be the same, always well distinct and characterized.

This is brought out by the experience of communications had both with our own beloved and those of our friends. And this is also confirmed by mediumistic literature in general.

One probably has to allow for the fact that the personality of the deceased seems more blurred, more purified of certain former passions. In them we generally find an attenuation of the passions and also a gradual fading away of memories.

In general, one may say that in its first phases ultraterrene life is more in line with its earthly counterpart, but then gradually moves away from it.

I cannot here enter into many details that I myself have illustrated and discussed in various books, Hope Booklets and shorter writings.

I shall therefore limit myself to saying that at a certain point there commences for each soul a process of emptying the I, which has to free itself of all the dross of egoism and egocentrism.

The loss of memories sustains this process, because the former earthly passions, ambitions and rancours are bound up with these memories. The loss of memories also seems a true shortcut to the ascesis of the spirit, the spoliation that goes with it: a kind of astuteness of the providence that guides us in these salutary processes, in this itinerary of the mind to God. "I had enemies, but... who are they? And what evil did they do to me? I was attached to many things, but... to what? I no longer remember anything: and this certainly helps me, and not just a little, to achieve piece of mind".

The mediumistic communications obtained by our experimental group at the Convivium have a particular characteristic. We are all of a profound Catholic-Christian faith and conviction. And, seeing that like is attracted by like on account of the well known law of affinity that rules particularly in the other dimension, the consequence is very simple: since we are of this orientation, the souls that come to us are for the most part souls from the corresponding spheres of the beyond.

You will wonder: Is the beyond not one, just as there is but one truth? Yes, the truth is one, and we ourselves are convinced that it will end up by fully revealing itself. But for the moment the other dimension is the domain of *truths* in the plural. Thought is creative. The opinions and beliefs professed in earthly life remain and their subjective confirmations are created. The other dimension is a dream world: and each one creates his own dream, where the former opinions assume concrete shape and give themselves

an appearance of reality. Due to affinity, groups of souls come together in the same sphere or condition to live the same dream in common.

Due to affinity, we thus came into contact with souls of Catholic-Christian spheres. Now, what exactly is it that these souls tell us about the ultimate destiny of man? They tell us that the process of total spoliation is the premise of the sanctification that is to be attained.

Before it can fill itself with God, the soul must first despoil itself, empty itself of itself. This is not a question of making partial repairs: the old edifice has to be razed to the ground right down to the foundations, so that in its place there may rise a completely new edifice.

Here we have a concept that we find in exactly the same form among the authentic mystics. And in an exemplary manner, above all, in Saint John of the Cross.

But the mystics have to be divided, be it even very roughly, into two great categories.

There are the mystics of the Hinduist-Buddhist type, who base themselves particularly on the Upanishads, the Vedanta, the Yoga and the original Buddhism of the Lesser Vehicle.

And on the other side there are the mystics of a strong monotheist inspiration: the Christian ones, but also those of Judaism and Islam.

The former conceive the ultimate goal of spiritual ascesis as an eternal samadhi purged of all empirical content of consciousness. For them the emptying process is an end in itself.

The latter conceive the ultimate goal as contemplating in God everything that God in his turn loves, creates and contemplates. In beatific contemplation the soul realizes a form of omniscience in its own manner. The emptying process is therefore only a point of passage that opens the road to a further goal.

Emptied of itself, of every dross and form of attachment, of every egoism, every egocentrism and pride and presumption of implementing itself on its own and living for itself, the soul is then destined to fill itself with God.

In God it once again finds all the things it left to implement this spoliation. Benefiting from all these things is now no longer a danger for the soul that has by now become sanctified. It rediscovers all its beloved. It will live with them eternally in the Lord.

In God one loves and rediscovers the entire creation. As He is conceived by Christianity, God has a particular dimension that must not be forgotten: he is also the incarnate God.

He is the God who incarnates himself in his creation and makes himself man in it, and also men in the plural, seeing that all of us are called upon to grow in Christ until we reach his stature.

He is the God who sanctifies and regenerates and deifies the selfsame human corporeity and also the whole of nature that constitutes the prolongation of man's corporeity and, in the limit and ultimately, can represent its complement.

This recuperation of the full humanity and even of corporeity is the final universal resurrection.

The resurrection is also the final encounter of the deceased of the other dimension with those who will still be alive on the earth at this supreme moment of human history.

Meeting each other, the living men will contribute the mature fruit of humanism and progress, the conquests of science and the arts. For their part, the risen deceased will contribute the fruit of sanctity achieved in that spiritual and religious ascent that constitutes the specific feature of the other dimension.

The return of Christ must also be understood as the manifestation of all those who have grown in Christ and have attained his stature. The return of Christ coincides with the “manifestation of the sons of God” for whom “the creation waits with eager longing” and “has been groaning in travail until now”, as Saint Paul tells us in his Letter to the Romans (8, 19-22).

The redemption of even the most wicked among men will be achieved due to God’s infinite love that will find concrete expression at that time through the power of love of the risen saints.

The hardened wicked enclosed in his sin would be lost forever if all of us were not in actual fact different members, be it even as autonomous as you wish, of one and the same body. What the Indians, using a Sanskrit term, call the *karma* is not only individual, but collective. And here there comes into full light the Christian concept of the “communion of the saints”, the idea that received its first expression in the evangelical image of the vine and the shoots.

A good action of mine, and even before that any good thought of mine, radiate from me to all the others and all draw benefit from it. Though inversely, the same may be said of the influence that a negative thought of mine can have on the others, all of them.

That is why the salvation of the sinners is entrusted to the saints, even though it calls for an act of adhesion of the beneficiaries themselves, a commitment of redemption, a not indifferent and even painful effort. And thus even the most wicked of sinners “will be saved, but as through fire” (1 Cor 3, 15).

One is the Spirit, whereas its gifts, its charisms, are many and different: one is the mystic body of mankind, of the whole of creation, but many and different are its members, i. e. the individuals, each with his charism, with his unique, unrepeatable and non-interchangeable personality, with his particular vocation. Each has his task and does something not only for himself, but for all the others, and all will eventually come to benefit from it.

In his turn, each one will learn what all the others have learnt also for him. And how will this acquisition come about? It is difficult to answer this question, but a particular experience made by us in our mediumistic communications may perhaps throw some light on the matter.

According to all appearances, we often came into contact with entities that were wholly unknown to us until that moment, just as we were unknown to them. In many cases they did not even know our language, since the entities in question were souls that, at least according to them, had lived in other countries during their earthly existence.

Very well, in just a few instants they were able to express themselves in our language. This may be explained by the fact that they limited themselves to giving form to concepts that then assumed an Italian expression through us. As they explained to us at times, in communication there came to form itself something like a composite entity made up of the communicant spirit and us human means. This composite entity took the substance of the message and the manifestation from them and from us the language and something of our culture and our humanity in many aspects and shadings.

This knowledge of the Italian language that they acquired from us in such an immediate and instantaneous manner made it possible for those souls to specify also, when we so requested, the precise significance of certain expressions as if, just like ourselves, they knew more or less everything of our language, including its orthography, morphology and syntax.

In just a few instants these entities were able not only to speak our language and to hold forth on some of its subtleties just like ourselves, but also to know our facts in such

a manner as to give us encouragement, advice, valuations regarding certain particular situations and problems that arose in connection therewith.

In the course of our earthly life we learn things little by little. It takes us a few years to learn Hungarian as it is spoken, read and written by a Hungarian of average culture. Those souls, on the other hand, learn our language in an instantaneous and global manner.

One day I asked one of them how this learning was possible, and the entity made use of an image bound up with my memories of school: a soul learns instantly from another soul everything that the latter can teach it, just as a piece of blotting paper absorbs an entire written page of still wet ink in a single instant: not one line after the other, but all together.

When the individuals all have a common root and are like many branches or leaves of one and the same plant, they will in the end recognize each other as parts of a single being: they become conscious of this and implement themselves as such.

Let us assume that each individual assimilates whatever there is positive in the others and lacks in him. Let us also assume that men can assimilate even divine omniscience and become like God himself.

This will certainly not happen in the sense adumbrated by the serpent's words to Eve, certainly not in the devilish sense in which it was understood by the builders of the tower of Babel, but rather in the sense that God himself, in his infinite love for us, donates himself in infinite measure, giving himself to us without limits until we become wholly transformed into Him.

At this point, where would individuality end up? Even though the individuals may ultimately merge with God, become transformed into God, they never disappear as individuals. Eternal life does not abolish time, but makes it be time, englobes it, gives it value as time. Thus the universality of God, his infinity and absoluteness do not abolish the multiplicity of individual things and individual lives, of individual acts and events. In the absolute Look of God all the singularities consist as such. God sees even the little ant on the black stone in the black night of the previously cited proverb and gives sense of being even to the individual existence of that ant.

In the last instant of cosmic and historical evolution, when time merges into the eternal, those existing at the time will not dissolve, but – quite the contrary – will each be and remain in all their singularity. And everything will relive, everything will be, as it were, re-brought up-to-date in the absolute act of consciousness that brings all things into being, and of which we, too, eventually become part.

Maintenance of individuality derives from the maintenance of memory of the past existence of each one. Here we have a memory that never comes to lack.

But we are here concerned with a memory in the strong sense, a memory that re-actualizes its object.

Everything that has been is relived in multiplicity and succession and yet contemporaneously in the immutable unity of an eternal, absolute act of consciousness.

In such an act of consciousness all the experiences, even the negative and painful ones, are lived, though all this is contemplated *sub specie aeternatis* in a kind of aesthetic contemplation where even the most atrocious pain becomes transfigured into joy. This is what happens in the catharsis that takes place within us when we contemplate an authentic work of art. In that case, too, even the most painful matter loses all weight and evil is nothing other than the sum total of the shadow zones of a picture that have the aesthetic function of making the light zones stand out.

In this ultimate and eternal vision each one relives his own experiences and those of all the others, but each individual existence is forever, *is* in the absolute and full sense. God donates himself totally to each one of us, so that each one may be a new

absolute like God himself, and that he may be such precisely as an individual and in his unrepeatable and unique manner.

4. Survival and eternal life

The experiences that strongly suggest survival and eternal life in the Hope Movement today are experiences of both a paranormal and spiritual and religious nature. In many of us there occurred an interior transformation, there took place a true initiation.

In many and even too many cases this transmutation process was unfortunately triggered by very grave sorrows. More fortunate, others of us did not pass through such painful experiences, but were able to deepen and strengthen a certain awareness by means of a more tranquil and gradual maturation: of a more philosophical nature, as we might say. I confess that this is my personal case.

The eternal problems of life and death and the ultimate destination of us humans have always attracted me. Ever since I was very young, I concentrated my attention on paranormal phenomena on account of what they could reveal to us in connection with survival. I made survival subject of a theoretical and comparative study.

After having classified the various phenomena with the greatest possible care, I wanted to have mediumistic experiences of my own and dedicated myself to experimental research. In our frontier psychic research group, which works in Rome at the Convivium, we have so far totalled almost eight hundred mediumistic seances. We make use, above all, though not exclusively, of telewriting.

Among others, we gradually accumulated experiences in the course of a series of seances with about a hundred of our friends of the Hope Movement. All these were attempts to have a communication with their beloved dead.

What shall I say about the success or otherwise of these seances? The only ones capable of giving a judgement are the interested parties themselves. It is only to them that we can give the floor in this connection.

Very well, out of more than a hundred friends who participated in these seances, only two were negative: that is to say, they did not recognize their beloved in the entities that manifested themselves (to be truthful, one of these two matured adhesion after the passage of time). Another two, though in strong doubt, added that they could not absolutely exclude the reality of the communication that had taken place.

All the others declared that they recognized their dear souls and were convinced that they had really communicated with them. As can be seen, here we have a goodly percentage of adhesions, at least formally so (though only God knows whether and to what extent they are really based on intimate conviction),

But what shall we say from the qualitative point of view? Many allowed themselves to be carried away by emotivity, though many others were able to give a more pondered judgement both immediately afterwards and at some distance of time: there are minutes recording everything that was said and these texts can be re-read as often as one wants after the passage of time. Many of the participants were simple people, but others had attained a notable degree of culture and were able to perform accurate and penetrating analyses.

All considered, I concluded that we have good arguments for affirming survival on the rational plane. Undoubtedly, we are not in a position to give a scientific and 100% apodictic demonstration of this, though our conclusions seem to be founded on a base that in its own way is likewise scientific.

Parapsychology is likewise a rigorous science, even though it is not as exact as physics and chemistry. It is a human science that wants to live its phenomena; and it wants to live them, as we might say, from within. It is a science that not only records and classifies, but also interprets and therefore calls for comprehension, penetrating intuition, personal commitment and intimate maturation. At a certain point one is either inside or simply remains outside. If one succeeds in grasping the spirit of everything, the underlying mechanisms, one has the keys. Psychic research, especially frontier research, opens to the other dimension by means of what one might call an initiation in the truest and most proper sense.

I am happy to recall the answers I had in this connection from an entity that according to all appearances would have to be identified as Enzo, deceased firstborn son of our friends Tonino and Vanda Mascagna.

The parents were present during this communication, which took place some years ago at our country home in Roccamassima, on the Lepini Mountains in Southern Latium, where Tonino and Vanda had made us the gift of a visit.

And at this point, with their permission and that of other friends, I propose to cite phrases taken from similar communications. They are expressions I cite not only because each one is significant on its own account, but inasmuch as they constitute examples of what we were told by other entities on widely different occasions.

Enzo thus told us: *One first has to mature the certainty of survival*. I spoke to him of discussions had with rather sceptical friends: *They are persons*, he replied, *who do not believe in survival*. “Do you have a message for them?” *Spiritual maturation* (Our communication No. 581).

Survival, that’s fine. But does survival imply eternal life? And if it were only of a temporary, provisional survival? And if, after a certain time from physical dissolution, there came to dissolve themselves also the souls with the personalities?

It is at this point that there arises the great metaphysico-religious question. It is only the absolute Being, it is only God who can give us true immortality, eternal and perfect and indestructible life. But in what terms would we have to conceive such a God?

According to me, He would have to be conceived as a living God, a God who not only *is* in his absolute sphere, but *exists*, manifests and donates himself also in our cosmic and human sphere to have an effect on our reality, to transform it, to render us like Himself. The sole God who saves us is the living and incarnate God: the God that Jesus manifests to us.

These “words of eternal life” come to us from the Book of Revelation. God reveals himself in various ways everywhere and in the most widely differing traditions: this has to be recognized with great ecumenical aperture. The Judeo-Christian tradition was formed by very imperfect and sinful men, because we are all thus. In spite of all the dross of negativity we carry with us, these men of the Judeo-Christian tradition had the merit of having placed and maintained themselves in a condition of special harkening to the word of God: and this only true merit turned them into the privileged vehicles of a very special revelation.

The revelation of which we are the unworthy bearers is the one by means of which God manifests himself not only creator, but creator who incarnates himself in his creation to save it and lead it to its ultimate perfection, the famous “omega point”.

Very well, I can say that our mediumistic communications have given us full confirmation of the Christian revelation. From them we obtain not only the certainty of survival, but also the “glad tidings” that our Creator does not abandon us, but incarnates himself in our midst to give us eternal life.

Someone will reply: But the mediumistic communications do not all say the same thing. Often they seem to reveal to us different spiritual and religious horizons. How does one explain this? Perhaps the souls take with them into the other dimension old beliefs already professed by men and women living on the earth?

However strange it may seem, I feel that the sum total of the experiences we made authorizes me to confirm that this is precisely the case. The beyond is a mental world: and therefore, especially in the early stages of their evolution, the souls remain greatly tied to the mental realities that they carry with them when they abandon their body, almost as if they were in a cocoon constituted by them. All these mental realities comprise first and foremost their religious beliefs. This would explain the survival of certain limitations and of the beliefs they once held.

Would there thus be, as we might put it, a separate paradise for each religion? It is not by any means unthinkable that, given the law of affinity, souls that profess strictly similar beliefs go to stay together: participate in one and the same condition, i. e. the same collective mental state. For the moment that is how things would seem to be: only in the end the truth will shine forth for all and all will fully know it.

It would seem that, due to affinity once again, we came into contact with spheres of Christian souls. And hence: what they told us of their condition confirms our selfsame religious beliefs.

There are however aspects to be revised, updated. The beyond that has been revealed to us is not the one of Dante Alighieri, nor does it seem that of many antique representations. On the other hand, our religion is neither fundamentalist nor bound to formulations of epochs and cultures of the past: it is a fact of substance. Revising certain old formulations to update them will help us gain greater insight into the substance of our faith.

Again: especially in the early stages, the souls seem to be bound to the mental habits acquired in the course of earthly life. Have we ever wondered how it is that in the dreams we have every night we find ourselves always with an appearance of a physical body in environments similar to the earthly ones and in relation with persons who likewise have a head, two legs, two arms, complete with the clothes of the epoch, and so on? These are mental environments and come to be formed in this manner because for the moment this is more or less our mental patrimony.

What is it that prevents similar souls from having a common dream? We also have shared dreams in our present existence: but they constitute an exception, whereas in the beyond they would seem to be the rule.

“How is your environment?”, I asked Maurizio. Who replied: *Beautiful, serene and luminous: what you call ‘paradise’*. “If you look around, what do you see?” *Nature* (502).

Saint Peter, keys, gate, paradise, angels with wings are not to be seen, observed Marilena. I asked: “Is it perhaps a limbo rather than a paradise?” She replied: *No. it is a true paradise as we youngsters think it*. “Does it resemble our earth?” *Yes, but more green, more airy, more luminous, in short, more everything* (495).

To complete and gain more insight into this idea, I should now like to mention a highly clarifying reply I had from Corrado, the son of Laura Paradiso, in one of the seances when his mother was present.

Corrado had confirmed to me that a soul finds itself in a spiritual environment in conformity with its desires and expectations. Let us now consider a youngster excessively given to visiting discos. Very well, after his untimely death, this youngster could still dream of finding himself in discos, astral in this case, *created by thought: if we think them, they are there* (523).

At this point I asked him a further clarification: “Corrado, let me put another and far more demanding question to you: after all, you are all intelligent in your family. You youngsters of your sphere find yourselves all together in a serene spiritual world in the midst of spectacles of nature. Other young souls find themselves in a more obsessive and mad astral world of motorcycles, juke boxes, discos, in the midst of all the things that made up their dreams on earth. And now the question: Could it not be that your parents, with their way of being and thinking of you, cooperate to some extent in determining your serene state and your natural environment that inspires such great serenity?”

That’s a fine question, Corrado told me, returning the compliment. The love of the parents, their faith, their prayers and works of charity help the soul; and that gives us peace and serenity and we live amid green meadows, immaculate mountains and blue seas (553).

Don’t you think that this is a fine variant on the theme of the “communion of the saints”? We are so many shoots of one and the same vine, where there circulates one and the same vital lymph. And not only everything one prays, but also what one does and thinks reflects in others in a positive manner when it is a question of positive mental acts or, in the opposite case, negative acts.

Let me formulate a limit example: the example of a man who died by suicide. Of him Enzo told me that he *is in solitude and in mist*, i. e. in a particular state of expiation intended, in the last resort, to purify that soul. *But the prayers, so he added, the holy masses and his repentance will manage to save him. Human freedom does not terminate with physical death, but the soul may emend its earthly faults. The mercy and the love of God, together with the communion of the saints, free the souls of the sins they committed. The force of the saints and the prayers help the evolution of the souls (591).*

Prayers are however helpful for souls in any condition. *They are extremely useful, stressed Orazio, and help me to achieve an accelerated spiritual development (544).*

Coming back to considering the existence of the souls in spheres similar to the earth, it should be underscored that they see themselves in the form of the body they no longer have. It is more or less the same phenomenon we always have in dreams. This form is later left as the soul’s mental habits change, until it eventually comes to feel itself a purely spiritual reality. In this sense Claudia described herself as *a luminous essence with form, but intelligent (587).*

Daniela, daughter of Mario and Luisa Mancigotti, defined her spiritual environment as *love and intense light (553).*

Claudia said she conserved her earthly form, but added: *If I want, I can deprive myself of it (587).*

Inversely, those who have overcome the form may assume it again, if necessary, to let themselves be recognized by other spirits who are less evolved or have only recently passed beyond. The baby son that Laura lost as soon as he was born, Corraduccio, promised his mother that he would come to meet and welcome her the day, hopefully in the very distant future, when she will pass to the other dimension. *One may or may not have the aspect*, said that first Corrado, who – had he lived here on earth – would today be a man round about forty. *If I see my mother, I take my aspect. She can see me that way: you will see me some day. “Will you come to meet me as a man or as a child?” Like a child, because from you I want the caresses I never had (522).*

Usually I ask what evolution awaits the souls. Enzo spoke of *a further spiritual development: ever more angels, eventually to become saints of God (581).*

Pierluigi, father of Orazio, who lives in a different sphere, though he can visit the little son when desires to do so and thinks him, says that he is engaged in *a work of*

individual spiritual elevation, which consists of trying to free oneself of the conditionings you bring with you from the earth (544).

And Marilena, for her part, attests: *We shall set out on a road of elevation, but now we are anchored to the earth, because our dear ones are there* (495).

We had a number of confirmations that it is above all the souls of those who passed away at a very young age that remain for a certain time bound to their dear ones left on earth, especially their parents. *I am always with them and share their joys and sorrows*, says Maurizio (502). And Claudia, to her mother: *I am always in dialogue with you and live all your events* (587).

They often come in their astral form, which recalls the one of the earthly body. “Where exactly are you?, I asked Sebastian. *I am embracing mother* (542).

Marilena confirmed this to her own mother: *I’m hugging you real good. Even though you can’t feel me, I’m embracing you* (495).

When they assume human form, and therefore descend to a vibratory level closer to our own, they manage to see us physically, as if they still had eyes. I asked Enzo: “Can you see us in this room?” *Yes. Do you doubt it?*, he asked, in an almost jestful, if not slightly teasing tone. And, referring to his parents: *Do you want me to deprive myself of the joy of seeing them?* (581).

They were *all there*, said Corrado when I mentioned a meeting held at the Convivium the day before, where Laura had been guest of honour and principal speaker. *Dear mother, lots of us were there. Even our friends were with us* (522). I am quite certain that every room in which we hold our meetings is crowded by hundreds of presences, invisible to us, but live and loving participants.

With God’s permission we are always by your side, said Enzo to his parents (581). It is with divine approval that the souls take part in these mediumistic communications. *We can always come with God’s permission*, affirm both the Conrads, *to testify that life continues* (522). And Enzo: *I have the Lord’s permission to come to you and say: faith, faith* (591).

These souls of youngsters deceased at an early age have not yet set out on the road of elevation, but are already engaged in some way in purifying themselves of their earthly dross. This purification is achieved by means of dedication to others, especially youngsters who have just passed away, who are welcomed by those of their own age, this in conformity with the principle that aggregation in the other world is based on affinity.

I live for others, said Corrado. And one can understand that this gift of oneself already brings about a first spoliation of the dross of earthly egoisms. In this sense the dedication to others can be a substitute of either the whole or at least a conspicuous part of a more painful expiation and purification process that many other souls have to pass through.

With God’s permission we console our dear ones, Claudia told us. *We welcome the newcomers and live with them a friendship different from the earthly one*. “How is your friendship?”, I asked her. *It is finalized*, she replied, *to the full realization of spiritual life* (587).

I am one of the host of those who welcome the souls, Orazio told us, *and there are many youngsters who arrive unprepared* (544).

And Corrado: *I help youngsters on earth and here. Many arrive bewildered and incredulous and I and the others help them* (553). “When you go to meet and welcome them, how do you appear to them?” *As we are: boys like themselves*. “Are you referring to the human aspect you assume?” *Yes*. “Is it one of you who welcomes the newcomer or do you do it all together?” *That depends: sometimes only one, at others a group* (522)

Sooner or later there commences the road of elevation: at this point the souls can no longer assist their dear ones with as much assiduity as they do now. They can however return to them on some occasions for the remainder of their earthly lives and also after they pass into the other dimension.

“How do you see your immediate future?”, I asked Francesca. *More elevated*, she replied. “Namely...?” *Other states*. “How will they be as compared with the present one?” *More mystical*. “Will you be able to come to us then?”. *If I get permission*. “And for the moment you have permission?”, I went on to ask, obtaining a real crossfire of: *Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes* (534).

Claudia defined the road to be undertaken as *a mystical initiation*. But then added: *The evolutionary states will not prevent contact with our loved ones* (587).

It is upon the final and universal resurrection that we shall become reunited forever. Having attained perfect sanctity, it is upon resurrection that we shall enter into *a happy eternity when we shall be all together*, affirmed Corrado (522).

I limit myself to citing his words as example of what numerous souls have said and confirmed on innumerable occasions. But among our youngsters Daniela, Enzo and Orazio also spoke of it in a tone of certainty.

“Why do we rise again?” *To realize perfection*, replied Enzo (581). The perfection of the love of God, the oblation of ourselves to our Creator, namely the perfection of sanctity, will be completed by the perfection of our total being, of our personality at all levels.

When we say that we shall have our corporeity again, we must obviously not think of our material bodies as they are today, with all their infirmities and limitations. The bodies, as Corrado told us, *will be glorious* (522), that is to say, completely regenerated and transfigured by the spirit. And here I am referring in the last resort to the Holy Spirit: I am referring to the God who transforms us from deep within to render us as perfect as He is.

What we are ultimately destined to attain is a perfection of fullness. It does not consist of becoming dissolved to realize a cleansed state in which the personality no longer exists inasmuch as it has become absorbed by the whole, like the famous drop of water that returns to the ocean, according to an image that is very dear to Orientals and also the orientally inspired in our own midst. The biblical tradition does not say this, but affirms and underscores the exact opposite: the personality of each, far from dissolving, becomes strengthened and enriched to the greatest possible extent and is rendered perfect and full in everything: in a creativity equal to the divine one and knowledge not only of the pure spiritual principle, but of all things.

When we shall again have the body, glorious, we shall have everything. And there will become realized the merger of the spirit with the universal values of the creation. Indeed, the eternal body will help us to understand the great values, Corrado told us.

I asked him to explain himself more clearly. *Do you want to know what the values are?* “Yes, give a couple of examples, if you don’t mind”. *Art, music, faith, friendship, charity*. “Also science?” *Yes*, confirmed Corrado. And, to better define the picture with some further detail, added: *The glorious body and the spirit are two elements that enable us to better understand and taste the beauty of a sunset, a symphony, a masterpiece of art* (523). At the previous seance he had already said that recovery of the material dimension proves to be necessary *to appreciate the beauty of the creation* (522).

Corrado stressed that his replies were inspired, because they were drawn *from the infinite Intelligence in which we participate* (523).

We can undoubtedly assume these replies as paradigm of everything of particular significance that was revealed to us in the course of our mediumistic experiments,

which amounted to several hundred. Taken as a whole, all these indications seem not only to be of extreme interest, but also extremely comforting, because they confirm that a God creates us from nothing for everything, for eternal life, for unlimited perfection and happiness.

It is a perfection and happiness to be shared forever with the persons who are dear to us. And, certainly, the day on which there will come down the barriers of our human limitations and incomprehensions, on that day all will be dear to us.

5. Man's spiritual road is at an epochal turning point

What is called the "manifestation of the children of light", from which the Hope Movement drew its origin, is a rather comforting phenomenon for anybody prepared to accept it: it shows that our dear ones survive invisibly by our side and that some day we shall see them again and be reunited with them forever. In the meantime, the interrupted dialogue with them is reopened.

There are many people who consider communications with the deceased to be blameworthy, though the souls say that they come not only with God's permission, but by divine will.

Instinctively, I feel myself to be in full agreement with the souls: as such, communication with our dear ones seems a very beautiful thing to me. And when I enlarge the field of view to a wider horizon, I see the importance of these communications confirmed by other reasons.

Recent centuries have witnessed the flowering of a very sophisticated scientific and technological civilization that made truly gigantic steps forward in a relatively short time. I ask myself what factors made this possible, what human attitude could have constituted its main spring, its driving force.

All said and done, it seems to me that this can be pinpointed as the attitude of concentrating attention on the world, on nature and then on human life itself, but considered more in its exterior aspects than the interiority from which alone it could draw its true significance.

Indeed, the exterior and material aspects of things are the ones that best lend themselves to being objectively ascertained, to the application of mathematics, and thus becoming objects of study of the exact sciences. Interiority is laid aside, together with the spiritual dimension and even the Divinity that indwells it. This earthly dimension is privileged with respect to the beyond. Rather, the beyond is ever more confined to the margins and ends up by falling into oblivion. All this implies the triumph of materialism. For its own part, human life becomes enriched with ever more sophisticated means, but loses the sense of itself and of its end.

Now, it seems to me that through the manifestation of the children of light the beyond not only repropose itself on its own initiative, and powerfully so, but also affirms itself as the dimension of God and eternal life. The children of light, and with them all our dear ones who manifest themselves, tell us that life does not terminate on this earth, but continues in a further existence from which even earthly life receives its significance.

The further condition that awaits us is a divine life. We are not therefore destined to survive just for the sake of surviving, in any manner whatsoever, a survival that could also be trite. Quite the contrary, our survival tends towards a superior, perfect life, a divine life. Our final destiny is deification.

All considered, this is exactly what Christianity tells us. One day many people who until that moment had followed Jesus began to abandon Him, so that He turned to the apostles and asked: "Will you also go away?" And Peter replied on behalf of all: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6, 67-68).

Hence, if the specific feature of the Christian message is to propose words of eternal life to us humans, we can say that the manifestation of the children of light is clearly on the same line and in strict continuity.

The Christian revelation, as also the manifestation of the children of light in its wake, have words of eternal life for man that are not abstract, but relate to all his positive and legitimate values.

The Christian vision is very different from that of a certain Hindu tradition that runs through the Upanishads, the Vedanta and the Yoga. In the Christian perspective it is not just man's pure Self that is saved, the mere Atman in its pure self-transparency, while all the rest is dissolved and forgotten on account of its irreducibly illusory nature. In the Christian perspective, on the other hand, the whole of man is saved at all levels with everything positive and valid that is in him.

The words of eternal life of Christianity are for the whole of humanism: for the sciences and all the forms of knowledge that, in the limit, pursue divine omniscience; for the arts that in some way emulate divine creativity, so that the creation may be richer in beauty; for the technologies that strain to transform reality in the endeavour of concretely implementing a better world at all levels; for the social activities that render human solidarity operative.

The words of eternal life of Christianity are for all the authentic values of man and for all his legitimate affects, for everything that man rightfully loves, and for all the loved persons. Nothing valid is lost. Nobody is ever lost forever, even though a person may become invisible for us for some time, even though it may seem that our relationship with that person remains suspended for some time.

The messages of the children of light confirm these words of eternal life and therefore exhort their dear ones left behind on earth never to despair, never to become shrouded in their sorrow. They also exhort them to work on the earth, to be useful, to be active. And they invite each one to return to God, resuming with Him not only a relationship of dialogue, prayer and entrustment, but also to cooperate with God in completing the creation.

Our dear ones are active in the other dimension to prepare the "new heavens"; and we are thus invited to be active in this world to prepare the "new earth": to prepare also here the roads of the Lord who is coming to establish his kingdom. It will be beautiful to meet again in the end, after each has performed his task in his own dimension.

Christianity propose itself to man not only as a vision, but as the concrete beginning of a new life. The manifestation of the children of light is thus a foretaste of the final encounter of the deceased in heaven with the men living on the earth. This encounter has been prophesied for the end of time, but this does not mean that its premises cannot be laid as of this moment.

The communications obtained by our experimental group of the Convivium of Rome tell us that at this final encounter there will be a kind of exchange of gifts.

Heaven is not the place of humanism, but rather of the spiritual, religious, mystic ascent. It is to be presumed that at the end of time the deceased will have attained the perfection of sanctity there.

The earth, on the other hand, is the place of humanism. Here the living at that time will be heirs of the progress made by men in the course of all the epochs: and one may assume that by then they will have attained the supreme peak of humanism that men are capable of reaching with divine help.

In that final encounter of heaven and earth the sanctified deceased, grown in Christ to the point of attaining to his selfsame stature (as the Apostle Paul tells us, Eph 4, 11-16), will be with Him to bring into the world the light that will constitute the judgment of the world; they will be with Jesus Christ to bring sanctity to men, so that the whole of humanity may be deified and the entire universe transformed and glorified.

For their part, the men living on earth at that time will bring to heaven the gift of the fullness of humanism, so that humanism may be adopted in heaven and enter the kingdom of God.

This encounter is the final universal resurrection. One may ask oneself what rising may mean in this connection. It is the recuperation of one's full humanity.

In order to sanctify itself in God, each soul of the other dimension will have had to pass through an initiation death and this implies a certain depersonalization.

This is the price that has to be paid for realizing a certain detachment from the earth, for purifying oneself of all egoity and all dross of spiritual imperfection.

Each soul will have to forego everything in order to be wholly of God, but in God it will again have everything. In God it will become reintegrated with its humanism, but at a higher and divine level.

It will also fully recuperate the sense of its own earthly identity, and therefore the physical aspect it had on earth, its own body: the body with which we are accustomed to identifying ourselves. But it will no longer be a carnal body with the limits, the infirmities, the dysfunctions and the illnesses characteristic of our body: it will be a spiritual body, a body of light, a perfect vehicle of the loftiest spirituality.

Our ultimate destiny is what the Fathers of the Latin Church, here in the West, called "sanctification", while the Greek Fathers of the Eastern Church preferred to use the term "deification" (*théosis*). What we are concerned with is man's assimilation to God.

Now, not only the religious, but even humanists will tend in their own way towards this assimilation. As I have already suggested, does not art emulate the divine Artist of the creation? And does not every form of knowledge tend in the limit towards divine omniscience? Though not always aware of this, man always tends towards God as his ultimate goal. And thus even humanism de facto proposes an ideal of assimilating man to God.

One may thus wonder whether the religious and Christian ideal and the humanist ideal of assimilating man to the Divinity are not naturally destined to tend towards a synthesis. Here we have the very synthesis that the final encounter of heaven and earth will be able to implement in concrete terms.

The manifestation of the children of light is a foretaste, the first fruit of this final encounter. And this can be said also of all the mediumistic communications implemented in a positive spirit, not to predict or know the future, not for magic practices, not for exploiting the dead for the purposes of the living, but for love and the purposes of better consciousness of our human destination.

There have always been mediumistic manifestations more or less everywhere, but in the ambit of Western civilization they became substantially more systematic, almost a mass phenomenon, from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. The particularly famous case of the sisters Kate and Margaret Fox at Hydesville in the state of New York dates to 1848. Mysterious knocks were heard in the house to which the two girls and their family had only just moved, and this gave the sisters the idea of dialoguing by means of a rudimentary alphabet (two knocks for "yes" and silence for "no") that was quickly extended to cover all the letters. The mysterious interlocutor thus revealed himself as an itinerant haberdasher who had been assassinated and buried in that house.

The walled-up skeleton of a man was subsequently found there. This case gave rise to modern spiritism and metapsychics.

In Italy the manifestation of the children of light can be historically collocated round about the 'eighties and, as is well known, the first congress of what subsequently came to be known as the Hope Movement was held at Cattolica in 1987.

Manifestations of children of light have also occurred elsewhere. Among these one should particularly recall the four "Christic messengers" in France, all of whom died at a very young age – Piere Monnier: 23 years, Roland de Jouvenel: 14 years, a girl called Paqui: 20 years, and Arnaud Gourvenec: 13 years – whose messages seem to be strongly animated by the will of adhering to Catholic orthodoxy.

We thus have 150 years densely laden with significant manifestations. I would distinguish these into three essential veins: Anglo-Saxon "spiritualism", which among others has churches and other religious functions of the Protestant type, with the specific additional note of the presence of a sensitive who sees the deceased by the side of their dear ones present at the seance; the reincarnationist "spiritism" that was originated by the experiences of Allan Kardec and flourished especially in France and Brazil, but also in Italy; lastly, and far more recently, the manifestation of the children of light, particularly concentrated in our own country.

It could hardly be said that elements and factors of ambiguity are wholly lacking in the Hope Movement. Sometimes reincarnation comes to the fore, though not in as obsessive a manner as elsewhere. At times there are signs of a pre-existence of the soul that already before its birth on this earth had chosen to incarnate itself in this body.

I take this opportunity of saying that even this concept is wholly extraneous to the tradition of Christian orthodoxy, according to which each human individual is a soul that originates at the same time as the body and, together with that body, is destined to rise again.

Apart from some slight confusion of ideas attributable to a certain improvisation due to the lack of sure theological bases, one must nevertheless recognize that the Hope Movement is wholly pervaded by a sincere, authentic and very live Christian religiosity.

For the moment there are two things we can infer from all this. First: the manifestation of the children of light impresses upon the vast phenomenon of modern mediumism that commenced in 1848 a character ever more in keeping with the Catholic-Christian tradition.

Second: being connoted in this manner, the manifestation of the children of light can be seen as a foretaste of the culminating and conclusive encounter of heaven and earth that is otherwise referred to as the final universal resurrection.

One may conclude from all this that the manifestation of the children of light brings us to an epochal turning point. It prefigures and anticipates something of the ultimate goal of human evolution. It confirms that this goal is an integral part of Christian eschatology, i. e. of the ultimate things announced by the Christian message.

In this sense the manifestation of the children of light is prophecy. We are here concerned with a prophecy that, even though it assumed somewhat uncertain and vague features in nineteenth-century mediumism, expresses itself in the manifestation of the children of light of our own days with the same lineaments as the Christian announcement. If the Christian Glad Tidings tell us that we humans are destined for eternal life, the manifestation of the children of light only confirms this good news in terms not of a doctrine that we have to learn from others, but as an experience that we can live in the first person: a paranormal and spiritual experience at one and the same time.

And epochal turning point means that one epoch ends and another begins. There is a before and an after. Before the news of our eternal destination was communicated to

us in the form of a teaching. But from this moment onwards we have experiential confirmation of it.

Our dearest, the very children that were thought lost forever, tell us that there exists a life after life, that there exists a beyond: not a simple prolongation of life, not any kind of beyond, but the beyond of God and eternal life, a goal of perfection and perfect joy in the fullness of everything that can be considered interesting, beautiful, good and valid.

The experience of modern mediumism undoubtedly includes the messages that concern us personally, inasmuch as we receive them from our dearest who have died, some while still young of age, children and companions of our life, parents and friends.

But it also comprises everything that we can learn from the experiences of others about the nature of the paranormal world, the parapsychic and paramystic phenomena.

Lastly, the experience of the mediumism of these last 150 years embraces everything that we can learn about the beyond not only inasmuch as it is described in the messages, but also because we ourselves can experience it – be it even in a limited and imperfect manner, because no more than initial – in the frontier experiences *esperienze di confine* where soul issues from the body and for a moment comes face to face with the beyond.

What concrete and more specific teachings can we draw from this? Here are some of them.

Life continues and therefore has a scope: it thus has a sense that is not ephemeral, but a true and absolute sense.

Death may be preceded by the sufferings of an illness, for example, but of itself is sweet and gentle, is felt as a liberation of the spirit from the shackles of matter, as an exalting experience. So we don't have to be afraid of it! Let me confide to my readers that I await it with pleasure and great curiosity.

The mind is creative, so that each one of us creates his own future beyond with his mental activity. And the other dimension is a pure mental reality, where each one, having left his properties, his comforts, his homes, cars, possible motor yachts and bank accounts on earth, brings with him not what he *has*, but what he *is*. Into that mental world one brings the quality of one's thoughts, what one has made of one's soul by thinking in a positive or a negative manner.

If the soul is luminous, it enters automatically into a luminous condition; if it is burdened with dross, it enters into a condition of gloom and highly unpleasant solitude.

It is there enclosed in solitude, as in a cocoon that the soul has woven around itself with its egoism. It is so shut up in this cocoon that for a long time no good spirit can reach it to bring it a word of solidarity and comfort. In such a painful situation the soul is left alone to meditate the errors it committed.

In the end the infinite mercy of God and the generosity of the souls at his service will redeem that unhappy soul, but the operation will be anything other than easy and straightforward. Redemption will be attained in the sign of suffering.

Knowing all this, rather than simply thinking or believing it, will help each one of us to take wise decisions as to how we should regulate our existence.

What should our earthly existence be like, so that we can prepare an acceptable afterlife already here on earth? It will be as well if, right from this moment, we forsake all egoism and egocentrism, every excessive concern for our wellbeing. The less we think of ourselves, the more good will we do to ourselves. The less we pursue pleasure as an end in itself, the better shall we construct our happiness. As experience teaches us, these are principles that are already confirmed in our daily life, but we shall have their full verification only in the other dimension.

Forsaking our egoism has to be really thorough: we have to abandon every form of egoism, even the egoism of family or small groups, of sect or church, corporation or nation. We have to free ourselves of the chains, the fetters, the eyeshades of every closure, shabbiness, pettiness and also mediocrity of thought.

We have to free ourselves of the conditionings of consumerism. Sales promotion plays on the most infantile feelings that a man may harbour: his desire to be the first, and not even due to his own real capacities, but simply by exhibiting costly toys.

Consumerism is shabbiness of soul erected into a system, is seeking refuge in the shell of a family that from the human community has shrunk into a mere cell of collective consumption. Consumerism is the very opposite of social commitment and – to be quite frank - also of lived Christianity.

Since – be it said once more - the beyond is a mental world and the mind is creative, it is clear that certain thoughts will open us for a good beyond, while others will close us. Among the good thoughts and mental attitudes that open us there are the religious ones, while the ones that close us include atheism and materialism.

But there is yet more. The beyond is a religious world par excellence. The further the soul penetrates, the more will it rise from sphere to sphere, the more will it discover that in the beyond it is not so much called upon to progress in the sciences and the arts, but rather to set out on and follow a religious road. For this reason, practicing religion or at least feeling and nourishing religious aspirations already in this earthly life is a good preparation for the new life that awaits us in the beyond.

In the Christian tradition great importance is assumed by the idea that we save ourselves by faith. This may seem a sectarian exclusivism: “There is no salvation outside the Church, only Christians are saved!”. But no parochialism can subsist in a discourse of this type once one really wants to delve into it and verify in the light of experience that we can already have of the other dimension. The first effective salvation comes from our mental attitude of aperture, while every closure and negation constitutes a hindrance.

A happy arrival in the beyond and a good insertion in the new condition is assured by adhesion to any religious faith that in general terms can be considered valid, healthy and positive.

To us who profess it, Christianity undoubtedly says a great deal more: it says something that goes well beyond survival and touches eternal life, our ultimate destiny of deification. In general, however, it does not follow that the other religions are off-track, especially as regards the first degree of the ascent to eternal life, simple survival.

Each religion contains a fragment of divine revelation, and possibly may also have gained deeper insight into it than we have succeeded in doing in our own tradition. And thus every other religion can teach us something also for the purpose of better realizing our Christianity, or – let us say it – helping us to be better Christians.

Our experience urges us to be more open to other religions, more ecumenical, but – be it clear – avoiding all confusion, all disavowal of the specific original and irreplaceable apportion of Christianity.

Our experience urges us to be more committed in our religiosity, which assumes concrete shape in solidarity with all human beings of every country of this earth. On the political level such a constructive ecumenism becomes translated into mondialism: into the commitment of working all together for a truly united world.

Saying that the spiritual road of mankind is an epochal turning point does not necessarily mean that we are inaugurating an entirely new and unknown spirituality. The contribution of tradition remains most essential. Nevertheless, there is something new connected with the 150 years of the vast movement of modern mediumism and also

with the manifestation of the children of light, which in our day and age tends to develop it in a more clearly Christian direction.

And the new thing is this: as far as our human destination is concerned, in the past it was always somebody else who on his own authority (which may well be authentic and genuine, why not?) provided us with teachings, training, admonishments, more or less salutary advice and even menaces, all signals that came to us from outside and of which we limited ourselves to taking note in what for the most part was a passive manner: but now *we know* all these things.

6. The final universal resurrection: what it may mean for us in concrete terms

The Judeo-Christian prophecies, as also the Islamic ones, promise us the universal resurrection at the end of time. What does that mean? What significance does it have for us? Why is it so important?

I here want to forego the descriptions and the various mentions to be found in the Bible (Ez 37, 1-14; Dan 12, 1-4; Mt 19, 28-29; 25, 31-46; Lk 14, 14; c. 20; John 5, 28; 6, 39-44 and 54; 11, 24-25; Acts 3, 21; 1 Thess 4, 13-18; 1 Cor 15, 12-28; Rom 8, 18-22; 1 Pt 3, 11-12; Rev, ch. 20 and 21, etc.). Leaving aside also the innumerable attempts of further specification made by theologians, I here want to limit myself to underscoring what seem to be corollaries and different aspects of the resurrection that nevertheless interest us more closely.

Universal resurrection means that in the end we shall all be reintegrated in our full humanity.

Taken on its own, what does this mean? To get the concept clearly into focus, one has to remember what, according to mediumistic communications, happens after the passage into the other dimension.

Immediately after decease, each soul that manifests itself shows that it has preserved its personality in everything: it appears exactly as before.

At a subsequent moment, however, the souls realize ever more clearly that they have to follow a road of spiritual elevation. This road calls for a detachment from the earth and its memories that the soul has brought with it. Here we have a detachment that is rendered easier and more rapid by the disappearance of the earthly memories. The soul thus tends to become depersonalized.

Now, these memories are not exactly lost: they are only suspended. They become reintegrated every time it is necessary. Souls bound by relationship or friendship find themselves communicating with each other in the other dimension or are destined to remain together for some time in certain evolutionary phases. Common memories are thus re-activated.

Each soul also has its own individual and different evolution that may call for a further process of detachment, a further depersonalization and loss of memories, a suspension of affects.

However, the important thing is that in the end the souls come together again and recuperate their memories, affects and entire humanity, with the personality in all its expressions at every level.

Personality and memories and affects will no longer mean more imperfection or risk of backward steps, but will only be synonymous of completeness.

All together we shall find ourselves in the fullness of a transfigured, deified humanity. We shall be perfect, but also perfectly human. And we shall once again be all

together to love each other and share every felicity and every asset. That, in substance, is the final universal resurrection.

It will be the final and definitive encounter of all those who will be alive on the earth with all the deceased. Be it clear that we, too, shall be deceased: it may readily be presumed that this event will take place a long time after our passage to the other dimension.

We shall meet to live together in God's eternity. In God we shall be perfect and perfectly happy. In God we shall all be united to share that infinite good.

True love, true friendship is sharing. It is having something in common: some good to be shared. And that good, that asset, as we said, will be infinite, and infinite our happiness.

What is an asset? It is something that is good for us: something that interests us, attracts us, exalts us.

How can we imagine an infinite good? Our life has its trials, its sorrows, but it nevertheless also has its magic moments. If we want to develop this further, it will be best to start with the latter.

Can we remember a moment in which we were truly happy? Can we remember an experience that really satisfied us?

They are experiences that are more beautifully lived with others. Can we remember some magic moment experienced with some really beloved person or persons?

Those are moments lived with extreme intensity and felicity. Let us therefore try to imagine a supreme, never-ending moment in which we shall have the sum of all our most happy moments, and also a great deal more than that, infinitely more.

When the skies are low and laden with clouds, that circumscribed and oppressing vision makes it difficult for us to remember even the beauty of the infinite luminous blue, even if we had enjoyed it but the day before.

And even in sad times, when the image of past ecstasies of beauty, truth, felicity, communion of souls seems greatly faded, we have to try to bring it to life again in memory, concentrating all our attention on it. And say to ourselves: The good that awaits is greater, far greater.

It is an indestructible good, without turnings back, without losses.

It is a good to be enjoyed with others. With the persons dear to us. Let us think of them. Let us think of the moment in which we shall see them again and become united with them forever.

Let us try to remember an occasion when we saw something very beautiful, but it seemed a miserable satisfaction to keep that vision just for ourselves, and therefore we called a certain person close to our heart and said: Come and have a look....

Why did we call the other person? For the simple reason that beautiful things have to be seen, contemplated, considered and enjoyed together. There is almost no enjoyment if we are alone in those moments.

We therefore eagerly await the moment when the other will come to see for himself or, at least, to let us tell him what we have seen.

It is beautiful to be united, to feel oneself in unison; but it is also beautiful to be in two or more to feel also different, with each one giving a different, personal and original facet to one and the same experience. Diversity is creativity, is wealth. One is tempted to exclaim: *Vive la différence!*

Diversity is to feel oneself in two, in more. Love is between two, between more.

From two to more, to the many. One has this in fecund love, when children are born, grow, marry and generate grandchildren. And the family becomes enriched also by those who enter to form part of it, just as the friends of one become the friends of the other, and therefore common friends. Here we have a multiplicity of persons on whom to

pour our love, which by its very nature is diffusive: so that it multiplies, and that there is enough for all.

We may feel indifferent to strangers; but, to the extent to which we get to know them and keep on enhancing this knowledge, they, too, enter the circle of our affects.

And thus we have a new friend. We feel so greatly akin and in unison that it seems to us to have known him forever. How many unknown friends there are just round the corner!

We feel that a spiritual brotherhood binds us to certain people: and with these people we are immediately at our ease, right from the first moment. Things are more difficult with others. And there are some with whom they become particularly difficult.

And then, in the limit, there are some with whom things can be very tough. They seem created and mentally structured for the precise purpose of contrasting with us in everything, to give us torment and have us damned.

These are limit situations. Can even these be recuperated? Hopefully, yes. I remember that many eventually felt sorry. Not on account of opportunism, but really so. Afterwards they seemed really changed. And thus I can see no reason why the same thing should not happen also to my present "enemy"!

However, there still remains open the question of my own conversion. Am only I right in everything? May God illumine me and make me understand where I err.

And then, when I know the error perfectly well by myself, or at least glimpse it, and yet keep on "erring", let the Lord give me the strength to denounce and clarify to myself whatever bad faith may still dwell within me, possibly in shadow zones, so that I, too, may examine my conscience and in the end make amends.

If sooner or later there is such a recovery, we have the magnificent prospect that the many who misunderstood and fought each other for a long time and at times in a very tough and merciless manner, will in the end recognize and understand each other, pardon each other, become reconciled, be friends forever from that moment onwards.

In the end we shall find our beloved again, but this in the incomparably greater sense that all will be dear to us in the end.

We shall feel spontaneous and even overwhelming interest and love for each. And we shall be very happy to find each one again as if he were the being closest to our heart.

Indeed, each one is unique and is worthy for his own sake in an absolute manner.

Far from forgetting the individual, far from dissolving the individual in an amorphous whole, universal love discovers him as an individual in all his infinite value.

Thus nothing is lost and every singularity becomes assumed in the absolute, just as it is, in everything it is, and forever.

It is in ourselves that we first learn to know the individual and to love him, and only afterwards in the persons to whom we become attached, persons who interest us, with whom we feel identified.

They are not only our parents, relatives and friends, but also those whom we admire: our heroes.

They are the personification of our ideal: what we would like to be, or what we would have wanted to be. In them we live what we have never been nor ever shall be.

We follow their existences in the illustrated magazines if they are real or, if they are fictitious, in the novels, films and interminable television serials. We thus obtain second-hand gratification, by proxy as it were.

And then there are those for whom we feel pity, solidarity, participation and an interest that can become active and militant.

And here we often fight for a class, for a collectivity in the abstract, without entering into communion with the individual. But if in the end it is given to us to

encounter the individual and to establish a more human relationship with him, then that individual will be born within us, hopefully never to be cancelled again.

The multitude of our dear ones keeps growing. Each distinct and clearly characterized in everything he is. Each happily different and very much himself.

I should like to be able to follow all and each one. But how can I do this? Many are lost from sight. I should like to have an intellect of such power and a heart so big as to be able to embrace all and the existence of each in all its everyday details.

But this is impossible in our present human condition. All the same, some day I should like to be like that, to keep on dilating these faculties to the point of embracing everything. And this – let me say it once more – without forgetting the individual.

That would be a divine way of living. It would be the attainment, in the limit, of divine omniscience together with infinite love.

Nor would it satisfy me to have all this only for myself. I should like all my dear ones to attain this supreme condition. And, since my dear ones are potentially all, I should like to see it truly attained by all.

Re-acquiring all memories, so as to be able to acquire in the end an overall vision of all things.

Re-actualizing our humanity at every level, so as to recollect in the most lively way the entire cosmic and human evolution with the sum of the individual histories. And to relive everything and each event.

We shall be immersed in God, raised to his perfection. The shell of each one will burst to let in the infinite life in which we shall merge with God and with each other in full and indissoluble communion.

As if we had climbed to the top of a very high mountain, we shall look down on the paths that took us there to re-evolve the adventures lived in each part, adventures it would be beautiful to remember, no matter how full of travail they might have been.

Restored to full awareness of his individual being, each one will be able to make himself recognized also by means of reminiscence of the bodily aspects he had in the course of earthly life.

Returning to full consciousness of oneself implies, among others, a return to awareness of one's former image. Now, it is well known that in the other dimension thought is immediately creative.

For each one of us, the return of full consciousness of oneself will have its counterpart also in the resurrection of the former earthly corporeal image: nothing prevents us from imagining this as very probable and foreseeable.

This is the resurrection of the flesh, i. e. of the bodies in their concreteness: but bodies transfigured, and also transformed, luminous, glorious, elevated to vehicles of the loftiest spiritual life.

Appropriately considered and yet to be considered further, indeed to be considered incomparably better, all this seems to me to form part of the true of the final universal resurrection. It is the ultimate event that will bring the creation of the universe to completion, that will introduce each one of us, and all of us together, into the eternal life of God.

7. The paramystic phenomena prefigure the ultimate condition of the risen

No matter how much one may appreciate the ideal content of a sacred text, its literal interpretation and certain of its narrations will always arouse some diffidence in many people. Let us therefore set aside the religious substance of the message and admit

quite frankly that a sacred text can always give rise to the suspicion that it could tell us the most uncontrolled wonders.

If, however, we turn our attention to the lives of the saints, including those who lived in the 19th and 20th centuries, above all, to what was ascertained about them in the course of very severe beatification and canonization processes, we may find corroboration in this sense. It may be very interesting to learn that many miracles of the same type as those related in the Bible were performed in epochs much closer to us and, indeed, continue to be performed in our own days.

It may also be of some interest to place the paranormal facts of the Bible into some relationship with those of hagiography, i. e. the lives of the saints, and also with those studied by parapsychology, all of which generally take place wholly outside a religious climate and seem, as it were, completely “lay”.

Let us for a moment consider the phenomenon of levitation: Jesus levitated when he walked on the waters and eventually when he ascended to heaven, as did Saint Giuseppe da Copertino and also Daniel Dunglas Home, a Scottish medium of the 19th century, an excellent person, but not exactly a saint.

I shall try to explain the matter in some way by recalling a saying of the Apostle Paul, who distinguishes “the whole being of man” “into spirit and soul and body” (1 Thess 5, 23). Let us therefore imagine three concentric circles: the outermost can symbolize, as it were, what is outermost also in man: the *soma*, the body. The middle circle will correspond to the human soul, the *psyche*. The innermost circle will be the *pneuma*, the spirit.

And what is the spirit in this sense? I would say: it is the most intimate part of man that remains in more immediate contact with the Holy Spirit. And how shall we define the Holy Spirit? It is the divine Spirit that inspires each man, being more intimate to him than anything that man may have in his own human nature.

Considered from the viewpoint of a certain interpretation, religious phenomenology shows an action that moves precisely from the Spirit, from whatever is most intimate in man, and from there renews and transforms and regenerates and “deifies” man’s soul, rendering it “holy”.

Such an action of the spirit, the *pneuma*, may or may not arrive at acting also on the physical body through the mediation of the *psyche*: that is, passing through the soul regenerated by grace. An action on the body, the *soma*, could also move from the *psyche* as such, i. e. from a soul that is not necessarily sanctified.

The above considerations could enable us to distinguish four categories of subjects as follows:

1) There are *psychic men*: i. e. clairvoyants, the mediums and all subjects of parapsychical phenomena, on the *soma* (or physical body) of whom there acts the pure and simple *psyche*.

2) Then there are *pneumatic and psychic men*; i. e. saints who perform miracles, and where the *pneuma*, through the mediation of the *psyche*, arrives at acting on the *soma*.

3) There are *pneumatic but not psychic men*: i. e. saints who do not perform miracles.

4) Lastly, there is the immense majority of us common mortals, who are *neither pneumatic nor psychic*, who are not saints and not even subjects of paranormal phenomena of any kind.

We can now distinguish the *paramystic phenomena*, i.e. all the phenomena of mystico-pneumatic origin, into four categories:

The first category comprises the phenomena where the *psyche regenerated by the pneuma knows*: here we should recall hierognosis (i. e. experience of the sacred, the

perception of holy realities), the various gifts of wisdom and science, various forms of inspiration, including artistic inspiration, and the penetration of hearts.

Then there is the second category of phenomena, where *the psyche regenerated by the Spirit shows itself to be autonomous of the body*: out-of-the-body experiences right through to true bilocation.

Third category, where *the psyche regenerated by the Spirit acts on its own body* with a true moulding action: stigmata and dermatographism, luminosity, odour of sanctity, incombustibility and invulnerability, extreme fasting, prolonged waking, levitation.

Lastly, fourth category, where *the regenerated psyche acts by means of a moulding action on the bodies of others (healing) or on the environment (multiplication of food, causing or stopping rain) and also exercising a certain loving dominion over animals and nature in general*.

Let me give a few examples regarding some categories of phenomena where, as we said before, *the psyche regenerated by the pneuma knows*. Let us begin with hierognosis. The Apostle Paul writes that “the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (1 Cor 2, 10). This experience of God, of which the Bible certainly represents a continuous documentation, enriches the men of God with many different kinds of gifts of wisdom: so that men of God, even if wholly devoid of culture and intellectually but little gifted, reveal a most profound theological wisdom.

Side by side with the gifts of wisdom, the Spirit pours out also gifts of science: Saint Catherine of Siena, as yet illiterate, asked the Lord the capacity of reading, and this was immediately granted to her; and then she also obtained the gift of writing in the same way.

The Spirit of God infuses inspiration and skill in every art into sculptors, engravers and goldsmiths who worked at Yahweh’s sanctuary (Ex, ch. 35-36), and David composed under its inspiration; but hagiography, too, offers us examples of poetic, musical and pictorial inspiration of supernatural origin.

Jesus read in the hearts of the scribes (Mt, ch. 9) and of Judah (Jn, ch. 13), but the holy Curate of Ars likewise saw everything in the souls of those who came to his confessional for the first time.

Let us now pass to the second category of phenomena: those in which *the psyche regenerated by the pneuma demonstrates full independence of the physical body*. Here we have, above all, the phenomena of bilocation, where an individual appears in another place, even if it is very far away, and not only appears there, but in the limit also performs some physical action and at times leaves physical objects at that place. I can here limit myself to mentioning a Saint Anthony of Padua and, in our own days, a Padre Pio and – why not? - even Natuzza Evolo.

At this point let us pass on to considering *the phenomena that show a moulding action of the psyche on its own body*. Let us begin by recalling the best known ones in the form of a very brief listing: stigmata and dermatographism, luminosity, odour of sanctity, incombustibility and invulnerability, extreme fasting, prolonged waking, levitation. They are all variations of one and the same phenomenon: the psyche dominates, moves, forms and moulds matter in an absolutely spontaneous and immediate manner.

The face of the risen Jesus changed its lineaments, so much so that Magdalene did not at first recognize him (Jn, ch. 20) and, likewise, the two disciples of Emmaus did not recognize him, even though they talked for a long time with the Divine Master (Lk 24; Mk 16). In the Transfiguration the face of Jesus shines like the sun and his clothes became “as white as light” (Mt 17; Mk 9; Lk 9).

But even the skin of the face of Moses emitted rays of light when he came down from Mount Sinai with the two Tables of the Law, so much so that he normally kept his head veiled to avoid increasing the fear of the people (Ex 34).

The three young men whom Nebuchadnezzar had thrown into the furnace because they refused to adore his golden statue remained unharmed (Dan 3) and so also Paul when he was bitten by a viper at Malta (Acts 28).

Let us remember the long fasts of Moses (Ex 34) and Jesus (Mt 4; Mk 1; Lk 4); and, as far as levitation is concerned, we have Jesus walking on the waters (Mt 14; Mk 6; Jn 6) and in the end ascending to heaven (Lk 24).

Let us now set out on a rapid excursus among the corresponding phenomena that are shown us by hagiography, all capable of being reduced to the principle of the moulding action exerted by the psyche on the soma.

Saint Francis is the first illustrious stigmatized and, from him to Teresa Neumann and Padre Pio, there are innumerable examples of an action of the psyche on the body, where it moulds – in a manner that may vary from case to case – the signs of the Passion and causes these wounds to bleed and then even makes them disappear completely or makes them re-appear every Good Friday or even simply every Friday.

Closely similar to the stigmata are the dermatoglyphisms, namely signs that appear on the skin due to the effect of, for example, a dominant emotion.

But these modifications may also occur in the internal organs of the body. Let us recall a little known example, the one of Sister Maria Villani, who died in 1670 at eighty-six years of age: in her heart there was found an open wound of the same shape and size of the figure that this servant of God had drawn on a page of a treatise she had composed.

Examples of luminosity. Saint Colombini of Siena entered a hospice to pass the night there; on reaching the dormitory, he opened his tunic, but woke up everybody with the solar glow emitted by his chest. The Archbishop of Ragusa took the hand of Saint Filippo Neri into his own to kiss it and remained thunderstruck when he saw it sparkle like gold and shine like the sun.

Odour of sanctity is the extraordinary perfume that emanates from the body of some saints and then even from their corpse; in certain cases the body does not decompose and also lags in assuming its normal and characteristic rigidity, and sometimes even remains warm for a long time, in a certain way almost as if it were still alive.

The Blessed Maria degli Angeli, a Carmelite, emanated a particular perfume that enabled her fellow sisters to find her immediately in the convent by simply following her trail. The court perfumer of the Savoias declared that this perfume did not resemble any of the existing ones, and the sisters in fact called it an odour of paradise.

The first time the tomb of Saint Teresa of Avila was opened, her body was found intact: it exhaled a delicious perfume and emanated a sweet oil that soaked into her clothes and the surrounding ground.

Incombustibility is a phenomenon that not only recurs in hagiography, but even in the religious phenomenology of today or of epochs very close to us on fixed occasions and places widely apart: In Natal at the Hindu temple of Umbilo, at Singapore, in Mysore, in the State of Chitral, at Tahiti, in the Fiji Islands, in the Antilles, at Mauritius, at Saint Helen and at Langadha (in Greek Macedonia).

Extreme fasting is the capacity of surviving without either eating or drinking (or almost) for a long time, while prolonged waking is the capacity of abstaining from sleep for extraordinarily long periods: even these are facts that are extensively documented in both hagiography and the religious phenomenology of widely different traditions.

Levitation, lastly, is mentioned in the lives of Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Peter of Alcantara, Saint Filippo Neri, Saint Paul of the Cross and many others, though the most characteristic charism would seem to be that of Saint Giuseppe of Copertino: he levitated very frequently and in a most prodigious manner, moving in the air over considerable distances, exactly as if he were flying, as was confirmed by innumerable witnesses. There are even cases of men of God (like Saint Raymond of Pégnafort, Saint Jacinth, Saint Peter of Alcantara) who on given occasions walked for a long time on water.

We have thus arrived at the fourth and last part of our classification, namely all the various *phenomena that reveal a moulding action of the psyche regenerated by the Spirit on the bodies of others, on the environment and on nature.*

This action is expressed above all in the miraculous healings, both in those that are so extensively reported in the New Testament and in those that abound in hagiography and frequently occur in such places as Lourdes, healings that in some way have a counterpart in psychic healings and the so-called “psychic surgery” of the Philippines and Brazil (a discussed but most impressive phenomenon that has yet to be studied in greater detail).

Witness to the *psyche’s moulding action on the external realities* is borne in the Gospels by the transformation of the water into wine at the marriage in Cana (Jn 2), the two multiplications of the bread and the fish (Mt 14 and 15): Mk 6 and 8; Lk 9; Jn 6), the miraculous fishing (Mt 4; Mk 1; Lk 5; Jn 21). The fig tree withered with the power of the faith (Mt 21; Mk 11), and the calmed storm (Mt 8; Mk 4; Lk 8).

Let us concentrate our attention on the phenomenon of multiplication of food. Apart from the manna that falls from heaven to nourish the Hebrew people while crossing the desert to reach the Promised Land (Ex 16), there are some even more specific examples in the Old Testament. Elijah multiplied the bread in the jar and in the oil skin of a poor widow (1 Kings 17); and something similar is also attributed to Elisha (2 Kings 4).

But facts of this kind are recalled also in hagiography in connection with, for example, Saint André Hubert Fournet, Saint Gaspare del Bufalo, Don Bosco and Cottolengo.

To give just one example, at the little orphanage founded by the Curate of Ars the granary filled with grain and the bread bin filled with dough in a prodigious manner in the periods when famine was abroad. The Curate had hidden a statue of Saint Francis Régis in the granary, to whom he addressed continuous prayers on those occasions. He then told his orphans to go and measure the supplies that remained: and the girls barely succeeded in opening the granary doors, from which the grain immediately overflowed. During the pastoral visit following one of these prodigious events, the Bishop of Belley went into the famous granary and, wanting to put his saintly parish priest to the test, suddenly raised his hand to a certain height and asked him right away: “The grain arrived up to there, didn’t it?” “No, Monseigneur, higher than that: up to there!”

In parapsychology the paramystic phenomenon of the multiplication of food is in a certain way recalled by the phenomenon of the apport of objects and even living beings in closed environments.

Thus, to do no more than mention another type of phenomenon, the calmed tempest may find some counterpart in the action of the so-called rain magicians, but even more so it can find close analogies in many episodes related by hagiography.

I have pleasure in here mentioning one of these, though of an opposite sign: a hurricane is said to have been provoked with a prayer by Saint Scolastica to enable her to concern herself at greater length with things of God and her own brother, Saint Benedict, rather than returning to her monastery as the rule would have required.

Episodes regarding the *prestige they enjoyed with animals* and the *loving dominion they exercised over them* are reported in the case of very many saints. Here, too, I shall limit myself to mentioning but a single fact, taking it from among the less well known ones, though not for that reason any less charming: Saint Rosa of Lima had her room full of gnats that never stung her: at a certain hour of the day she invited them to praise the Lord, and they did so with a particularly melodious general buzz: at a certain moment after nightfall Saint Rosa bade them silence, and they stopped humming so that the saint could sleep in peace.

My review of these four essential categories of phenomena has been extremely summary, intended only to give a bare idea by means of just a few examples that the need for brevity induced me to select solely from the tradition of Judeo-Christian spirituality.

But I must not forget, but rather underscore that phenomena of this kind occur also in widely differing traditions, in all parts of the world and in all latitudes.

One can hardly overlook the extremely close analogy that links the paramystic phenomena to those that can be defined as simply paranormal. Nor must one overlook their essential difference: whereas the phenomena studied by parapsychology are purely human, derive from the psyche, the paramystic phenomena are of a pneumatic nature: they pass through the psyche, but have their more remote spring in the Spirit with a capital "S", i. e. in the Divinity itself.

There can be no doubt as to the power of the Spirit at every level. It seems very clear from the Gospels that the renewal that the divine Spirit brings about at the highest levels does not set out to be a mere interior transformation, but seeks to operate on man's being and his total condition at all levels.

When John the Baptist came to know in prison of the works of Jesus, he sent him two disciples to ask him: "Are you the one who is to come or do we have to wait for another?". And Jesus replied neither yes nor no, nor did he formulate theoretical discourses of any kind. He indicated them some pure and simple facts witnessing that there had been put in the world a new and renewing life, a life that transformed at all levels and worked in a more concrete and effective manner: "Go", he said. "and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Mt 11, 2-6).

The total transformation of man and of all creation at every level is the ultimate event, is the eschatological event promised for the occasion of the total advent of the kingdom of God, for when the divine will shall have its total triumph "on earth as in heaven".

Of this ultimate and resolute event the paramystic phenomena are the "advance payment" or "first fruit", if we want to use these two Pauline expressions to define them (1 Cor 15, 20 and 23; 2 Cor 1, 22): that is to say, they represent the anticipation, the living prefiguration of what in the last days is to be the glorious condition of the risen.

8. Human values and affects in the eternal life of God

Each man has his values, his interests and affects; the things that are of value to him and are important, the things in which he believes, the persons that are dear to him.

Certain philosophies teach us detachment, but our feelings tell us that being completely detached from everything is not good for our humanity.

The authentic values call for our full attention. They have to be loved. We feel that our love is due to everything that is good, to everything that is truly lovable.

Our absolute God, He who is lovable above all other things, the Supremely Lovable is God. How could we detach ourselves from God?

But here we do not want to speak solely of Him. God is creator of the universe. Among the creatures of the universe there are we men: privileged creatures, made in the image and likeness of God. Each human creature, each person is a God who is beginning, is a potential Absolute.

Each human creature has to be loved for its own sake. We could never consider any man as a mere means, or instrument, for obtaining something else. Each man is an end in himself. And has to be loved to an infinite extent, just as God loves him.

Each man is unique, unsubstitutable, never interchangeable. Each is himself, and forever so. Each is called upon to realize the divine perfection, and in his very personal and, I insist, unique manner: with all his inimitable personal creativity. God calls each by name, and with a different name: with the name that is peculiar of him and of no other.

The desperation that takes many people when they lose a person dear to them shows and attests, with the strongest possible evidence, that this personality is unsubstitutable.

“You have lost a son? But you are young, you can put another in the world”. Could one possibly say something more stupid? And yet there are people who said it, as if a son were a little dog (I love dogs far too much not to wonder whether a dog, that particular dog, is not unique in his own manner, but this is a consideration that will be understood only by initiates, i. e. those who have had dogs in their home just like true members of their family).

Let us assume that a parent, hearing himself invited to substitute that son with another, just as one replaces a broken-down car with another, manages to control himself and keep calm. What would he answer? He could say, possibly with a slightly forced smile: “Certainly, my dear, we can have another son. And we would love him just like the one we lost: But it would be another, it would no longer be he”.

We spoke of a God who creates the universe and donates himself to his creation to an infinite extent. Such a God gives us everything, he gives us every perfection. He can do everything for us.

When one says that God can do everything, that he is omnipotent, this must not be understood that he can do everything at this moment, here and now, in this earthly dimension. His kingdom is not of this world, where, quite contrary, he is crucified. Let us not forget that Christianity is the religion of the God who in this earthly dimension is born in a stable and dies on the cross.

But in the end God rises again by virtue of his infinite love. And in the end, on the day of the Lord and universal resurrection, he will defeat sin, death and all evil and establish his definitive, eternal kingdom over all things.

The kingdom of God will also be of this earth. And therefore we pray: “Our Father, who art in heaven... thy kingdom come, in earth as it is in heaven”. And likewise “hallowed be thy name”, which here today is cursed in every possible manner; and “thy will be done”, the divine will that today, here, is for the most part disregarded, opposed, ignored.

God will affirm his will over all things, at every level, thanks also to the cooperation of his creatures. God stands in need of men. The forces of evil are in clear advantage in a large part of the creation, but shall not prevail; the final triumph belongs to God by virtue of his infinite love, which is stronger than death.

Ultimately prevailing over the entire creation, God completes the creation and donates himself without limits to each one of us. He renders each perfect and therefore also eternal.

It is impossible that such a God should annul us or even reduce just one of us humans to nothing. It is impossible that He should annul what for each one of us constitutes an authentic value.

Here we have the omnipotence of God: He gives eternal life to all our authentic values, to everything that is rightly dear to us. He not only saves everything from death, but gives infinite development to each value, to every good thing.

And now let us see the concrete consequences at the various levels of what has just been said. Let us begin with the level at which our psychic research is carried out.

Does physical death involve the annulment of the entire being of an individual man? Frontier parapsychology suggests the very opposite.

“Frontier” means “open to the other dimension”. A parapsychology can render itself available for recognizing the reality of the other dimension when it is pushed ahead with the necessary intelligence and sensitivity. It ends up by giving us, if not the “proof” in the strictest and mathematical sense, at least sufficient “clues” suggesting that life continues after death.

A research conceived in these terms proves to be open to accepting the phenomenon just as it offers itself. The phenomenon must undoubtedly be subjected to critical examination, but without mortifying it. A frontier parapsychology pushed fully ahead reveals to us another dimension populated by souls that still have their personalities and whose faculties of feeling and reasoning are intact.

Let us consider what we know about life after death due to frontier parapsychology. It seems that the souls generally remain in a kind of mental, onyric environment, i.e. an environment that can be compared with our dreams. But the dreams are intersubjective: dreams that in one and the same “sphere” are jointly lived by all those who are bound to each other by certain links of affinity.

Each soul conserves an earth-like human form and also sees the other souls in human forms that correspond to those they had on this earth, though more luminous and as if transfigured. All these souls move in environments that, though transfigured, resemble those of the earth. Meadows, woods, mountains, the sea, gardens and houses with their interiors. The mind is creative and forges all these landscapes and even the dwellings due to a purely psychological need, this in harmony with its mental habits, which for the moment continue.

During this astral period of earth-like life each soul freely does what it always vainly hoped to be able to do in life. Each soul thus sustains its own aspirations and tastes as best it can.

But at a certain moment the soul feels that it cannot endlessly continue this kind of vacation of the spirit. Even the guides urge it to set out on the road of elevation. This is a difficult and arduous path that passes through renunciation of the soul’s earthly attachments.

A shortcut to this spoliation is the loss of the forms, the memories, the affects. A soul told us: “I had enemies, but who are they? They harmed me, but what exactly was it? I had attachments and rancours, but which? I really don’t remember!”

It would seem that this loss of affects and memories is not definitive. It seems to be a suspension rather than a loss and promotes the detachment that seems to be the obligatory point of passage for realizing the mystic ascent.

The soul completely empties itself of itself in order to be wholly God’s, and his alone. Simple restorations or repairs would be of little use: the old edifice has to be razed to the ground so that an entirely new one may rise in its place. Thus, if the new man is to be born, it is as well that the old man should die: it will be appropriate for the individual to pass through an initiation death.

The soul empties itself wholly of itself and loses all its individual characteristics. But one might now ask oneself: will it not at least save itself as such, in its pure essence?

Let us try to give a valid answer to this last question. Our analysis of life after death tells us that a soul, even though it has lost the memories of its earthly existence, subsists as soul, as a spiritual personality, as a Self. But we are here concerned with a Self that has become devoid of empirical contents: everything has been overcome and left behind. (This does not mean, however, that memories, notions, images, experiences of various kinds and empirical contents of all sorts cannot subsequently be recuperated).

At a certain moment there come to our aid also experiences into which Hindu spirituality has gained very special insight. These experiences tell us that, abstracting from everything that forms our intimate personal life, abstracting from the sensations, the feelings, the thoughts that come and go, there remains the essential core of every spirituality, there remains only what confers its originary sense of being upon every spirituality: the pure I, the pure Self.

But once it has been reduced to the bone, as we might say, this pure Self comes to be configured as a quid that could indifferently be either mine or somebody else's: nothing makes me see how and why this pure Self should be mine and not somebody else's.

The Indian spirituality of the Upanishads, the Vedanta and the Yoga confirms to us that in the Self we have the core of the personality, of every personality. And it also shows us that each one of us can have direct experience of it within himself. And, lastly, makes us see that each one of us, by direct experience, can realize that the Self is immortal.

But now there arise the problems that follow. The core of the personality survives, agreed. But what becomes of the persons who are dear to us, considered in what we might call the most empirical aspects of their personalities?

And what becomes of our values? What becomes of everything that quite rightly attracts us, that we find beautiful and interesting, and that sustains our spirit?

And, coming back to the persons, what becomes of the relationship of love, friendship that binds us to them? If we ourselves do not save ourselves also in some empirical connotations, if we do not survive also in those empirical connotations that give some concreteness to these relationships, how can these relationships be saved as such?

The Hindus use *maya*, illusion, to describe all those empirical connotations and even our selfsame values: all the things that outside the pure Self may please us, render us curious and involve and enthuse us in some way.

If all this is illusion, it is all destined to perish. What sense is there, then, in letting ourselves become involved in what is destined to pass? Why love what is destined to vanish like a soap bubble? What sense is there in committing ourselves as scientists, historians, artists, entrepreneurs, politicians, social reformers, willing citizens? Why not reduce our entire human life to a gigantic Thebaid where all of us are engaged in nothing other than "saving our soul"?

Humanism loses significance in this perspective: it becomes reduced to a pastime or, worse still, a waste of time. At the very most, one could attribute a mere ancillary function: it would be merely functional to the organization of a world reduced to an immense monastery.

In contrast with this, we feel that many things have in themselves a value of their own. Could this sensation, which is clearly and firmly within us, be illusory?

In the other dimension we are all destined to suffer an initiation death of which our physical death would be nothing other than the first step. Now would this death, simple

passage rather than definitive state, be followed by resurrection or is it an end in itself and therefore an irreversible ultimate condition?

The Bible speaks to us of a resurrection and announces it as the ultimate event. A non-literal and pedestrian, but rather intelligent and penetrating interpretation of the biblical text makes us understand that, in that particular perspective, the creative process continues through the evolution of the cosmos and the history of men. Here creation is not just a mere fact accomplished once and for all, but an ongoing process that aims at its perfective completion.

A God in the strong sense completes his creation. As it becomes gradually more receptive, the creation is destined to receive the total gift that God – as a prospect – makes of himself. The creation is a new God in germ. Salvation of the integral human personality and all its authentic values is fully affirmed by the Christian announcement, affirmed in everything it has, be it explicit or implicit.

The final resurrection has been configured with extreme fantasy, especially by painters, whereas the Bible text is far more restrained in representing it.

It is quite true that the image of bodies coming out of their sepulchres (as can be found in the Gospel according to John, 5, 28, a text that can appeal to the expanse of human bones come to life again described by Ezekiel, 37, 1-14).

An operation of this kind would indeed be implemented after the destruction and disappearance of almost the totality of the tombs and their remains. Though suggestive, that image would certainly prove to be improper, even though it is inspired by the finding of the empty sepulchre after the death of Christ, whose individual resurrection constitutes the prototype of the universal resurrection we await. In Revelation (20, 13) it is also the sea that, in its turn, gives back the dead.

Rather, frontier parapsychology and the descriptions of life after death of which we dispose comfort us in interpreting the resurrection as the act with which a soul reconstitutes its concrete and compact – solidified, if you wish – aspect, doing this by its own virtue, concentrating and consolidating its own energies.

With its own human aspect, each soul would certainly reassume a concrete body, but transformed into a perfect instrument of the spirit and vehicle of the loftiest spiritual life. Such a body would not only be “transformed”, but also “incorruptible”, as the Apostle Paul tells us (1 Cor 15).

This would be the recuperation of a corporeity that is no longer biological with all its limits and ills, but a wholly spiritualized corporeity.

The letter of the biblical representations is not to be repeated indiscriminately, but rather has in some way to be interpreted in accordance with what could be its true intentions, its profound spiritual significance.

What then does resurrection mean in substance? It means that the initiation death is not in any way whatsoever intended as a prelude to the definitive annihilation of what we might call our humanist dimension. It only aims at the dissolution of the old man that is in us, i.e. the sinner, the egoist, the egocentric.

Despoiled of the old man just as a butterfly frees itself of its chrysalis, our humanity will come to be implemented in all its fullness and perfection. And this by virtue of the disappearance of the intolerable incrustation, the cuirass of egoity, closure within oneself, sin and death that previously girdled it with limiting and suffocating effects.

Together with our humanity there is recuperated our matter, our corporeity. In this sense: corporeity and matter seem closely connected with the memory and the individuality of each one of us. Using just a single word, we could say: with its empiricity. Despoiling oneself of every empirical connotation is equivalent to despoiling oneself of all individual character.

If I may express myself as follows: the personality of each could be symbolized by a kind of onion, where the successive layers represent sensations, feelings, thoughts, ideas and images that populate our field of consciousness, creations of our spirit.

They are all contents or phenomena of consciousness that come and go. Our true interiority can be conceived without them, until it remains pure light of consciousness and first origin of every sense of being, but sense of being devoid of any empirical connotation.

But what would remain of a consciousness despoiled in this manner and, as we might say, “peeled” of all its outside layers that could still distinguish it and render it capable of being defined as the consciousness of Tom rather than Dick or Harry? The empirical connotations are lost, matter is lost, what gives individuality to the body is lost: there remains an originary but empty form.

Many times in our mediumistic communications the entities told us that they lose their memory of earthly life as they gradually empty themselves of all materiality. To a similar extent and in a similar progression they lose the sense of their identity as something that differentiates each one from other souls, so that each soul may feel to be itself and not some different entity.

In principle, this is corporeity, this is matter. Corporeity and matter are not by any means synonyms of either heaviness or crudeness, nor of imperfection or limit.

Even the most sublime work of art is matter to the extent to which it is individualized by an image with lines and colours; or a set of sounds realized by instruments and voices. A trumpet is made of brass, a violin has a case of wood, of a given wood worked and processed in a particular manner. Even the colours are matter, are chemical products enclosed in tubes, from which they are extracted, mixed and then kneaded on a palette, eventually to be applied to a canvas or the plaster of a wall. No colour photography, no matter how perfect, can surrogate the contact of the eye with the original painting wherever this may be conserved, nor can any recording surrogate hearing the concert with one’s own ears in the place where it is given.

Now, is all this not matter? Certainly it is! But at the same time it is also spirit: matter transfigured into spirit without losing any of its materiality. And woe if it were to lose even a minimal part of it!

That is why we face even toilsome and costly voyages in order to be able to contemplate the work wherever it happens to be found or to hear that music played in that particular environment by those artists with their material instruments. Otherwise photographs and recordings of high fidelity could avoid for us the need for making such voyages, though we find that we cannot do without them when even here we discover that being superficial does not satisfy us.

Recuperating humanism, art, science, historical memory, the full sense of the individuality of each coincides with the recuperation of matter and corporeity: these are not overcome and put aside, they are only suspended.

Liberation from matter is pursued by a spirituality of Hinduist stamp.

The monotheists, on the other hand – Jews, Christians, Muslims – believe in a Creator God in the strong sense, creator even of matter. In the monotheist perspective matter is necessarily valid as such and is good and perfectible. And as such it is therefore insuppressible as term and support and means of expression of the most sublime spirituality.

Monotheist asceticism does not suppress matter, but limits itself to suspending it. It suspends it in order to dominate it better and thus to forge it in such a manner that it will realize itself, precisely as matter, to the utmost of its potential.

Upon resurrection each one will once again have his former memories and affects and also the full sense of his own identity and personality. Nothing prevents us from

thinking that when we rediscover our identity, when we recuperate the memory even of our former personal image, the soul restored to its full humanity will not be induced to represent itself by means of that image, not least to be recognized in the most tangible manner by all.

If that is so, the re-acquirement of the bodily dimension should also express itself in the recuperation of the concrete but transfigured image of one's own body. Of the texts that the Bible dedicates to the resurrection one could therefore accept also some image like, indeed, the one of the bodies that rise spiritual and transformed.

The entities that correspond with our research group at the Convivium in Rome talk to us of the final universal resurrection in more explicit terms and tell us that we will at that time relive the memories and affects of this earth. They also tell us that all those who loved each other will once again be together – and forever – in God. Lastly, they tell us that there will be a kind of exchange of gifts: the rising souls will bring sanctity to those living on earth at the time and will acquire humanism from them with all the fruits of the progress made until that moment by the sciences and all the other forms of human commitment in the world.

Is further progress conceivable at that point? Why not, if the infinite love of God is the total gift he makes us so that we may become like him? Would such a God be jealous of us? And could he therefore set us insuperable limits?

Once we have all become like God himself, what would there remain of the individuality of each? There would remain, I think, the memory: a memory so powerful as to re-actualize every event, rendering it immortal, eternal in the absolute Mind of God. In other words, it would remain like a film of the life of each one of us: like the films of many individual lives rendered once again actual, so that in the divine Mind all the past events would not only be remembered, but also perfectly relived.

Together with all those who love me, each one will be able to relive my personal existence, just like his own existence and that of anybody else. Thus the love that binds us will become concrete in perfect knowledge and understanding of each other.

This is true not only as regards those I love today, but for all: because I shall then love all, we shall all love each other with a perfect, infinite love. I shall donate everything to all, including my lived biography. To all and to each I shall confide everything, and shall be immensely glad to do so, because in God we shall be fully friends in perfect confidence.

Thus my interest for the others, my intelligence of love for each will induce me to live the biography of every other human being in a contemporaneous overall vision, in a beatific contemplation protended towards the ultimate objective of the divine omniscience.

Once I was enclosed within “my own facts” and “minded my own business”, indifferent as regards all the rest. Then I came to know one of my likes, took a liking to him and understood him better. Little by little, the family of my dear ones and all my friends became larger, enriching itself with many persons whom I did not know before or, knowing them, did not understand and possibly even disliked, opposed and, in the limit, even hated.

In the end we shall all like each other, and know and understand each other in a total manner and shall live in full communion among us, with all and each, in God. In Him every human value and affect will thus receive the greatest exaltation, to an infinite extent.

Indeed, in God we shall truly have all, will be all; and each one will be perfectly himself, and all will be perfectly one and yet many together, in full communion, in love and felicity without limits.

9. We are all a single being

Today we polemicize a great deal, and rightly so, against every form of “protagonism”. I have had occasion to note that the most severe seem to be those who distinguish themselves by the most clamorous, tenacious and incurable protagonism.

They scrutinize the sins of others with a magnifying glass, but are practically blind when it comes to their own. Since they do not see them, nothing disturbs them: they are happy that way.

It is a happiness conquered at a high price on account of everything that has to be sacrificed to the idol of the cult of oneself: an exacting idol that can readily become a tyrant and tormentor.

If certain women offered our good God just a twentieth of the sufferings they face on the altar of their beauty, they would make very rapid progress on the road of sanctity.

And the same could be said as regards the impossible life that many men face in furtherance of their career, money, power and also and always for the greater glory of themselves in the endeavour of realizing themselves as protagonists on a growing scale.

The egocentrism of some is so shameless, but also so convinced as to be almost touching, if it were not so very irritating on account of its almost maniacal petulance. Speaking of themselves, indeed speaking in general, is something they cannot do without. It has become an addiction. It generates forms of self-adoration that at first tend to make one smile, then make us sad and eventually get out back up.

They are like children or, better, like certain particularly temperamental and spoilt children who, if they are not the centre of attention for even half a minute, start screaming and possibly even damage something.

Now, a child has to be taken care of because it needs this. Remaining at the centre of attention may be functional for a child for the purpose of survival and growth. But as the subject grows, the need for all these attentions and cares and caresses and manifestations and reassurances from others becomes less and less.

But not in the case of the born protagonist, who dominates the external environment but does not succeed in dominating himself, who can achieve things and found empires, but keeps on displaying immature and even infantile behaviour.

I have here delineated a truly pitiless picture of the aspirant protagonist. Let us now see whether and to what extent this could possibly be also a self-portrait. Let each one analyze himself well and draw his own conclusions. May he not be afraid of discovering himself, forego the defences that prevent him from seeing himself as he really is. And let those who are without sin throw the first stone!

Let us see whether some good thought might not also be helpful for me, whether it could not offer me, as also to all and to each, some hint for meditation.

One thing we may note first of all: individualism is certainly not a product of the modern age, but has become accentuated in its course. Man affirms himself artificer of himself and his destiny. He affirms himself as genius. As scientist, as philosopher, as artist, as politician and founder of states, as entrepreneur. In this new perspective it is the individual who realizes himself and realizes his own works with his human forces, with his individual initiative.

In the primitive-archaic civilizations there was and still is a different feeling. The individual lives and acts in communion with the family and the people to which he belongs. Each has a function, has a mission to perform for the whole by virtue of energies that come to him from the whole to which he belongs.

This whole is the community, and each community has its soul, has its sacrality, has its gods, or its God.

The individual may technically do his best, but always remains clearly conscious of operating by virtue of an initiative that comes from above or also from the depth of the collective life in which he is immersed. No primitive-archaic would ever dream of attributing everything to his individual initiative and virtue.

The “genius” that inspires the individual is felt as a presence that he is very far from being able to control. A genius conceived in this manner is a force that undoubtedly operates through that individual, but derives from an ambit that is not within his control, that transcends him.

It transcends from deep within, as we might say. In each individual there is a profound dimension on which he cannot lay his hands. He may certainly draw inspiration from it: but only by opening himself to this profound dimension that is in him, so that it may reveal itself to him on its own initiative, by grace.

We can never put our hand on the sun; but we can raise the blinds and clean the window panes so that the sun may illumine the rooms of our home. We thus gather the inspirations from within by rendering our little interior windows more transparent: it seems that there is no other way.

At a certain moment in the historic development of the religiosity of archaic peoples there may take place the monotheist “revelation” that has also been defined as a “revolution”. No play on words! Indeed, monotheism affirms that all the existing are nothing other than creatures of God, brought into being by Him, finalized for Him. This revelation is a revolution, because it no longer leaves any room for autonomous sacred powers who are finalized for themselves.

These sacred powers, the ones that were previously called “gods”, are to be considered at the very most as “angels” in the service of the one God. If the Greek word *ánghelos* means “messenger”, angels are those spiritual creatures who have the function of announcing God, of revealing him. Through his angels, God, absolute, eternal, immutable, acts in time and in the multiplicity of the situations.

In the monotheist vision all the creatures are called upon to cooperate with the Creator in completing the creation: and therefore individual being, and in particular each man, is called to a function that can be defined as “angelic”.

In the monotheist religious perspective we humans acquire consciousness of being only of God and for God. Our true good, our true life, our true being is God. And whoever illudes himself that he makes himself and can live only for himself proves to have a very limited and inadequate consciousness of himself. A very different maturation and consciousness is demonstrated by those who live for the others and the Whole.

If my true being is the Whole, I really *am* and *am* more to the extent to which I live for the Whole.

I thus feel an intimate need for opening myself to the existence of the others and the universe, the entire creation. I feel the need for no longer limiting myself to pursuing my own instances, but pursuing rather the instances of others just like my own, feeling them as mine.

This means immersing myself in the others. At a certain religious level it means immersing myself in the God who is the profound and true being of every creature; and therefore, by very virtue of this fact, it means immersing myself in the profound being of each man.

If immersing myself in God is the road, if it is the point of passage of my immersion in the profound being of each man, the biography of each man will appear to me as the long and travailed itinerary by means of which that individual man arrives at God.

Each individual existence is the history of the ascent of that man to God. Lowering ourselves into the existence of each man we can again pass through the insight-

enhancing process that gradually leads each of us to the more mature spiritual discoveries. Identifying ourselves with the existence of all the others, we can relive in the first person the process of ascent of the whole of mankind. We can re-actualize the passage of the human spirit from the initial phases in which it pursues far more superficial and deceiving ends to further phases in which it passes to pursuing the true, absolute Good.

This is the divine epilogue that ennoble the existence of each one of us. It turns it into a ladder to perfection, even though this can be pursued by means of a more complicated itinerary, with many errors and many backward steps.

Every individual existence is the story of what God has done and does in a human being, and through him, for his perfecting and, in the limit, his deification.

We have come to realize that loving our neighbour as we love ourselves means taking as live an interest in the affairs of every other individual as we take in our own. One can take an interest in others in the sense of “sticking our nose” in their business in order to gossip to their detriment. But there is also an interest in other persons and their doings and problems that has nothing whatever to do with the spirit of gossip.

Gossip is an outpouring of malignity; the taking part in the life of others in the sense I have explained here is only an attention of love.

There are the malign, but also the benevolent, who instinctively sympathize with other persons, taking an interest in them and sharing their vicissitudes, joys, successes and delusions.

There are persons of whom we spontaneously become “fans”. They are the ones we find particularly “likeable”. Others seem to us far less pleasing and, in the limit, may even repel us altogether. But it can also happen that later, when we know these persons better, we end up by finding them just as likeable. And thus we begin to take an interest also in them.

And then there are personages whose affairs we follow with curiosity at first and then also with a little anxiety, with full identification: in the context of fiction, these are the heroes of novels, comic strips, films, television serials that go on for years.

These are indeed “our heroes”. Through them we live what we have not been, what we can never be. We project ourselves into them, incarnate ourselves in them, we live by proxy stories that are not ours: stories of kings, leaders, men of state, scientists, explorers, saints and promoters of civilization, benefactors.

We take an interest in the good, but then also in the wicked, the miserable, the persons less likeable and least favoured by grace. Without necessarily justifying evil, we come to understand the motivations of those who are its prisoners. And we are in communion with all and each.

There is a further enlargement of interest when the protagonists of the stories are no longer only kings and queens or, in any case, “very important persons” as in the tragedies of former days, but burghers and also common people, as they generally are in modern dramas, comedies, novels and in the other things generally represented on the screen, be it large or small.

Not only the lives of highly placed personages, but also the ordinary existences are of interest. I am well aware of this, and therefore very happy to listen to the taxi drivers, the artisans, the peasants, the immigrants, the policeman, the housewife, the youngsters, the children who talk to me about themselves and their vicissitudes and problems.

They are content, because they have found someone who willingly listens to them, something that is not easy today; and I, too, am content in listening to their discourses, accounts and confidences.

In this civilization, where direct dialogue between persons is in crisis, there are far too many people who, rather than conversing, prefer to watch television. Nevertheless,

even on television there are broadcasts, including some with a very high audience index, where somebody is always interviewed and asked to talk about his personal affairs.

There is a programme entitled "*I fatti vostri*" (About yourself), but also "*Chi l'ha visto?*" (Who has seen him?), where the interviewed persons are all in anxious search of a family member who has disappeared. An interest is taken in even the least facts of people, even the most squalid ones, perhaps particularly the latter.

There may here be a component of unhealthy curiosity, or also a taste for being consoled by the vision of the misfortunes of others; but there is also, and above all, a sincere interest in others.

The others can be "the hell", as we are told by a personage of Sartre, but nevertheless seem indispensable for the existence of the individual: and this is very clearly felt by a prisoner kept in isolation.

The others are a part of ourselves: even the individual who lives wholly alone comes to feel this intuitively. Rather, solitude can be a road for communicating with the others, with all, in greater depth, once the superficial encounter has been left behind, once the daily gossip has been silenced.

At first – or even at times, and more at certain particular moments – we feel to be isolated. We then pass on to digging deeper within ourselves and there we discover that all this immense multitude of leaves and flowers springs and ramifies from a single common root.

The great discovery is that we are all leaves and flowers of one and the same great tree that embraces the universe and is the totality of being. The single root of the tree is the Absolute.

If we are all one, my life belongs also to the others, the existences of the others are my other existences. I thus have a thousand lives, billions of lives.

Here is a fine variant of the ancient, suggestive, though highly debatable idea of the reincarnation. Here we have the idea of a reincarnation that is no longer successive, but rather contemporary (if we may call it such).

Here the idea of reincarnation encounters and merges into a single whole with the concept of the communion of the saints. According to this concept, which seems altogether fundamental in a Christian vision, none of us is an island: each one is linked with the others by invisible communicant vessels, and each one contributes with the others to constituting a kind of collective soul.

And thus everything that any one of us does is done not only for himself, but for the others. What I am not capable of doing, you will do for me: and where you fail to arrive, I shall work in your place.

Those who believe in reincarnation are not wholly wrong when they wonder how an individual could all by himself pursue and attain the sum of the perfections by living just a single existence.

This is a problem that they try to resolve by conceiving a series of existences in temporal succession. It is like series of pearls on a string. The string is the "individuality", that develops through a succession of "personalities", i. e. individual and personal earthly existences.

In the perspective of this classical reincarnation concept one can also imagine that a succession of earthly existences would enrich an individuality. But one can also ask oneself how a mere succession of earthly existences could attain the perfection that could be attained by a spiritual ascent – in one with the scientific and technological progress and the artistic, literary and musical creativity – of all of mankind.

It is one thing to dispose of, say, a hundred lives or even a thousand; it is quite another to dispose of billions and billions of personal existences by means of which the collective existence of humanity is realized.

To say it in other words: having at my disposal only a limited series of existences, no matter how large it may be, means that I can certainly enrich myself by their teachings, but I nevertheless remain excluded from the quasi-totality of the possible human existences.

To ascend to perfection I can therefore dispose of the totality of the personal human existences, that is to say, not only my own existence, but of the existences of all the others. I shall, in any case, stand in need of divine help, but among men there is a division of labour. Each plays his part. In the end the contribution of each is placed at the disposal of all. In the act of benefiting of the contribution of all the others, each assumes for himself what the others have done for him, have done in his place.

We can now ask ourselves how this assimilation of the contributions of others is possible in concrete terms. An idea may come to us from considering a certain phenomenon that occurs in the course of mediumistic communications. I can personally attest it on the basis of my personal experience.

I have noted, for example, that in our communications we are often called upon to encounter a disincarnate soul that declares that in the course of its earthly existence it never spoke our language. If it has some difficulty in expressing itself, I can give it the following advice: that it should limit itself to thinking the pure concepts, without searching for words. These will come with all spontaneity from us human subjects of the communication, who still live on the earth and at present express ourselves in our Italian language.

The communicating entity relaxes, entrusts itself to us, without worrying any longer about playing an active part in the search for words. By doing so, it immerses itself even deeper in ourselves, to the point of constituting an aggregate with us that is maintained for the duration of the contact. It is as if there were formed a composite entity with contributions from both us and our visitor.

In merging with us, be it even temporarily, the entity enriches itself with the knowledge we have of our language. The thing happens within a few instants. The entity “learns” our language not a little at a time in the course of years (as happened in our case). But in one fell swoop, globally.

The experience I have mentioned shows us the possibility of such a global and immediate learning. It happens just as a piece of blotting paper becomes globally impregnated and all in the same instant with everything that has been written on an entire page: this is the very image that an entity used to explain the phenomenon to me.

It took me years and years to learn my language as I know it now. And yet the entity appropriates itself in a few instants of this fruit of such a long labour of mine. This phenomenon possibly explains in some way how each one of us could assimilate what has been learnt and implemented by all the others.

We now have to clarify that each one of us can assimilate, even rapidly and globally, the fruit of the work of the others and the evolution of others, because we form part of but a single being. We humans, as we said, we creatures are not by any means strangers for each other: we are cells of the same organism and therefore whatever the others do is as if it were done by another part of ourselves.

With the help of God and the contributions of the entire human kind, each one of us can climb the ladder of perfection, attaining in the limit even divine perfection. God contemplates all things: and it is by virtue of his absolute, universal, immutable and eternal act that He gives sense of being to every reality. The divine Mind has universal, unitary and contemporary vision of the entire succession of events.

This seeing everything that has happened in a total and adequate manner will be the highest perfection, beatific contemplation. It will be a contemplation of God, but also a seeing “into its profundity”, i. e. into the intimacy of the absolute divine mind, “Bound

up with love together in one volume, / What through the universe in leaves is scattered”, as Dante tells us in the last canto of Paradise.

From the height of the supreme perfection thus attained, we shall contemplate the story of the ascent we made as if, on reaching the peak of a high mountain, we had turned back to contemplate the paths we had followed and re-evoked the adventures we had at each point of those long and tortuous paths.

Re-evoking even the misadventures will be pleasant at this point: *Forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit*, “Perhaps some day it will be a pleasure to remember even these things”, says Enea to his companions at a particularly ugly moment of their travailed odyssey in search for their true homeland.

A soldier come back from the wars likes to speak about his past misadventures. Just as those who have undergone a long operation while fully awake will willingly talk about even its most unpleasant moments.

We liberate ourselves of longstanding traumas by bringing them back into consciousness and telling them to an analyst. We free ourselves of the burden of sins by confessing them. Saint Augustine confessed to God, but also to men, by telling his life, which is the story of how God had freed him.

Re-evoking the less pleasant things is a way of freeing ourselves from them, but also a way of contemplating them in God, *sub specie aeternitatis*; in the eyes and under the aspect of eternity.

In this absolute vision reality seems like an immense fresco of great, sublime beauty. Here evil has become no more than a graduated variety of shadows that counterpose themselves to the lights to make them stand out more clearly. Even the negative facts become not only full of interest, but even of beauty, when they are transfigured by the vision we can attain of them in the absolute look of God. It is a catharsis that we will also have in a more human ambit when we contemplate a work of art.

What is there more tragic and atrocious than what is described in a canto of Dante’s *Inferno*? The situation represented is so terrible that we don’t succeed in imagining a more desperate one. Now, how is it that the reading of a canto of the *Inferno*, far from depressing us like some ugly fact in a crime column, actually exalts us and also renders us serene? It is the miracle of the transfiguration that is performed by authentic poetry, by great art.

The negativity of the facts narrated and represented in a mediocre narrative work would have conserved all their heaviness, all their oppressive character, whereas in a true work of art and poetry the materiality of its contents, its sadness, its horror become dissolved in a light of spirituality and becomes beauty and joy.

Indeed, everything is interesting and suggestive due to the sole fact of being. Beautiful and interesting is the variety of the stars in the sky, just like the variety of the things and phenomena of nature as they evolve from the mineral kingdom, via the vegetal and animal kingdoms, right through to the animal man.

The study of man becomes particularly passionate in all its manifestations, even in psychopathology and also in criminal anthropology, notwithstanding its miseries and squalour.

Human history is of extreme interest, and this both as political and social history and a history of literature and the arts, and also of scientific and technological progress.

But history is of no interest whatsoever for the Hindus, who only long to evade from the historical contingency to realize themselves in God who transcends it. What they see and long for is a God imprisoned by the illusion of the empirical and historical reality that envelops and hides him. Only by digging into the crust of this reality and dissolving it can the heart of reality be freed thereof.

What monotheism comes to glimpse and experience is the very opposite: a God who realizes himself by moulding the creation to the point of rendering it perfect, to the point of deifying it. God realizes himself in a completed creation also as Man, this in the fullness of his incarnation. In history Man thus eventually realizes himself as God, and God realizes himself as Man. If in the Hindu vision God realizes himself by liberating himself of the creation, here, in the monotheist perspective, He implements himself by bringing the creation to its ultimate completion.

This creation consists of all of us, intimately associated in one immense being. And the completion of the creation is the work that all of us push ahead together, cooperating with the divine initiative. Here is what we have to be, here is our profound and true being.

10. The dimension where each encounters all

There is a dimension where we all encounter each other and nobody is alone any more. All: who? An indication may be useful; but necessarily preceded by an exclusion.

“We are not alone”, rather, “Wearenotalone” - all in one – is the name of well known review of the UFO contactists. Those who write for it assert that the entire universe is inhabited by extraterrestrials. So that the five billion inhabitants of the earth, should they by any chance feel alone, possibly in a moment of sadness, should know that there are many other billions of beings in the universe on other planets, and solar systems and galaxies, all desirous of becoming our friends and, who knows, they might well offer more valid friendships than those of earth dwellers.

It seems appropriate to me to take this argument as my starting point, but for the precise purpose of immediately laying it aside without expressing any judgments either for or against. Let me say right away that what I have to say will have nothing to do with extraterrestrials, and will concern itself solely with realities of which I have some experience or, at least, some glimmer of an experience.

What I have heard about the ETs does not induce me to affirm their objective existence beyond the possible existence of psychic formations, our own involuntary creations. But that, as I will readily admit, may well be due to my not having delved into the problem to a sufficient extent. Somebody else might develop the discourse also in this direction, but I am certainly not the most appropriate person.

What, then, will I talk about? Well... I shall certainly talk about men. Then, or rather before, I shall talk about God: the “First” par excellence, who gives true sense to all the rest.

And is there by any chance anybody else between God and men? It is said that there are the angels. *Oi ánghelei* means “the messengers” in Greek, messengers of God who announce and manifest Him.

God is one, eternal, infinite, absolute. How does He manifest himself in the multiplicity of the things of this world, in the succession of events?

Dante says: “The glory of Him who moveth everything / Doth penetrate the universe, and shine / In one part more and in another less”. These are the opening lines of Paradise.

Very well, how does God render himself present more than elsewhere in the true and beautiful and good and holy things, in the valid things? The angels are the vehicles of the Divinity and through their manifestation the kingdom of God, which (as Jesus himself told us) “is not of this world”, can become fully extended also to this world, so that “on earth as it is in heaven” there “may be hallowed” the name of God and that “his will be done”.

“Angels” is a word that can have many meanings. In particular, it indicates these pure spirits. But even we men can turn ourselves into angels to the extent to which we become “messengers” of God, his vehicles. Our ultimate end is God, our task is to bring God, mediate Him, announce Him, render Him present.

When one speaks of human beings, one has to remember that, apart from the live ones on this earth, there are the deceased. We members of the Hope Movement pay particular attention to deceased souls. We not only feel them to be present by our side, but also charged with an exquisitely angelic task.

In the Seminars and the Hope Booklets we have impressed a certain development on the thematic of the Children of Light. The collective manifestation of these souls of youngsters is intended for the men of this ultra-scientific and ultra-technicized epoch of ours, all concentrated on this side, secularized and, in the limit, atheist, to show to them not only that the beyond exists, but that it is the beyond of God and eternal life. Thus the children of light appear as the “new angels”.

And therefore we are never alone. Many times the sky above us seems closed by a thick and low cloud cover. The horizon is limited and desolate, the heart is sad. It seems that life has lost its sense and no longer offers us motives for either joy or hope.

All, or almost all, or at least many of us have at some time been in an aircraft. I like this very much. I always try to get a seat by a window. There one is more sheltered from the consumerist seductions of the hostess who passes along the central corridor to sell us cigarettes and foreign liqueurs free of tax. Looking through the window, one sees everything from above: all the human miseries and closures seem to become re-dimensioned, while the horizon enlarges out of all proportion. These are moments when one can feel in communion with all.

Just a few moments before, a low and leaden cloud cover oppressed us. It deprived us of all views. But then we took off and within a few minutes we crossed a dense layer of soot and then the clouds were below us, like castles made of whipped cream, but light and in continuous movement, lined up in numberless multitudes as if to bear us welcome. A fantastic vision is opened before our eyes, which at this point can range across the infinite blue of light.

For me this vision is the symbol of the other dimension at its highest point, where it truly seems the dimension of God. The horizon no longer has limits and even temporal becoming seems overcome. Events are undoubtedly successive, but as if in a book that one keeps in one’s hand, a book wholly open and present for our consideration from the first page to the last. Here everything is known and understood, is recognized and pardoned and conciliated.

This is the dimension of the ultimate future to which we tend, i.e. the future of Paradise. The theologians tell us that there we shall have a beatific vision of God and, in God, of all things: again according to Dante, there we can see “Bound up with love together in one volume, / What through the universe in leaves is scattered”; (Paradise, XXXIII, 85-87).

It is the vision of our future, but also of something that is already present. The future events already exist. Our future in God is an eternal present. Even the most modern and up-to-date scientific theories open the road to affirming that space and time are relative. Parapsychology confirms this. It seems that in the last analysis reality gives itself as if in a four-dimensional continuum where time is only apparent.

Certainly, the succession of events is real in its plan, at its level, but, considered from a higher plane and level, it seems like the succession of the pages of a book to somebody who holds the book in his hand as a whole and considers the entire story panoramically in its unity.

We have seen a film. We have lived it moment by moment, and now we turn our eyes to the reel of frames that lies in front of us, or the disc or videocassette. The story is all there as a whole.

That does not mean that the story was unreal for those who passed through it step by step and lived and suffered it with all the intensity with which each one of us lives and suffers his personal vicissitudes.

But now we have arrived at the ultimate moment, when each one has travelled all his long and arduous road and all the roads come to converge, to meet at the end. We have climbed to the top of the mountain and from there, contemplating the panorama, we see the paths we followed, each point of which recalls some episode for us. Each sees his story once more in a global manner, in a panoramic vision, and offers it to the contemplation of others. All together we see once more and in synthesis everything that has already been done, everything that has already been. And we contemplate the book of the story of the cosmos and of evolution: a book that has now become a single but immense page to be re-read by all together. It is the great final ecstasy, where becoming is concluded and crowned and contemplated as a marvellous fresco.

But in the meantime, the while we are in expectation of that eternal moment and in tension towards it, we are still in time, each one of us lives his own story. And living it day by day is a long and tough experience, so much so as to seem interminable. To say that it is a pure and simple illusion seems improper.

“Pe’ conto mio, la favola piü corta”, says a fine little poem in Roman dialect by Trilussa, “è quella che se chiama Gioventù: / perché... c’era ’na vorta... / e adesso nun c’è piü”. (“As far as I’m concerned, the shortest fable / is the one called Youth / because... it was there once upon a time... / and now is there no more”).

“E la piü lunga? (And the longest?), he asks. And provides the answer right away: “È quella della Vita: / la sento raccontà da che sto ar monnno, / e un giorno, forse, cascherò dar sonno / prima che sia finita...” (The one of life / I’ve heard it told ever since I’ve been in the world, / and one day perhaps I’ll fall into a deep sleep / before it’s all over).

One thing is clear: it would seem wholly improper to me to call “illusion” a story that I “heard told” day by day ever since I’ve been in the world and in such a manner that I live it in the first person and suffer it on my own skin.

Certainly, we are lowered into this reality. It is a very real reality, just as a toothache is very real for as long as it lasts. And who would have the courage of calling unreal a terrible toothache that lasts for the whole of his life?

Each has to bear his own toothache, or his own cross, if you prefer the latter term. Each is called upon to drag out his own long earthly day. But it is also important that each one should be capable of thinking that above the clouds there is the splendid and infinite sky, that he should get used to this idea. Above the travail of the times, the epochs, the individual existences and their conflicts, there is the eternal dimension of God. He is the eternal present. As of this moment, He is already present in his sphere, has been so for ever. The important thing is to be able to elevate ourselves to this sphere, if not totally, as will be the case only at the end, but at least with our thought and our spirit.

That is where we are at home. The truth, the good, the profundity of each one of us, his true being, what he has to be, is all to be found there. There each one of us is, and always will be, what he has to be in accordance with his true nature, in accordance with his ultimate destination.

Many times we do not understand each other, we oppose each other and may even hate each other altogether. We are like the many leaves and blossoms of one and the same tree, unmindful of our common root. But when we arrive at the root, we discover

that we are one. We discover that my most profound reasons coincide with your reasons and those of that other and of all.

Those who, even at a negative moment, are capable of taking off to the altitudes that I spoke about, will be able to dialogue even with their worst opponent just as if they were in the company of their best friend.

What I have just said calls for explanations. None of us is so insensitive, or so wise, as not to remain pained by the malice or, worse, the malign stupidity of many people with whom he comes into conflict in the course of his life, as unfortunately happens all too often.

At first he will also remain greatly upset. He will have some humanly understandable reactions. It may be that for a certain period, meeting our friend, we shall find him literally off the rocker and hear him “let off steam”, as it is said. But then, unless he happens to be a particularly rancorous subject, there is hope that he will regain his serenity, will find an explanation for the wrong he has suffered and, at least deep within himself, becomes even reconciled with the person who caused him that wrong.

If one really wants to re-dimension the reasons of that bitterness within oneself, among the best roads to be attempted there may well be the one of considering also one’s own possible wrongs. A good examination of conscience is the first technique to be attempted.

And then there is another. This is a personal technique of mine, tried also with good success, though not always with immediate effects. If it interests you, I will tell you about it.

It is a practical application that can be deduced from what I have already said in theory. The application is underlain by a very particular experience that I shall recall.

When I was about twenty, I often attended – though without being a member - the meetings of a group of spiritually highly committed friends of what one might call a protestant orientation, though they considered themselves to be pure and simple disciples of Christ. In their company I had a good deal of experience of evangelical cults in many of the Roman churches of those confessions or sects. In various churches the sermon of the pastor was supplemented by the “witnesses” of common faithful.

I particularly remember some men who said that they had been sinners, but that they had now been wholly converted and transformed by divine grace. They described their life before, reviewing many deplorable actions and habits, lacks of charity and egoisms of various kinds, and generally they laid it on as best they could.

But at present, thanks to God, the selfsame person who had behaved in such a negative manner could be said to have been redeemed. He had understood, had repented, and had amended his ways from top to bottom. In order to obtain all this, rather than on his own forces, he had relied on divine power, which indeed had brought about the sinner’s redemption deep down within him, changing his life and, even before that, the very course of his thoughts.

The “old man” had died to give way to the “new man”. But the beautiful, interesting and marvellous thing to note is that all this happened in the intimacy of the person. It was the selfsame person that now seemed wholly transformed.

Very well, when I am angry with someone, and possibly have good reason for being in anger, I try to imagine how that person might be in some further stage of his or her spiritual evolution. I try to imagine that person at the moment when he or she will have recognized the wrongs committed, will have laid aside the behaviours of former days, be sincerely repentant, and will have changed also his or her attitude towards me. At that point a beautiful friendship could even come into being between us. I confess that this ideal vision of a possible future situation is of great comfort for me.

We are often divided not by real dissents, but by simple contrasts of ideas. Even in that case the first thing to ask oneself is: "But am I really sure that I am right?". If the truth is very different from the concept that I had formed of it, I have to be ready to be the first to recognize my error. There will in any case come the day when the revelation of the truth will cause all disputes to disappear.

I recall with pleasure to have seen many people recognize what they previously refused to admit and refine their sensitivity for themes that had previously found them deaf and obtuse. The memory of things that have already happened in the past induces greater hope for the future.

More often than not we are divided by the simple fact of not knowing each other. Our type of civilization renders us estranged from each other more than ever before. When we meet on the stairs at home or in some country lane even the simple greetings we extend to each other become a forced and toilsome act.

All of us have become even less ready to help others. In certain cities one has the impression that if one were to suffer an accident there, one might even be left to die without any of the numerous passers-by becoming aware of what has happened.

Today more than ever before we live and die in solitude. Possibly even in the midst of a crowd. I remember a book that enjoyed a great success many years ago in which an American author analyzed the anonymity of our existence in the modern metropolitan cities: and the title, extremely significant, was *The lonely crowd*.

It may be of comfort to us to think that some day we shall all be friends. And not just by way of saying, but in profundity. We shall all know each other intimately and love each other. The perfection of love lies not only in being solidary and helping each other, but rather in taking an interest in each other, in being in sympathy with each other.

We often say that we love a person and yet we are completely unaware of what there is in the heart and mind of that person, indeed, it doesn't even matter at all. But some day nobody will ignore us any more, all will give us their friendship also in the sense of a more live participation in the things we have at heart, and we, of course, shall do the same as far as the others are concerned.

It seems to me that I can already hear someone object: "But I don't care a damn about the others or, worse, that all should put their noses into what is and must remain my own business". I could reply that for me all this is extremely important. I am convinced or, rather, I profoundly feel that being open to universal life is the most beautiful thing. But, notwithstanding all my good will, I cannot loan this feeling of mine to anybody who doesn't already have it or, at least, is not yet prepared to acquire it, to mature it in his intimacy. For the moment, I have to forego all further attempts to convince my critic. And may his feeling different render him good service. But I don't think it will lead him very far.

It seems to me that all this could come about, above all, in the perfect condition of paradise, when our capacity of knowing and loving will no longer have limits.

Among others, psychic research studies certain experiences of a panoramic vision or also a panoramic memory of past events. These are experiences that we have at particular moments, on the occasion of accidents or in imminent danger of death (danger that in actual practice we often manage to survive). At those moments psychic life within us assumes a truly extraordinary intensity, while the field of consciousness becomes enlarged out of all proportion: so that we succeed in feeling, thinking and remembering innumerable things in just a few instants. And thus we already have a first idea of what a thought concerned with innumerable things and persons contemporaneously could be like.

And if we now tried to imagine an even greater enlargement of our field of consciousness? We would be on the road to arriving at least at imagining, be it even very

imperfectly, what could be a state of consciousness embracing the totality of the existing: not considered as abstract universality, but lived in all its details, in the innumerable modalities of the existence of each.

It is in the divine dimension that we know and possess everything and receive and give love without limits. It is in the divine dimension that we are no longer alone.

We shall enter the divine dimension at the end of a very long road that, in many respects, seems as yet to have barely commenced. But at least in thought we can project ourselves to that final point. If we succeed in anticipating some idea, some glimmer, that will already be sufficient to give sense even to a toilsome life.

If every now and again we succeed in taking off to the heights of the spirit, which I have symbolized by the heights at which our aircraft arrive, we can enter into dialogue not only with our few true friends, but with all, enemies included (if it is legitimate to use the word “enemy”), and with all previously unknown men.

Even now we can dialogue with all. Even with those who hate us? Certainly: at that level there is no longer hate, but only infinite comprehension and love. Can we dialogue with those who ignore us? It is just as certain: at that level we know everything and all.

At that level all listen to us, each receives our message, each is aware of the thought we dedicate to him.

When we write a letter to a beloved person, it is probable that the given person will not think of us at that precise moment. And yet we always dialogue with the beloved person, prefiguring to ourselves the moment when the letter will be received, opened and its contents read.

It is a future moment we enjoy as if present. So that there undoubtedly is a dialogue, even if it is not a live dialogue. But we are fully and directly in touch with the other party every time we dialogue with somebody in the divine dimensions, because the divine dimension is always present, is eternally present.

In God we can dialogue with all. Even with God himself? There can be no doubt: we can dialogue, rather, we are called upon to dialogue, above all with Him.

God is Person not only by virtue of the fact of being Consciousness, but by virtue of the fact of acting through his angels in space and time, in the innumerable diversity of the existing and the succession of everything that happens and becomes.

The angels are the presence of God, they are his glory that “doth penetrate the universe, and shine / in one part more and in another less”, as recite Dante’s previously recalled lines.

Due to the fact that he is present to a greater or lesser extent and in many different ways, God distinguishes himself from us, is incomparably higher. We cannot capture Him, nor subject him. We can only raise ourselves to Him, fill ourselves with Him inasmuch as he donates himself to us by grace. If we are to receive Him, if we are to incarnate Him ever more completely, we have to invoke God. And God’s response is his donation of himself.

God donates himself to the creatures, donates himself to us through the creatures inasmuch as they vehiculate Him, announce Him, are carriers of his power and messengers of his inspirations. To the extent to which the creatures turn themselves into the angels of God, He comes towards us through them. One has to become accustomed to seeing the sign of God, his word, his response in the other human being, in the other creature more in general, in ourselves, in every situation and event.

Lastly we have to learn to discern God’s message also and in a very particular manner in the communications of the deceased. They live in the other dimension and return to us to announce that this is not a pure and simple condition of survival such as it may be. They announce to us that the other dimension, of which they now form part, is the beyond of God and of eternal life.

It is the perspective that confers an absolute significance upon the whole of our life. It is the most important message, the most important announcement for us. It tells us that in God nothing is ever vanifed, our dear ones live a full life and we realize ourselves without limits together with all other humans, that some day we shall know all and all will be dear to us in perfect love. It tells us that nothing is lost even of our values, which in God are destined to be fully implemented. In such a perspective death and evil are overcome and there is no longer any solitude.

Love is union, but it is also the pleasure and the joy of being together, in two, in more, in many. In the communion of love, no matter how intimate it may be, the individual is never lost or overcome. In eternal life we shall be together in many, and each will be himself.

Love is when one finds or discovers or contemplates or acquires or obtains for oneself something very beautiful, very good, very interesting, but does not want to enjoy it alone: so that one calls somebody else to share it. Even a lonely person feels the need for ideally doubling and speaks alone as if he had somebody else by his side.

Love is enlarging the circle of this communion gradually to others until it comes to embrace universal life.

Love is this feeling oneself together with others, with many others without anybody ever coming to lack and without there ever coming to lack the otherness of anybody, his being other.

Love is being with all in that eternal life in which we shall be less lonely than ever before. Just as loneliness is already overcome by those who, thinking and gazing deep within themselves, succeed in foreseeing and pretasting that condition already as of this moment.

11. How to dialogue with the eternal future of each

“Oh, there will indeed be an eternal and at long last beautiful life! We shall then be always in the presence of God; there will no longer be ingratitude, calumnies, intrigues, crimes. Everything will be beautiful, everything will be good”.

Whose is this thought? I found it in a biography of Carlo Alberto, King of Sardinia. This ruler, whom a poet once called the “Italian Hamlet”, was an enigmatic personage par excellence. And yet, for any man who has matured even a minimum of religious sensitivity in the Christian direction these few words will seem very luminous on account of their clarity and strong on account of the heartfelt longing they express.

I myself could not express better what, in spite of all errors, remains my most intimate aspiration. We wander through a forest of false images of good, where we yet catch a glimpse of the as yet feeble light of our most profound and true instances. The discourse seems obvious, above all, to those who share these instances. The others, well, let them be patient for the moment.

In the words of Carlo Alberto there takes shape the antithesis of what are our present relations with God and with the men on this earth and those who will be in eternal life. I find confirmation in other words, not wholly different in their substance, that were given us by an entity in the course of one of our mediumistic communications. Without going into details that are not of interest to us at this particular moment, let me say that the entity claimed to have lived on the earth many centuries ago.

Referring more generally to the souls who had lived on the earth in the entity’s own epoch, we asked: “What have you realized in your ultraterrene dimension in spiritual terms during all this time?”

And here is the reply: “At first we unlearned earthly life in all its aspects. Then we left affects, sentiments, sensations and all that you can imagine... And began to understand the Divinity. And from then onwards our essence has tended exclusively towards unconditional abandonment to the Divinity and adoration. Does that seem little to you? Rancours, hates, traffickings, deceits, intrigues were in our daily life. In eternity joy, love, dances, praise of the Divinity”.

Only by way of an aside, let me here note that the loss or, better, the suspension of all the sentiments and affects is intended for detachment from what weighed down the terrene condition: “rancours, hates”, as the entity said, but also every form of egoism and egocentrism. The legitimate affects will be recuperated when they no longer constitute an impediment to the elevation of the soul, but once again represent a positive integration, though – be it clear – at a far higher level.

In God’s eternal life we shall love each other with a perfect love. It is a love without limits that each one will pour out on all the others and on each other. There will no longer be known and unknown people, family members and strangers, friends and enemies, persons on whom we concentrate all affections and persons who leave us altogether indifferent. Each will participate in the life of all the others to a total extent.

If this spiritual love is to be realized in more concrete terms, each one will have to be transformed in his intimacy by a divine force. Only in a condition in which we are all profoundly regenerated will we be able to love each other for ever with a love that is full and fully corresponded, without any more shadows or reserves, disaffection or backward returns.

That day is future. But in a certain way it is also present. How can this be? I think I can justify this affirmation by briefly mentioning the vision that is opened for us by both parapsychology and the new physics.

Physics today tends ever more to conceive reality as a continuum of more than three dimensions, where time itself is configured as a space dimension. In a time that is, as it were, a “fourth dimension” of space, events seem successive only in a relative and no longer in an absolute sense. Each individual instant seems contemporaneous with eternity. And eternity is compresent in each individual instant. Eternity is therefore already present.

This concept can be expressed by the image of a book containing a long story that I am reading. I have arrived, let us say, at page 125, both the “past” pages, the ones I have already read, and the “future” pages, the ones I have yet to read, are compresent in the volume I am holding in my hand.

Parapsychology confirms all this with the phenomena of clairvoyance in the future. The precognitions of future events are often so full of details that there remains no more than an infinitesimal probability that these events are foreseen by chance or by mere inference from the existing situation. We are left with no alternative to assuming that future events are in some way, in some sphere, compresent with today and therefore attainable, perceivable by those who possess an adequate sensitivity.

Some day time will merge with eternity and the personal existences of all individuals will then flow into that sphere. That day I can not only anticipate with desire, but can also live it already today.

That day all individuals will be perfect. They will know and understand everything. This will happen to Salvatore, to Adolfo, to Giulia and also to all the others. As of this moment, therefore, I can already dialogue with Salvatore, with Adolfo, with Giulia and all the others who, when they shall have attained perfection, will have knowledge and understanding of all things. Indeed, I already want to draft a little letter for each one of them.

Who is the sender of the messages that follow? It could be a different person in each case. Imaginary, certainly, but not all that much: the events, the behaviours that are mentioned unfortunately form part of the written and unwritten chronicles of our everyday life. However, let me say right away that any reference to the facts of my own life is wholly casual.

Dear Salvatore, your mother was a saintly woman and today, in the glory of paradise, she is so more than ever before, but the way you acted was more like a something son of a woman anything other than saintly... well, we understand each other. And at long last we understand today that everything comes to light, far more than we could intend on earth. You have been one of the greatest delinquents, you amassed a fortune by peddling dope, destroyed innumerable human beings and had others done away with by killers because they stood in the way of your plans. Then, in prison, you passed to the side of the collaborators of justice, accused your partners of your own crimes and thus obtained sentence reductions. After having "repented" in inverted commas, you at long last really repented. In the other dimension you expiated your faults, amended your ways, asked God and men to forgive you. You suffered terribly, but a suffering that was your medicine. Now you are redeemed. Now we understand and love each other without limits. Your destructive folly has come to lack, and there has also come to lack my hate on account of the son you killed me. Dear Salvatore, from time I send a letter addressed to eternity, where ideally I already take my place even though I still live in time that passes and in its vicissitudes. Compresent in every instant, eternity is contemporaneous even with this moment in which I am writing to you. And because I already live in the eternity of God, I can already tell you that in God I am at peace with you. I speak to you also in the name of my son, who has pardoned everything, I am quite certain of this. I love you even now, and wish you all good things without limits.

Dear Adolfo, nobody ever cast doubt on your idealism. You aimed at good. You did not seek advantages for yourself, because you only for the good for which you sacrificed everything and never had a moment of rest, a day that was your own. But to obtain that good, to make it triumph, you passed over too many corpses.

Dear Giulia, you were a most beautiful woman and, not least due to your will of being beautiful. No Christian martyr ever faced as many tortures as you for your beauty. You revenged yourself by making many men suffer. You tormented even me for a long time until I managed to break the magic circle. Now you are more beautiful than ever in celestial glory. And I love you more than ever with the true love for which God created us.

Dear Sandro, you did not kill anybody, not least for the simple reason that nobody existed for you. Only you existed. We others were mere phenomena of your consciousness, devoid of any consistency and life of our own. You toyed with us as with lead soldiers. Every now and again you hurled bowls against us to make us drop; then you passed to counting how many had fallen and remained upright to establish the score of your solitary game. You made me angry because you always looked through me as if I did not exist, but also made me feel much pity. You were a prisoner of yourself, incapable of coming out of your shell to rise to a human condition by establishing human relations with others, whom you never succeeded in discovering as others and as persons. I tried several times to get you to understand this, but you were far too enclosed in your pressure suit for my words to be heard in your intimacy. Now at last you know and understand that I, liking you, suffered on account of the friendship you unknowingly denied me. Only now can we be true friends. I am writing to you from time, where unfortunately we are not yet friends; but my letter is addressed to eternity, where we are already friends and for ever, with all the others, in a perfect and full manner.

Dear Giorgio, we dined together many times, cheerful and jokingly, exchanging wisecracks that opened horizons of intelligence and joy of living. Then I discovered that you were using me like a pawn for one of your games and that even those evenings were instrumental. But I nevertheless preserve pleasant memories of them. At the moments when I felt you closest you may have been sincere, forgetting for a moment those projects and letting yourself go to express sympathy, a more spontaneous movement of the heart. For a few moments you freed yourself of your obsession, only to let yourself be sucked back a moment later. Now you are freed forever. Of you there remains only the good, no longer repressed, no longer stalked: all and only good and forever.

Dear Ernesto, you are one of the few persons who cannot be accused even of a crumb of egoism and even less so of even the least suggestion of wickedness. You are a good one, even excessively so, but you are also and equally excessively obtuse. Is it possible that to make some other person understand the same thing I need only a few minutes, sometimes even just a few seconds, whereas with you it takes me half a day and brings me to the point of exhaustion? But they will tell me that you are not bad, you are simply too enclosed in your own ideas. You are a type who talks to himself and listens only to himself. But if you cocooned yourself to this extent, is that not to some extent your own fault? No, they will say, because you are made that way. Well, in eternity we at long last succeed in understanding each other. It was high time; and from this moment onwards, fortunately, we are enclosed in eternity.

Dear Marcella, there was love between us, we wanted to get married. What was it that struck me when I met you for the first time if not your beauty, a certain grace. From those first impressions I passed to a more personal and direct knowledge. Indeed, I discovered that you were not only a charming girl, but a person: and that was not little! I took an interest in you, in your life and your aspirations as best I could; because at a certain moment I began to realize how different we were. I wanted you to know me better, for a better understanding, and I opened my heart and mind to you, talked to you about the things I had most at heart. But I realized ever more clearly that you did not want me, but simply a husband. I hope you have found him, a pure and simple husband, now that we have lost sight of each for several decades. But I passed some very beautiful moments with you. In eternity even we will love each other with perfect love and will meet to relive those magic moments, which are likewise for ever.

Dear Ruggero, we are divided by a contrast of ideas and programmes, so that if we are not exactly enemies (heaven forbid!), we are at least - and certainly so - adversaries. As such we combat each other and the struggle embitters us: because there are polemics where the words just flow and then there rages the furious skirmish of initiatives, yours and mine, that are not always wholly limpid. It saddens me that I cannot be at peace with you, at least for the moment, on this earth. And I hope that at least in heaven there will be some corner where we can dialogue in a clarified and serene atmosphere. From there we shall be able to contemplate from up on high, re-dimensioned, "the lawn that makes us so ferocious" as Dante calls the earth that, from paradise, seems to him very tiny, its vicissitudes readily ignorable.

Dear Margherita, there was a touch of sympathy between us right from the beginning. But when I worked for you, it did not take me long to realize that, all said and done, you used me as something provisional until the moment in which you would at least have believed that you could take off by yourself. Your sympathy was sincere, but - how shall I say - a little forced. You were too ceremonious with me. And then one day I suddenly looked you in the face and in your eyes gathered a glimmer - how shall I say again? - just a little sinister. And therefore you never really deceived me. I just wised up and played the game. In the end, just as was to be expected, you got rid of me with elegance (which not everybody has, and that is already something!). But I was ready to

glide and suffered no ill, not even to my feet. All these little human ambitions and projects have now been overcome and left behind, from now onwards an endless horizon unfolds in front of us.

Dear Piero, dear Walter, dear Stefania and innumerable others, from you I expected nothing. It was obvious that I was a simple commercial partner for you. Nor did you ever waste a single word with me that was not strictly necessary. It was, as one might say, rather cynical, but clean. You did not deceive me, but neither did you give me anything in human terms. Nor did you let me do so with you: I had been served and... next one, please! The assembly line could not come to a halt. Now this relationship of gear teeth that meet for a moment and then pass on no longer makes sense. Now we are in the love that is staying together: simply staying together, disinterested, intense and total. "All together, passionately", as the title of a fine film would have it.

Dear Cesaretto, you fired into the air at New Year and, as the journalists wrote afterwards, one of the bullets killed a young woman who lived in the apartment in front of yours, mother of two children. I am your victim, who has pardoned you and hope that my husband, the children and all the others will likewise pardon you, so that on the day of the Lord we may all live under the sign of divine fraternity. And thus I already live that day.

Dear Giovannino, you and Adrian invented a new game: from a bridge over the motorway you would throw large stones at the cars that passed beneath: many times you missed, but in the end you made a hit and smashed the head of who is writing to you: the head of a forty-seven year old lawyer, as the paper said the day after, who with his wife and son was returning from a vacation in the Aosta Valley...

Dear Gaetano and Carmine, you were in need of lots of money and right away, "*ampresse e assaie*", as you said in your picturesque dialect, and you did not hesitate to rob from petrol stations and shops. A pistol went off in a moment of panic and, unfortunately, found its mark...

Dear Benedetto, you became a drug addict and procured yourself the necessary money by robbing, bag-snatching, sent two old ladies a little uncertain on their legs to hospital, and eventually brought terrorism into your own family, threatening your father, beating up your mother, raging like a demon. In the end an overdose killed you. Mother and father have pardoned you and pray for you, remember you above all in the more beautiful moments, think of you with the love of always.

Dear Tiberio, we are your mother and father whom you killed with gas to get your heredity a few years earlier. What can we tell you other than that you are our son and that we love you as always? We keep vigil over you in the sadness of prison, where even your fellow prisoners have taken their distance from you. But even if everything and all join in condemning you, remember that we are always close to you.

Dear Sibilla, when you were a tiny little girl I became the widow of your father, whom you can't even remember. I brought you up with a thousand sacrifices. And the things we passed together! Never have mother and daughter been such friends. Someone who courted me mistook us for sisters, as he said. I never gave way to him, because I had you. You were everything for me. You repaid me with a true adoration that later became an ever more tepid affect and eventually became coldness and even icy frost. Today you hardly ever let me have news of you. For the last two Christmases you have left me alone. You have freed yourself, as I well realize, from a tutelage you felt oppressive. But if I exaggerated in the attentions I had for you, it seems to me that you really exaggerate in your disaffection with a zeal that would merit a better cause. You prevent me even from seeing your little daughter, almost as if you feared that I would take her away from you. Perhaps I shall die before I manage to win you back. Could we in God's eternity return to being as we were? There is no other hope left for me.

Here I should like to observe that it is far easier for a parent to place himself in the situation of the last day, where everything is recognized and conciliated and pardoned. Far easier for a parent than a friend, a lover. The parents for whom their children have procured profound delusions will be the first to understand the contents of what I am saying.

And now let us come to myself, who has written these letters after having tried to identify myself with the various possible senders. I speak in their name and, to some extent, also in my own name: to the extent to which I succeed in identifying myself with the various cases and to find there something that belongs to me.

Am I completely at ease with my conscience? Have I only been the victim of evil, without ever committing any myself? I can frankly say that I have done evil to many persons whose cases I have not even mentioned here. But there are also others to whom I have done mostly good, only to remain badly recompensed. What could I say to them?

Dearest, did I ever dedicate my full attention to you? Can I really say that I ever made an effort to come out of my own mind to enter into your mind, to think also your thoughts a little and not just my own? Can I really say that I always gave you without reserve warmth of affect, of friendship? Did I not think more of myself than of you? And is it not that I continue to think more of myself than of you?

If I had loved you with perfect love, I may well have dragged, involved you a little more. Quite the contrary, I was and am very imperfect. If it is true that we are judged by the love we give, then woe is me.

Human, far too human, and not even in the best sense, I was the first to fall short in this respect. What, then, do I have to complain about?

I pardon you, but you, too, please pardon me. And may the Lord have pity on us all.

Lord, my Creator, have I really loved You in the course of what has been my terrene existence up to now? If I really loved You to the very limit, would I not love in You all the humans, and each as You yourself love him? And would not this force of love, once I really succeeded in making it felt, bring down many walls? But first I should like myself to sally forth from the walls I have constructed around myself.

But am I by myself capable of doing this? I don't really want to, because my will is sick. And therefore I say: Lord, have pity on me.

It is only You who will save us in the end, You and the concentration in You of all the energies of love of all your saints.

But we have to respond to your initiative. You loved us first and we are thus urged to love You and, in You, every human being, every creature.

But how insensitive we are to the many evils of the world! It could be that we watch the news bulletin on television while we are sitting at table for lunch or dinner. All the possible tragedies flash in front of our eyes and yet we continue to put food in our mouth and masticate it: what would we do if these misfortunes of others, which we support with such great... Christian resignation, were to happen to ourselves?

But, as somebody will say, can they really inflict upon us all the ills of the world? Would that not come to constitute an intolerable burden for us? If we had to relive them all in the first person, would that not overwhelm us to the point of madness?

It could well be. For this reason, Lord, You invite us to give our special love to our neighbour. And who is our neighbour if not the persons that destiny has made us meet, the persons with whom we are living? You, Lord, entrusted these persons to us. But have we taken adequate care of them?

Anyone of us could at this point reply: "Am I my brother's keeper? Or my neighbour's?". That was the reaction of Cain, who was certainly wrong.

You, our Lord and Creator, who loved us first, urge each one of us to love all the others without reserve, but above all to keep vigil over those who are closest to us. You ask each one to forget himself a little, to immerse himself in the others, to sympathize with them, to feel the problems of the others as our own.

Within the limits of the possible, you invite us to establish with each of the others a patient and discreet dialogue, because not all are immediately prepared to dialogue. With some it will be more difficult, with others even impossible, or almost so.

And yet it is always possible to dialogue, if not with each one in the present, at least in his future. The future, both ours and that of any of the others, is in a certain way already present and contemporaneous. And there is an ultimate future where each one of us merges with the Absolute and therefore embraces all the things with full intelligence of love. And it is in this dimension that we are already granted to understand each other perfectly, because all the barriers have collapsed. It is the dimension where we meet to become united.

It is good for us to visit this dimension often: let us establish our dwelling there. It will be of comfort and help for us, especially at the moments when our relations with other people, those closest to us, will undergo some crisis.

It will be an orientation for us; a true compass for our action, which must always tend towards that ultimate goal, without ever deviating, without ever tiring.

Let us establish our dwelling in that dimension. It is the dimension in which You, Lord God, make yourself man in all, in that fullness that will see each one of us grown to the stature of Christ.

It is the dimension in which I find once more, at your best and forever, each one of you: Salvatore, Adolfo, Giulia and all the others. Together with you, I form part, in God, of one and the same great collective and solidary being. Day by day of this long toil of living my road is always together with all of you.

Second Part

THE REASONS OF A FAITH

1. How the Absolute can be “other” for us and make itself multiple and becoming

We are not all equally good at everything. And not all of us have the same disposition for metaphysics. If, therefore, one of my willing readers should not have it, I don't want to be the one to “vaccinate” him with what I am anxious to communicate to him and, particularly with this *Second Part*, proposing him a metaphysical discourse that would find him unprepared.

To avoid making him suffer for no good purpose, let me tell him right away that the nine chapters that begin here undoubtedly form part of a single essay, but have been written in a manner to permit each to be read on its own.

Coming to the practical aspects, I would therefore advise the reader who is not yet initiated nor particularly interested in this field of research, but whom I would nevertheless not want to lose by the wayside, to skip the present chapter and pass straight

to the next without giving it another thought. There is always time to come back and read it if he should want to do so.

To the faithful who decide to stay with me I can address a discourse that, in order to make things as easy and straightforward as possible, will move from more general definitions.

To start with, let us therefore say: within us there is a more or less developed sensitivity that we can call “spiritual” or, in a more specific manner, “religious”.

It is a capacity of feeling that seems to us incomparably more subtle than that of the so-called “five senses” of the physical body.

A sixth sense? This is the name given to paranormal perception, which expresses itself in the well known phenomena of telepathy and clairvoyance. But we feel that spiritual sensitivity belongs to an altogether different plane. More than a “sixth sense”, I would define it as “an nth sense”

Very well, this nth sense acts in all spontaneity. And, as if by instinct, we feel induced to entrust ourselves to it and to what it suggests to us.

If we want to be self-critics, we shall have to admit that we often encounter great difficulty in defining what this religious sensitivity tells us. Very often its expressions will come to us in far too human, inadequate and stammering a form.

In the course of history men have for the most part expressed their religious intuitions by means of myths that, taken literally, may seem full of absurdities. Certainly, it may also happen that highly spiritual contents are expressed by means of symbolisms of the most bizarre form.

It will be more prudent to stick to generalities. Let us therefore say that “there has to be a divine presence in things”.

Afterwards we shall try to deepen this theme. We perceive this divine presence as the very profundity of things. And we also feel it as a principle of synthesis that the dispersed multiplicity of beings and events gathers in unity. And thus we are led to conclude: there is a supreme and single God; there is the One whom we shall simply call God.

Here we have an idea that the specialists of God – can we call them such? – i.e. the metaphysicians and the theologians have elaborated and discussed for a long series of centuries. To the point where they agreed, in general, about a certain definition of attributes that can nowadays be called classical.

God is conceived in rational terms as a being – or, better, as the Being – that is absolute, one, eternal, not subject to any becoming. The one and total Being: the One-All.

On the other hand, however, religious experience tells us that we can establish a personal relationship with God, face to face, as if with “another”. A well known phenomenologist and philosopher of religion, Rudolf Otto, defined God as the “totally Other”.

We feel this God to be present and at work in our everyday existence and, in a wider horizon, in the course of human history and the whole of cosmic evolution.

At this point we may ask ourselves: is not a One-All that we feel both as an Other and as a Thou a contradiction, something inconceivable?

We may also ask ourselves whether one can conceive a God who is absolute, one and eternal and makes himself present in space and time: who in a certain way makes himself multiple and becoming.

In other words: we have to come to grips with the problem of how the living God of religious experience can also justify himself at the philosophical level.

And in yet other words: the idea of such a God is undoubtedly suggested by religious experience, but is it coherent as a concept?

Let us first of all examine the problem of *whether* and *how* the Absolute can be “other” for us. And we may ask ourselves how one can enter into a relationship of dialogue, prayer, entrustment and therefore mutual otherness with a God conceived as the absolute, the infinite, the One-All.

And I think it will be best if we first of all ask ourselves whether it is possible to make a distinction of levels.

Now: Christianity, and not only Christianity, distinguished in one and the same God a plurality of levels, of modes of being. It is thus that Christian theology speaks to us of a Trinity; the same one and only God articulated into three Persons.

And here, speaking of divine Person, we must clearly understand the significance that this word “person” can have: certainly not the same in which we understand the human person!

At the highest level, as we might say, we can see and conceive God in his most originary mode of being: there is God in his first principle, metaphysically anterior to any kind of distinction.

Metaphysically anterior to any “external” distinction, but, even before that, “internal”.

It is “external”: i. e. to any manner in which God can distinguish himself from the creatures.

And even before that, to any “internal” distinction: i. e. between the modes of being of the Divinity.

Here I should like to avoid talking about the intermediate mode of being in which the intimate life of God can articulate itself. And, having mentioned the originary mode of being, I should now like to limit myself to considering which of the divine modes of being appears, as it were, the “lowest”: the most derived, the one closest to us, the one by means of which we humans realize our personal face-to-face dialogue with God.

In terms of the Christian Trinity, I have mentioned the Father: who can be defined as the originary principle, pure divine Self, pure abstract Self-consciousness as yet without determinations, metaphysically anterior to every concrete thought and creative act, comparable in some way with the Brahman of the Hindus and the One of Plotinus.

At this point and in the present context I want to avoid discoursing about the Son: Logos, Verb, concrete divine Consciousness of all things and events that embraces all contemporaneously in one and the same omnicomprehensive look. The Nous, in Plotinian terms.

I rather want to concentrate all attention on the Holy Spirit: on God as creator, present and active in multiplicity and temporal becoming; on God as Thou to whom religious men turn in prayer; on the One whom the Hindus call the Lord Ishvara or the Shakhti or Divine Mother; on what Plotinus called the Soul of the World.

It is precisely at this level closer to us that, as Dante tells us in the opening lines of his Paradise, “The glory of Him who moveth everything / Doth penetrate the universe, and shine / In one part more and in another less”.

In other words: the divine Presence comes to be articulated in all the things and in each to a different degree. And, as I should like to add, in a qualitatively different manner.

It is here that God as Spirit, as creative Energy, even though compenetrating all things, yet distinguishes himself from them in the clearest possible manner; distinguishes himself from them in an infinite manner, is “totally Other” with respect to them; he is and remains transcendent in the most absolute manner even with respect to the highest creature.

And it is at this level that God distinguishes himself from us, and we from Him, in such a manner that a relationship is nevertheless possible: there is rendered possible a staying in front of each other, the One staying in front of the others in absolute otherness.

It is in this relationship of otherness that God, even though He transcends the creatures in an abyssal manner, yet permits men to dialogue with Him.

It is in this relationship of otherness that men and God can each participate in the life of the other.

In a relationship of love there can thus become established a kind of nuptial bond. Be it even in various languages, many spiritual authors speak of a mystic marriage that can attain full consummation.

The “non-dualists” of the Vedanta, followers of Shankara, who have played a significant part in India’s great spiritual tradition, turn their attention to what has here been defined as the most originary mode of being of the intimate life of God: to what, as we saw a moment ago, can be called the First Person of the Trinity in terms of Christian theology.

I am convinced that what the non-dualists say of God and our possible relationship of unification with Him is fully valid at that level. It is a level at which they have developed luminous intuitions on the basis of intimate and most lively experiences.

And therefore I believe that the greatest contribution of Indian spirituality consists of having gained greater insight into an experience of God at that level in a manner that remains unique and inimitable.

To be able to pursue this research with the greatest possible concentration, the Hindu monists turned all their attention exclusively to that spiritual level.

It follows therefrom that to an ascetic engaged in the search of the Self, the other levels will end up by seeming emptied of being and value and, in a certain way, evanescent, phantasmic, illusory.

And illusory appears the level of the “duality” to the monist, who, following a tradition of millennia, is accustomed to concentrating all attention on the originary level of unity.

Here one can formulate a strong objection. Let us even grant the proper space to the thematics of the originary unity and the unification to be effected by means of the forms of ascesis that Indian spirituality has particularly developed. But this does not by any means imply that we have to skip the dimension of “duality”. It is a dimension, a level of being that is no less real.

There is a non-eliminable otherness between the divine and the human. That is a fact on which there is full convergence of the testimonies of all those who, in all epochs and in all latitudes, are engaged and involved in the experiences definable as *religious* in the proper meaning of this word.

When we affirm that we encounter God in the religious experience, there arises also the following problem: how can we perceive God, how can we realize a vital contact with Him, how can we nourish ourselves at the divine Source of grace if God is absolute and we are simple finite and relative beings?

By the concordant definition of metaphysicians and theologians, divine life expresses itself in a unique act that is eternal, absolute and unchanging. How is it then that God can encounter us in time? How can he render himself multiple within us and in the world? He who is pure and perfect unity? How can the one and eternal God undertake the creation of a multiple and becoming world?

I am looking for an answer to this dilemma. And perhaps I find it, partial and imperfect as it may be, in the approach that I shall now try to set out.

The Jewish-Christian tradition affirms the creativity of God with accents of unequalled power. But God’s creating is very different from that of man. Nobody has

ever been obliged to believe that God creates the world piece by piece by means of a succession of acts in a manner analogous to what is done by a human craftsman (or, following the plan of a more sophisticated collective work, an industrial undertaking).

The divine creative act is unique, full, total, absolute, perfect: nevertheless the creation is multiple, becoming, imperfect, even though directed towards a goal of final perfection.

Creation in process (i. e. ongoing, in course, in becoming) and evolution are all one: they are two aspects of one and the same reality that is being produced and, for as long as it remains involved in this process of implementation, it will always in some way remain imperfect.

But how can one explain that the creatures of a perfect God (one, eternal, etc.) remain imperfect (finite, becoming, etc.) for as long as that creative process continues, process that nevertheless springs from a single and eternal act? I think that one can at last try to explain it in the following terms:

- 1) Each existing is created by God inasmuch as He is the first and fundamental Cause.
- 2) But at the same time it is also brought into being by other existing as secondary concreating causes: for example, a man or an animal is brought into being by the parents, while a work is produced by a craftsman.
- 3) Lastly, one may say that each existing creates himself and, to a certain extent, even by himself.

Let me try to explain even this last affirmation a little better by taking a very concrete example from what happened and happens in each one of us to establish an analogy with the situation of the creature as such in relation with the Creator and the creation process.

Not certainly “created” in the full sense, but – as we say – “procreated” by the parents, each one of us forms a single whole with the mother for the entire gestation period. Once born, we continue to depend on the mother, the family in general, and then on the school teachers, later the university professors, and so on. But always to a lesser extent. That is to say, to the extent to which the subject learns to do things by himself, he learns to eat, to walk with his own feet, to study with his own method, to work, to self-manage himself in everything.

Little by little as he grows, the child, then the boy and eventually the adult can be defined as a creature that to an ever greater extent learns to create himself.

Woe if the son, on attaining the right age, proved to be incapable of taking flight and, at least to some extent, could not manage himself, dispose of himself. There are overgrown children, fifty or sixty years of age, who not only love their mother, of whom they not only take care (something more than praiseworthy), but feel themselves obliged and reduced to living, as it were, under the maternal skirts, so that not a single leaf moves unless mother wants it to move (something that is altogether unnatural).

The relationship between son and parents differs from that between creature and God in this: that at a certain moment the son can do absolutely without the parents, while the creature always stands in need, if it wants to continue living, to be founded by the divine creative act. Here we see once more that the images, the analogies, the symbols are incurably relative, and always fit only within certain limits.

However, one can say that the creature assumes consistency as it makes itself, as it becomes self-creating to a growing extent, just as a new human being really begins to “exist” at the moment when it reacts in an active manner (otherwise it would be totally incapacitated, a purely vegetating being).

In more metaphysical terms we might say that a creation that limited itself to receiving its own being in a passive manner would no longer be a creation, i.e. a live set

of creatures in the proper sense, but only a crowd of shadows: and here we would find ourselves in a phantasmic world and ourselves reduced to mere phantoms.

The making itself multiple and becoming of the eternal and absolute creative act is perfectly simple and can be expressed by the image of a Spring, unique and always the same, from which there derive many watercourses that will then branch out in various directions according to the ever different conformation of the land.

And thus we can figure to ourselves, albeit in an inadequate manner, the divine Spirit: an unlimited, eternal primordial Energy that continuously emanates without changing, communicating itself to all the multiplicity of the existing, but to an ever different extent in accordance with the different receptive capacities of the individual creatures and their different capacity and will of reacting.

The undifferentiated, immutable primordial Energy, which is always the same, can be articulated into many different energies identified and acting in space and time, and therefore becoming. Each of these can also detach itself from God, and even act in variously different ways and in a direction more or less different from that of the originary Impulse.

We can thus call this primordial Energy “God”, while we can designate the other energies that derive from it and differentiate themselves from it in the manner of a fan by the term “angels”. The divergence of the angels from God, i. e. the fact that the derived energies move away from the primordial Energy, and their assuming a different direction can be defined, always in theological terms, as the “angelic sin”, which brought their “fall” or “materialization” as its consequence.

Function of the angels is to vehiculate the eternal and absolute God in the multiplicity of the mundane and temporal situations, and this precisely because, to say it once in Dante’s words, “in the universe there may penetrate and shine” the glorious presence of the “One who moveth everything”: his transforming creativity that confers its perfection upon every reality.

Articulating itself in the multiplicity of the beings and the events of the world, God’s eternal and infinite creative act thus calls each creature to being. And not being in just any sort of way, but to ever more and ever better being, to an ever higher qualitative level.

Moreover, no creature is called upon to be in an undifferentiated manner – as we might say – that is valid for all; each creature is called upon to be in its own and most individual, unrepeatable and unsubstitutable manner. And it is in this particular manner that each creature is called upon to collaborate in the creation, so that the creation may be completed.

And not only: but each creature, in its own way, is called upon to turn itself into a particular vehicle of the presence of the Creator, precisely where each creature is situated and lives and works. Each creature is called upon to perform an angelic function: a function and mission that is particularly appropriate for us humans.

And each one of us, called upon to be a vehicle, bearer of the divine presence in the world, is in his turn the theatre of action of this presence: he is this in his own interiority, in the interiority that the Divine constitutes his privileged dwelling place.

God works *through us* in the world, but, even before that, *he works in us*. He transforms us from within. He works in us through those of his vehicles that are modalities of his presence deep within us.

All the forces that from deep within us act for our realization at every level seem to be capable of being defined as vehicles of the divine action. The divine action within us is protended towards the conquest of our being, so that at every level we may become the vehicle of the Lord for completing the creation of the world. Everything – every being, every asset, every value, every life, every energy, every illumination, every inspiration –

everything comes from deep within us, where God indwells as active presence that incessantly creates us.

God not only creates us at every level, but creates us all together, as a solitary whole. He gradually creates us in time, through evolution and history. It is thus that the Absolute, rendering himself other, renders himself multiple and becoming and establishes a face-to-face relationship with his creatures. It is thus that the Absolute creates us from nothing for everything. And it is thus that in time the creation develops, aiming at its perfective completion through cosmic evolution and the history of men.

2. Religious experience and cult: from the sacred Powers to the originary Sacred

The religious experience is de facto that of a relationship that man establishes with a mysterious Reality he feels to be sacred and transcendental. It is the experience of the Sacred, of the Numinous. Thus appear to him the Powers, the Gods. Thus appears to him – and to a supreme degree – the Supreme Power from which all the other powers and all the realities of this world seem to be derived.

Evolution of the religious experience sees this originary Power come to the fore ever more clearly as the only true Absolute. And thus this sacred Power comes to be connotated as the supreme Being, as the supreme God, father of all the gods, and eventually as the sole God.

There thus emerges monotheism, where every sacrality is attributed to this central divine figure. Before God there are no longer any other gods: no reality can propose itself as an end in itself; all the realities are creatures of God and each is called upon to cooperate with Him, be at his service, be his instrument and vehicle.

Once monotheism had affirmed itself, those that had been the sacred powers of primitive polydemonism, those that had been the gods of polytheism came to be connotated as the “angels” of God.

The name “angels” designates the spiritual energies that mediate the creative action of the one, absolute, infinite, eternal, immutable God in the multiplicity and the becoming of the beings of this world.

Thus the sacred Power, one in itself, becomes manifold. Absolute in itself, it acts in the relative, brings it into being, carries ahead its creation. Eternal and immutable in itself, it acts in time, and through cosmic evolution and human history pursues the final advent of the “kingdom of God”, where – in the Christian perspective – the creation will attain its perfective completion, so that God may be “all in all” (1 Cor 15, 28).

Here, indeed, I am setting the experience of the Sacred in a Christian perspective. It is a perspective that comes to the fore in the vision of many religious spirits, while it may find innumerable others as yet immature, unaware or refractory. May I be permitted to propose this conception as “true”, seeing that I myself accept it, adopt it as my own. And not due to blind faith, but following a particular maturation.

In all the religious spirits of every country and epoch and tradition there is a tendency to establish a personal relationship with the sacred Power, an “I-Thou” relationship. The religious man perceives the sacred Power as an “Other”, as a “totally Other”. Man establishes a dialogue with the sacred Power.

And with the sacred Power man also establishes a relationship of dependency: he feels himself to be indigent and needy in the face of the Power on which his life depends. He therefore invokes the Power to come to his aid. He turns to the Power in prayer and entrusts himself to it.

In the most mature and highest forms of religiosity man sees the Power ever more clearly as the first principle and the ultimate end of himself, his true and profound being, his all.

Religious man therefore no longer limits himself to invoking the Power to help him in the pursuit of his ordinary and everyday ends, but turns the Power into the centre of his personality, adopts the ends of the Power, wants to be as like the Power as possible, no longer wants to live for anything than the Power. Here religiosity becomes pure adoration and sanctity.

The Power thus transforms man into the vehicle of its own manifestation. And man becomes the incarnation of the sacred Power to various degrees and at various levels. In the limit we have the phenomenon of sanctity as it is defined by the Latin Church or of “deification” as the Eastern Church calls it.

It will be helpful to trace the pattern of religious evolution to clarify its various aspects. This is a formula with which I try to interpret the evolution of the religious spirit from its more primitive polydemonistic expressions right through to monotheism.

The latter, however, will have to be developed in all its logic or, at least, in its more essential implications. And that is what I shall try to do, be it even summarily, reserving a more extensive treatment to some other occasion, where greater space will be available for more detailed considerations.

In the manifestations of the more primitive religiosity the subjects of the Sacred Power are for the most part beings and forces of nature. Be it clear, not all the things of nature, no matter what they might be, but rather those that appear to be particularly “powerful”.

The book *La preghiera dell'uomo* (The prayer of man) by Alfonso Di Nola (Guanda, Parma 1957) brings together a true “anthology of prayer of all times and all peoples”, as the subtitle of the book would have it.

Even a simple look at the index gives us a more concrete idea of these entities with which primitive-archaic man establishes a religious relationship: there we find prayers addressed to the moon, the spirit of the race, the sacred animal, the earth, the river, the spirit of the air, the soul of the rice, the spirit of incense, the spirits of the earth, fire, the polar sun, the sacred bear, the thunderbird, the root of the sunflower, the entrapped leopard, the Great Beaver, the goddess of flowers and love, the goddess of mais, the goddess of rain, the grasses, the waters, the wind, the sun, the sky...

There does not even lack a prayer to the magic lance and another to the spirit of the door: i. e. to realities that in their material aspect have been brought into being by the work of man.

Moreover, as Lucien Lévi Bruhl notes, primitive man establishes a religious relationship not only with beings and forces of nature, but also with the instruments he has himself created: the hoe, the knife, the hoe that serves for weeding, boats and canoes, traps, harpoons, fishing hooks, arrows and lances, ropes and strings, anchors and even (and for better reason) the rifle (on account of its prodigious power) are appeased by primitive-archaic man so that they might serve him with the best dispositions and therefore with best success (cfr. L.-B., *Supernatural and nature in the primitive mentality*).

To each of these beings there is indeed attributed an (at least elementary) personality and, in any case, dispositions. The primitive is greatly concerned that these dispositions of the Power should be as benevolent as possible for him.

He therefore addresses a prayer, an invocation, to induce it in some way to be favourable and propitious as far as he is concerned.

That Power interests him in a particular manner, he tries to persuade it, treats it well, even gives it to eat in order to earn its gratitude.

When he perceives that the dispositions of the Power are no longer all that certain, the primitive tries to bind its will by means of magic rites. He tries in some way – as one might say – to hypnotize it.

It is clear that primitive archaic man often has a privileged relationship with the Power that is close to him and from whose good disposition he expects an immediate benefit. The arrow may strike his enemy. The hoe may enable him to shift the soil with a minimum of fatigue and render it more fruitful. The river will have to permit him to swim across it to arrive safely at the other bank. The god of war will have to incarnate himself in him to communicate to him the invincibility that is his attribute, and so on. The god of love and even the god of the thieves assist their faithful in their respective undertakings.

In such a context, religious man will seek to establish the closest possible relationship with that Power. He will thus make a vow of belonging to that Power, to live constantly in its sacred aura, to proceed in its wake, to nourish himself from its field of forces.

When (and to the extent to which) the magic attitude prevails, man will try to capture the Power to put it in his service. But when the religious attitude prevails, he entrusts himself to it.

How can this I-Thou relationship with the material realities be justified? The material realities are not such in all; they are material only in their more superficial appearance, not in their more intimate substance: this is the feeling not only of primitive men, but also of children and poets. Primitives, children and poets seem to have a common tendency to establish a personal relationship with things.

Contemporary physics consider matter as the resultant of a substrate of energy. The same conception is convalidated by parapsychology, which relativizes both space and time and matter itself, reducing it to psychicism.

From attributing a psychic foundation to matter it is but a short step to seeing a kind of intentionality in it.

Even each material reality can have an autonomous creativity of its own, connected with the fact of always being in some way in itself a subjectivity.

We have thus seen that primitive man attributes a kind of psychicism to things, an initiative of their own and a sacrality on the basis of an intuition that, all considered, seems to be highly penetrant.

Ultimately each reality of this universe has its psychicism and sacrality and acts in a creative manner. Primitive-archaic man intuits this. And, side by side with this intuition, he develops the one that there is an absolute Being with its subjectivity, sacrality and originary creativity.

As a general rule, the Creator is seen by primitives as a supreme transcendental Being. For the most part he is identified with the Sky, almost as if to express the intuition of its transcendence in the symbol that can signify it in the most obvious and efficacious manner.

Mircea Eliade notes that “ever since the beginning, the heavenly divinities have been supreme divinities”. And he goes on to say that to the eyes of the primitive religious “the divine transcendence reveals itself directly in the inaccessibility, the infinity, the eternity and the creative force of the heavens” (M. E., *Treatise of the history of religions*, § 11).

Particularly interesting are some data that Eliade offers us, purely by way of example, regarding the originary eternal character of the heavens. For the Semang of the Malacca Peninsula the Supreme celestial Being is “the one who has existed forever” (§ 14). For the indigenous of the Wetar Islands in Indonesia the Supreme Being that lives in the son or in the sky is “the Old One” (§ 15).

Raffaele Pettazzoni notes that the ancient Egyptians adored among their gods “Horus the Old” or even “Horus the very Old”, probably derived from an ancient God of the sky having as its symbol the falcon (Hr) that with its wings spread out overflies the superior spaces (P., *L'Essere supremo nelle religioni primitive* [The Supreme Being in the primitive religions], Einaudi, Turin 1957, p. 39).

It should be recalled that the Hebrews called the celestial God Yahweh, “the Eternal”.

Among the attributes that are insistently referred to the supreme celestial Being, as also to the celestial divinities in general, there is omniscience.

Omniscience is characteristic not only of the one God of monotheism, of the God or Being that is identified with the heavens, but also of the gods of the sun, the moon, the stars and the wind that have the luminous sky as their theatre of action; while – on the other hand – the “Earth Mother”, Demeter, does not see, because the earth is dark, opaque, full of shadows, devoid of light (P., p. 27).

As regards the specific object of divine omniscience, it is the conduct of men, and only secondarily does it extend to all the knowable. Thot (the Egyptian god of the moon) is “the one who sees and listens”, “whose heart does not ignore”, who “knows what there is in the heart”, who “scrutinizes the bodies and examines the hearts” (P., p. 39).

Of the Sumerian Enlil, “lord of the wind”, it is said that his “seeing eyes never tire” (ibid.).

Of Samas, Mesopotamic god of the sun, it is said: “You survey the peoples of all countries; in all the countries, even of different languages, you know their designs, you survey their conduct” (ibid.)

Of Marduk: “With your eyes you observe everything” (P., p. 40).

If we now jump to Vedic India, of Varuna, god of the heavens, it is said that “whoever succeeded in passing beyond the heavens from the other side, would not be free of King Varuna. From the heavens his spies come down here, with a thousand eyes they look from one part of the earth to the other” (*Atharva Veda*, IV, 16, 5, cited by Pettazzoni at p. 41).

And “everything sees the eye of Zeus, and everything does it understand; and even here, if he wants, he sees now, nor does it escape him what kind of justice our city encloses between its walls” (Hesiod, *The works and the days*, 267-269; cited by P. at p. 43).

Of the supreme Chinese God of the heavens, T'ien, one must never say “T'ien is up there high above me” because “he rises and descends above our actions, and observes us each day, no matter where we are” (*Shi-King*, IV, I, [3]: cited at p. 52). Indeed “the sky is high, but his ears are low” (*Ho Kuang-Tse*, 1, 10 v; cited at p. 54).

In the Jewish tradition, where little by little there takes shape what was to become the Christian God, divine omniscience does not limit itself to have human actions as its essential object to reward and punish them: it is a true omniscience in the full sense that becomes translated also into omnipotence, inasmuch as it is creative omniscience.

Generated by God before all the creatures, the Wisdom of God is the means by which God creates all things: “The Lord by Wisdom founded the earth, by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke forth, and the clouds drop down the dew” (Prov 3, 19-20). When God created the world, “Wisdom was by his side as architect” (Prov 8, 27-30).

Albeit somewhat summarily, we have seen that this idea of divine omniscience seems conditioned by the concerns of men, which – right from the beginning – are of a practical and ethical order and only at a second moment give way to a more disinterested and theoretical consideration of reality; but we have also seen that this idea of divine

omniscience takes shape in the most diverse religious traditions with a truly impressive concordance.

Lastly, we were able to note, albeit once again only in a few brief remarks, that this idea of the omniscience of God is expressed in all its fullness in a certain monotheistic tradition to the point of becoming the idea of a creative omniscience, an absolute Consciousness that brings things into being by virtue of a pure act of thought.

One may well say that the experience of the sacred moves from the cult of inferior powers, coincident with beings of the world and modes of human life equally sacralized, to reach its highest point in the adoration of the originary Sacred.

Here we have the term of every religious evolution. Nevertheless, having attained this goal, the work is anything but finished, because there remains to be brought into the light everything that a monotheistic religion implies if it is to be implemented and lived with the necessary coherence to the very limit.

3. From the supreme celestial Being of the primitives to the Creator God of the Monotheists

As a general rule, or for the most part, the primitives place what we might call a supreme celestial Being at the top of their hierarchy of divinities. Now, one can note that among them there is a strong tendency to consider this supreme Being as the creator of the universe.

I should here like to recall some examples proposed by Mircea Eliade (*Treatise of the history of religions*). Among the supreme Australian gods of the heavens, Baiame is creator of himself and created all things from nothing (§ 12).

Bundjil created the earth, the trees, the animals and man: the latter he moulded from clay and blew the soul into him through the nose, the mouth and the navel (*ibid.*).

The supreme celestial Being of the Andaman Islands, Puluga, created the world and also the first man (§ 13).

Temakel, whom the Selkam (nomad hunters of Tierra del Fuego) also call “He who is in the heavens”, is eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, creator, but the creation was completed by the mythic ancestors, likewise created by the supreme Being before he retired above the stars (*ibid.*).

Creator is the supreme celestial Being Leza of the Ba-Ila Bantu (§ 13).

Creator is “Tirawa, Father of all things” of the Pawni Indians (*ibid.*).

The Yoruba of the Slave Coast believe in the celestial God Olorun who, after having made a beginning with the creation, charged a minor god, Obatala, with completing and governing it (§ 14).

The supreme celestial God who created the world, but then went away from the creation and left it to inferior gods, is Ndyambi, of the Hereros, Bantus of South-West Africa (*ibid.*).

Creator is the supreme Being of many African peoples, who then tends to withdraw from the creation, entrusting it to inferior forces: and thus he often is not even object of cult, except when he is invoked as ultimate resource in adversity (*ibid.*).

As can be seen, between the supreme celestial Being and the monotheist God there is a considerable continuity. But even what has already been said about the supreme celestial being should enable us to note that the divine self-revelation realizes itself in it in an as yet weak degree, an insufficient degree (certainly not due to the insufficiency of the Divinity as such, but rather, as I would say, of the forces that vehiculate it).

Faced with the relative weakness and insufficiency (let us call it such) of this first degree of the self-revelation of God, the monotheist revelation characterizes itself as a

revolution. It is not therefore a mere play on words to speak of a “monotheist revelation-revolution”.

The advent of monotheism is connoted as a revolution above all in its opposition to the religion of the minor divinities, of a more earthly level, who have got the upper hand, have absolutized themselves, have taken almost a monopoly of the cult, relegating the supreme celestial Being a little too much into the background. We shall now say a few things about these concepts.

First of all, one has to mention the fact that in the pre-monotheist religious tradition the creative action of the supreme celestial Being seems to consist for the most part (or generally) not so much of an originary creation, but rather of manipulating some pre-existing matter.

The same could be said of the Divinity as conceived in general by Greek philosophy, when it places matter by the side of the divine Being as if it had always existed.

In monotheism the creative act is also conceived as free and sovereign, absolutely as non-necessitated. It therefore does not consist of any “emanation” of Neoplatonic memory, but is creation from nothing, performed in absolute freedom.

One should also note that the creative action of supreme celestial Beings seems a half-creation, not a creative action carried through to its end. At a certain moment, the creation seems abandoned to itself and left definitively in the throes of other forces.

The supreme creator Being enters into a “rest” phase and becomes a *deus otiosus*. One may also say that tendentially the supreme celestial Being is no longer even made the object of cult, while the most intense cult is dedicated to the created minor divinities, to whom the world is said to have been entrusted and who in actual fact play a role of the utmost importance.

Eliade observes that cultual poverty is a characteristic of the greater part of the celestial gods. Among the majority of the African populations, for example, the supreme celestial Being, though conceived as creator and omnipotent, represents only an insignificant part of the religious life of the tribe. He is invoked only in extreme cases, but is too good to need a cult in the true sense of the term.

Let me complete these examples by recalling that the Bantus say: “God, after having created man, no longer thought about him”.

And the Negrillos repeat: “God has moved away from us!”

The Fang populations of the steppe lands of equatorial Africa express the same idea in the following song: “Nzame (God) is up on high, man is low down, / God is God, man is man, / Each by himself, each in his own home” (E., § 14).

Eliade summarizes the situation as follows: “Men remember the Heaven and the Divinity only when they are directly menaced by a peril from the uranic regions; otherwise their religiosity is stimulated by day-to-day need, and their practices or their devotions are addressed to forces that dominate these needs. It is evident that this does not diminish in any way the autonomy, the greatness and the primacy of the supreme celestial Beings; it is rather a proof that ‘primitive’ man, just like civil man, forgets them easily as soon as he no longer needs them; that the difficulties of existence oblige him to look more to the earth than the heavens, and that the importance of the heavens is rediscovered only when a menace of death threatens from up there” (ibid.).

In such situations, while the supreme celestial Being is relegated into the background, there come to be superposed on him other and more earthly divinities who are closer to man and more at his level.

These are divinities that man will also feel capable of influencing with his prayers and, in the limit, manipulating with his magic practices. In this way he will obtain from them, and as automatically as possible, everything he needs to live better in this world.

That God, when creating, should gradually withdraw from his creation to render it ever more autonomous would seem to be in keeping with the logic of the creative action. When creating, God communicates, participates something of his own sovereign autonomy to the creature. I think that so far we have a concept that is altogether unexceptionable even in the ambit of Christian theology.

For the Judeo-Christian tradition the creature is free: free to do good, and just as free to do evil.

The creature has everything from God and has his All in Him, his Beginning and also his ultimate End: therefore the sole correct and due attitude that the creature can assume is to make God the centre of his own life.

On the other hand, the attitude of sin is that the creature places himself at his own centre, absolutizing himself, turning himself into his own absolute, which is a fallacious absolute, a false god.

Let us not forget that the Judeo-Christian tradition speaks of a sin, and of an original sin, not only of the human creatures, but, even before, of the angelic creatures.

Now, who are these angelic creatures? Here we cannot set out on a long disquisition about the angels. We shall limit ourselves to saying that widely differing spiritual traditions perceive them as energies through which the action of God, from being one and absolute and eternal and immutable, makes itself become multiple, temporal and historical.

Most up-to-date physics agrees with parapsychology, and then also with the sensitivity of the primitives and of children and of poets, that the material realities reduce themselves (in the last analysis) to energetic realities. This can help us to see how the divine creative Energy of the universe can arrive at becoming articulated into a becoming multiplicity of energies that find themselves at the foundation of all the realities, including the material ones, and are the intimate principle of life of each.

These are things that, obviously, cannot be touched by hand and recorded with the instruments of science; they can nevertheless be grasped with intuition and spiritual experience.

Moreover, the whole of our research is entrusted to this form of spiritual knowledge. And whoever does not want to abandon himself to this form of intuition and remains entrenched in an intellectualist-scientific mentality, let him choose the method patented for understanding practically nothing of what we are saying, the thematics we are trying to develop: because he will thus place himself outside and remain estranged. He remains estranged from what can be understood not so much by means of an objectivating, logical knowledge, but rather and primarily by means of an existential knowledge that lives these realities from within.

Begging my readers to pay the greatest attention (but not only in the intellectualist sense), I should like to conclude that the divine energies that render themselves multiple and temporal to found all the realities of our world can likewise determine themselves in accordance with two different, opposite directions.

They can determine themselves as vehicles of God, at his service, and in that case will connote themselves as his “angels” (be it remembered that the Greek *ánghelos* means “messenger” and *ánghelía* “embassy”, “announcement”, etc.).

On the other hand, these energies may also self-absolutize themselves: they can opt to place at their centre no longer God, but themselves: and in that case they connote themselves as “gods”.

In a weaker and less complete degree of his self-revelation to men, God limits himself to connoting himself as supreme celestial Being and therefore leaves space for gods. This, however, no longer happens in the successive moment and degree of more

complete, definitive, fulminating self-revelation that is the monotheist “revelation-revolution”.

It is here that God reveals himself completely, with power, such as He is: the true God in the most pregnant sense, the only One to whom the name of God, the cult and the adoration are due.

There is no room for other absolutes. Let us recall the words of Yahweh on Mount Sinai, that form the beginning of the decalogue: “I am the Lord your God. who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, nor any likeness of anything that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God...” (Ex 20, 2-5).

It is Raffaele Pettazzoni, in particular, who speaks of a monotheist revolution: “Always and in all cases the monotheist idea is object of the preaching of a Prophet who presents himself as founder of a new religion” (P., *L'essere supremo nelle religioni primitive* – The supreme being in the primitive religions, Einaudi, Turin 1957, p. 158).

And adds that this is true for both the monotheism of Israel as compared with the polytheist religions of the ancient East and the monotheism of Mohammed who decidedly opposed the traditional religion of the Arabs, polytheist until his time.

It is also true for Zarathustra, who opposed the polytheism of the traditional religion of the Iranian peoples. As regards this aspect, the Italian scholar specifies that for Zarathustra there is only one God, because his antagonist, Ahriman, is not a god, being the very negation of God. And even here one may say that, very probably, the one God Ahura Mazda goes back to some ancient divinity of the heavens who, just like the Zeus of the Greeks and the Jupiter of the Romans, must once have been the supreme God of a Persian polytheist religion of the kind that Herodotus (I, 131) tells us about.

Zarathustra does not by any means deny the existence of other gods, but denies them as gods, maintaining them as demons. Not even Christianity denied the existence of the gods of the various peoples: just like Zoroasterism, it turned them into demons. The concept was succinctly expressed in the famous phrase of Saint Augustin: *Omnes dii gentium daemonia* (All the gods of the gentiles, all the gods of the pagans, are demons).

The attitude with which the divine energies, rather than acting as vehicles of God in obedience to his will, absolutize themselves, turn themselves into gods, is an attitude of sin: it is the rebellion of the angels that turns them into demons. It is the original and fundamental sin of the angels: similar in this respect to the original sin of man.

Faced with such an attitude of sin, the only due attitude is that the creature should recognize his Creator in God, his only Beginning and End, his only true God.

“He is one, and there is no other but he”, is written in the Gospel according to Mark (12, 32; cfr. Deut 6, 4).

And in the First Letter to the Corinthians (8, 4): “There is no God but one”.

Let us also recall the Islamic formula: “There is no other god than Allah, and Mohammed is Allah’s prophet”.

It is clear that from the monotheist revelation there springs a different relationship with the Divinity and an altogether new moral attitude.

4. The experience of feeling oneself created by God

The God of monotheism proposes himself as Creator in the strongest sense. The monotheist religious experience is, par excellence, the one that can be called a “creatural experience”.

What is this expression intended to convey? Paraphrasing the Poet, I should say that we are concerned with an intimate experience “that cannot be understood by who does not feel it”.

For us humans, it is the experience of feeling ourselves in the hands of the Creator: of a Creator who at every instant gives us life and moulds us and opens for us the road to higher, more perfect forms of existence.

It is the type of interior experience that has animated in a most particular manner all the forms of Judeo-Christian spirituality, even though it goes beyond the limits of this tradition to inspire also other spiritualities. Among the ancient Jews there was a very strong sense of being continually sustained by God and moulded, and, in short, created: created not by a pure and simple original, primordial act that thereafter came to a halt; but by a far more complex action that continues through time and history and pursues an ultimate end, a final and absolute goal that is beyond history and all becoming.

It is an ultimate goal that was to become ever more clearly defined, eventually to be connoted as pursuit of a perfect condition by a deified humanity in the wider ambit of a creation brought to completion with the advent of “new heavens and a new earth” (Isa 65, 17; 66, 22; 2 Pet 3, 13; Rev 21, 1).

The whole of this vision gradually came to be clarified and enlarged to the point of embracing the evolution of the entire universe and the unfolding of the history of man towards an eschatological goal, a universal palingenesis.

But at the beginning the vision was far more circumscribed, even though it contained the germs of this development.

At the beginning, as one might well say, the Jewish people was concerned with itself, its own historical salvation, and its relations with its own God. A God who saved his people and guided and sustained it and even corrected it harshly when occasion demanded. In a certain way the Jewish people felt itself created. It felt created day by day, in a gradual creation always intended for the best.

If the Jewish people descends from Abraham through Isaac, one may well say that the Jewish people was *created* by its God: created almost from nothing, generated against all hope, just as Isaac was procreated by Abraham. Abraham was without offspring from his old wife and had his first legitimate son and heir in very advanced old age, by grace.

And from that moment onwards, one may say that Abraham’s descent, with the Jewish people to which it gave rise, is a continuous creation of Abraham’s God.

Then the Lord Yahweh freed his people from Egyptian bondage and guided it to the promised land and sustained it powerfully in the struggles against the Canaanite peoples for the conquest of the land, and gave it laws; and in the end He continued always and in spite of everything to govern the fate of his chosen people in relation to its particular mission, towards its eschatological destination.

All this even before the “doctrine” of the Jewish people became its experience.

It is an experience that expresses itself in the words of Deuteronomy: “And the Egyptians treated us harshly, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the Lord of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our afflictions, our toil and our oppression; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand... and brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Deut 26, 6-9).

The creatural character of this experience that the Hebrews had of their God ever since the beginning is brought out even more clearly in the words of the Psalmist: “Thy hands made and fashioned me” (Ps 119, 73) and “Know that the Lord is God! It is he that made us, and we are his” (Ps 100, 3).

Let us also recall the words of the second Isaiah: “Yet, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou art our potter; we are all the work of thy hand” (Is 64, 8).

The same idea had already found expression in Jeremiah, where Yahweh himself says: “Behold, like clay in a potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel” (Jer 18, 6).

In the Book of Sirach, which came almost four centuries later and where there was developed a more universalist vision, the same concept is applied to man as such: “As clay in the hands of the potter - for all his ways are as he pleases – so are men in the hand of him who made them, to give them as he decides” (Sir 33, 13).

The idea that the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob is the Creator of the entire universe gradually comes to take ever more definite shape, even though it is already powerfully expressed in a characteristic passage of Deuteronomy: “Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heaven, the earth with all that is in it; yet the Lord set his heart in love upon our fathers and chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as at this day” (Deut 10, 14-15).

What is the difference between the Hebrews and the other peoples with whom they came into contact in the course of their eventful trouble-laden history: these other peoples confided in gods who could do little to help them.

The devaluation of these divinities by the Hebrews ends up by reducing them to pure vanities, in opposition to Yahweh who is the only true God, Creator of the universe (cfr. Ps 115).

It must have been a great comfort, especially in the defeat and exile of subsequent epochs, to have this idea that, notwithstanding everything, the God in which the Hebrews believed was the Creator of the heaven and the earth (cfr. Psalms 89 and 95).

The figure and the concept of this universal and supreme Divinity came to be expressed also by the contribution of cultures other than the Hebrew one, of which the latter later came feel the influence. It was during the exile that there came to be elaborated the theology of the creation that has its texts in the first two chapters of Genesis.

Of a far more recent epoch are the words, attributed to the mother of the Maccabees, with which there is stressed the truly original character of the creation from nothing.

Here, too, the idea is expressed in a pragmatic context. That the particular God of the Jewish people is nothing less than the Creator of the universe is an intuition, a feeling that has always infused great courage into the Jews in their trials and struggles and in defeat and subjection and exile.

The heroic mother thus encourages her sons to face martyrdom in the confidence that their God will make them rise again (2 Mac 7).

With the New Testament there assumes definitive form the idea that the creation is oriented towards a final goal: to the regeneration, the palingenesis that will involve both men, deifying them, and in a certain way the whole of nature, in the advent of new heavens and a new earth.

In this final glorious transformation one may say that the entire creative work will attain its highest point, its final goal, will find its completion.

The whole of this conception of the creative work of God was gradually confirmed and explicated in the texts of the fathers and doctors of the Church, in the liturgy, in the ecclesiastic magisterium from the Fourth Lateran Council to Vatican I and Vatican II.

As we have already noted, the idea that has by now taken very clear shape is that the Judeo-Christian God is truly the creator and is so in a twofold sense:

1) he creates in a truly original manner (does not fabricate pre-existing materials, does not emanate, is not bound in any way);

2) he creates in a total manner, not leaving his creation halfway (as does the supreme Being of many primitive-archaic religions, who then ends up by being connoted as a true *deus otiosus*), but brings the creation to its ultimate and perfect completion.

The Jew of the Bible and, ever more, the Christian is a man who feels himself created not once and for all, to be then left to himself, but in continuous creation.

I feel myself being created by God every day – as such a man could say – and deep within me I perceive the mysterious Presence that moulds me and works silently within me and guides me and opens for me a road from my Egypt to my promised land; in short, continues to create me, continues to create us for the best, so that we may all attain a condition of perfect life.

This creatural experience in which we feel ourselves as creatures and God as our original and total Creator, this creatural experience makes us feel debtors of Him not only for everything that we actually have of being and good, but also for all the fullness of being and good that some day we may have.

We glimpse it with a prophetic look in our experience of faith that extends not only to the ongoing things achieved and experienced, but also to those not yet achieved and experienced, and nevertheless promised and therefore possessed in hope.

5. Why there is evil in a “good” creation

The creatural experience perceives every reality as “good”, inasmuch as its springs from God’s creative act, inasmuch as it springs uncontaminated from it.

This feeling is expressed in a particular and characteristic manner at the beginning of the Bible, where it is said that, having created the land and the sea, “God saw that it was good”.

The same expression is repeated after the creation of the plants yielding seed and fruit trees bearing fruit, the sun and the moon and the stars, the sea monsters and the fish, the livestock and the reptiles and the wild beasts of the earth. And in the end it is said that, upon the conclusion of the entire creation, “God saw all that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (cfr. Gen, ch.1).

Notwithstanding this sense that the creation as such is good, notwithstanding all optimism that can pervade our mind in the creatural experience, *de facto* the vision that we have of the conditions of life at least on our planet is not exactly idyllic.

All the capacity that man shows for suffering and sinning and making others suffer and sin has its premises in the constitution of the animals from which he seems to derive by evolution. These seem immersed in a condition where one survives by killing and devouring other beings, where suffering and violence are inexorable law, where there is no pity.

All this induces one to conclude that man – certainly not on account of his spiritual aspects, but simply due to his physical and psychic nature – derives by evolution from the animal kingdom. And also to conclude that from this kingdom he derives the instincts of overpowering to which, first and foremost, he owes the fact of having survived and having affirmed himself in the struggle for life.

It is therefore highly improbable that animals became violent only after man’s sin, before which they fed solely on the plants assigned to them as nourishment, as Genesis affirms (1, 30).

If violence existed on this earth long before man sinned, and if one wants to identify sin as the prime cause of all evil, one has to go back to a sin that well precedes the one committed by men. Now even the biblical traditions make reference – sometimes more directly, sometimes more indirectly – to a sin of the angels (Wis 2, 23-24; Isa 14,

12-15; Ezek, ch. 28; ch. 31; Jn 8, 44; 2 Pet 2, 4; 1 Jn 3, 8; Rev, c. 12; 20, 1-3). That, in fact, would be the original sin.

It is reasonable to think that the first creatures really made in the image and likeness of God were the angels. These are pure spirits, like God himself. Later on we shall try to clarify in some way that the original sin consists essentially and in the first place of the creature's tendency to abide by himself and to finalize everything to himself, as if God did not exist.

This sin of "pride", of absolutization of oneself, of self-deification is – as I would say – the spiritual sin par excellence, and is the only sin that can be attributed to purely spiritual beings like the angels. It may be that matter derived precisely from this tendency: not materiality as such, which even the angels may have, be it even extremely subtle, but the heavy, opaque, brute, "corrupt" materiality that characterizes the beings of nature and waits "with eager longing" to become spiritualized and in the meantime "groans in travail" (to express the concept in the well known terms of Paul's Letter to the Romans (8, 18-22)).

One may assume that the concentration of the angelic creature on itself determined – as we might say - a kind of process of solidification that can explain the origin of inferior materiality. And it may also be that every tendency of the creature to become enclosed within itself accentuates and reaffirms this condition, while the opposite tendency would be to open oneself to God to feed, in Him, at the Source of all spirituality.

Nevertheless, the ultimate goal of every process of spiritualization, of deification, is as yet far removed!

Considering at least what is his present condition, the man who suffers any kind of evil, a grave illness or other misfortunes, may feel induced to blame the Creator or, in the limit, even curse him. Such a reaction would no longer be in agreement with the feeling of positivity that the believer draws from reading the first chapter of the Bible.

But such an obvious remark does not in any way belittle what seems to me the truly profound significance of that chapter. One could express it in the following words: every creation is good in the pure metaphysical moment in which it springs from the act of God.

That the creation as such is "good", is only "positivity", is something that is gathered in the creatural experience. This experience is the sense of becoming created by God, being in his hands, receiving from Him every good at this moment and even more in prospect, being destined by Him to an infinite good. It is a religious experience, it is the religious experience grasped in its purity.

We can face the problem of evil on the conceptual level. But we can also, and more simply, consider the creatural experience as a pure and simple experience and try to listen to what it reveals to us.

Opting for this second alternative, we feel our spirit pervaded by the sense of a Creator God from whom alone there comes to us all good and nothing but good.

So that we feel induced to conclude that evil must necessarily derive from some other origin.

But from what origin? It is here that our metaphysics, theologies and theodicies can run amok: on a plane that is already different from the one of pure and simple interior experience.

According to the Judeo-Christian tradition, evil derives from a free choice of the creature. It derives from the fact that the creature does no longer maintain the due creatural attitude, in which it can receive life and good from God.

Quite the contrary, the deviating creature wants to consist of itself and becomes finalized to its own ends. In this way, it ends up by becoming detached from the vital

contact with God, ceasing to feed at the Source of life. It thus proceeds in the opposite direction of gradual barrenness and death (at least to the extent to which this detachment happens in real, effective terms).

It is in this sense, as we already noted, that the Bible speaks to us of a sin of the first men (which essentially consists of assuming an attitude of absolute and wholly undue autonomy vis-à-vis the Creator).

And we also said that the Bible adumbrates an even more original sin: the sin of the angels.

Certainly, not all the evils can derive from the sin of the first men, if it is true that, as we said, man derives his potential of violence, egoism and even cruelty from the animal kingdom.

But it should be kept in mind how great a responsibility man has for the conservation of the planet.

In our days ecology offers us continuous suggestions for what ought to be a daily meditation about this matter. We can therefore reinterpret the responsibility of Adam in the sense that on man's sin – or, in the opposite sense, his proper action – depends the fate of all nature.

Different religious traditions likewise have myths and doctrines to explain the origin of evil. And, lastly, individual theologians and philosophers may conclude whatever they believe regarding this matter. However, here we are already on the more conceptual level of explanations and interpretations.

At this point I should like to limit myself to a few suggestions that could perhaps be of general validity. Developing the discourse a little better, one could try to fill some gap left open by the many historical attempts of solution that, in all truth, do not seem particularly convincing.

First of all, one may observe: a creation that is such in an effective manner, no matter how good it may be in itself, will nevertheless leave open the *possibility* of evil.

Creating means leaving space for the creature, means leaving it both ontological consistency and autonomy of action. It means continuing to found the creature in all its autonomous modes of being, even the negative ones, leaving it free to determine itself as good and also as evil.

At the origin and in its first metaphysical foundation the creation belongs sovereignly to God. But, because on this foundation, at a more empirical level, the creature is consistent and autonomous and concreant, it may also become determined as evil at this level.

At the metaphysical level of his absoluteness, God creates in an absolutely sovereign manner. In doing so, however, He necessarily leaves space and consistency for his creation.

Otherwise he would not create in the proper sense. He would limit himself to expressing in a phantasmagoria of images devoid of reality.

Creating means leaving space of freedom for the creature, so that even the creature becomes concreant. In some way, creating is always a pulling out, a self-limitation.

Let me give what I think is an analogically valid human example to illustrate this idea. The parents put a son in the world and then continue to “create” him by educating him. If they really want him to grow, they have to accord him ever greater capacity of doing things by himself and disposing of himself. They thus have to increasingly limit themselves. In a certain way, they will thereby reduce themselves to an ever lesser capacity of acting, an ever greater impotence.

In a similar manner, God himself cannot bring into being living creatures if he does not permit them to self-create themselves further. But they will be able to do this taking positive or negative directions, in conformity or difformity with the divine will.

That is what ordinarily happens in the created universe, where the divine presence is as if constrained and undoubtedly limited by adverse forces. Thus, as Nicolai Berdiaev says, at the temporal and finite level of mundane contingency God reduces himself to appearing “less powerful than an ordinary police of the world” (Berdiaev, *Spiritual autobiography*).

At this mundane level of ours there really takes place the *kénosis* of God, his making himself defective and weak, so that He may not only be limited, but even crucified and killed by his own creation.

At this level we obviously find God no longer in the absoluteness of his being, but rather in the relativity of his manifestation.

At this empirico-mundane level, God manifests himself to the extent to which his creatures leave him space. The very creatures to whom God had originally granted space in the original act of creating them.

In creating, indeed, God has accorded effective space to his creation: he gave it space not just in an apparent, phantasmic, purely ludic and provisional sense but, quite the contrary, in a very real sense.

God left space to his creation in so very real a sense that every creature has the capacity of checking his Creator. And in an effective manner. Not just by way of saying. Not as a kind of game that the Creator can interrupt by a sign as and when he wills.

A teacher will let the children of his class play between one lesson and the next; but when they begin to fight and hurt each other, he immediately interrupts the break and orders them back to their places in the classroom. For punishment, they have to take their copybooks and pens and write a piece of dictation: that way they learn to control themselves better!

Our good God does not act exactly like that schoolmaster. We have seen two world wars and massacres and genocides and infinite horrors, but no God clapped his hands to interrupt the horrible recreation, and everything continued as if He did not exist or were blind and deaf or even enjoyed the spectacle, or “safeguarded himself” by leaving the theologians the subtle task of distinguishing what he “permits” from what he “does”; or, lastly, as if He were willing to help us, but impotent, unable to do so.

Authoritative thinkers have asked themselves what God was doing while the atrocity of Auschwitz was being committed.

It is probable that he was present there, was there more than in any other place to have himself hoisted on the cross once more.

All this does not in any way imply that, in the biblical perspective, the future will not see the triumph of the kingdom of God. Rather, it is a triumph that the prophets in the name of Yahweh and then Jesus himself promise in the most explicit terms.

The gates of hell shall not prevail; and eventually, on the Day of the Lord, the celestial Jerusalem will come down to earth.

But the total advent of this kingdom is not possible if the creation itself will not cooperate in an efficacious manner. In this sense it is above all we humans who are called upon to collaborate in the perfective completion of the divine creation of the universe.

**6. The response of love of the creature
to the God who created it
from nothing for everything:
adoration and cooperation**

The creatural experience tells us that we are created by a God, who gives us existence and every good, gradually in an ideally growing direction, to the extent to which we render ourselves capable of receiving it.

In the subtle manner that we can grasp solely in an experience of faith, the creatural experience reveals to us that our ongoing creation is directed to a point of maximum fullness of being and good and felicity, to an absolute and definitive fullness.

Thus, what can the creature, overwhelmed by such an experience - the creature who feels all this, or at least has a presentiment of it, the creature who perceives it in a live, powerful, ecstatic manner - do other than burst out with expressions of gratitude and praise for his Creator?

The creatural attitude thus springs quite spontaneously from the creatural experience. God gives us everything, gives us existence and life, gives us every being and every good. God is the centre of our personality, of our being, it is only in Him that we are. God is everything for us, in Him we are everything. Every attention, contemplation and adoration is therefore due to God.

Adoration is the word in which every creatural attitude can be summarized. Duly adoring God means aspiring to Him and breathing in Him both awake and asleep in an incessant communion, in an incessant prayer that is not a request for this or that grace, but rather contemplation of the Lord present deep within us, desire of remaining gathered within Him for as long as possible.

“Thy memorial name is the desire of our soul” says Isaiah. “My soul yearns for thee in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks thee” (Isa 26, 8-9).

And the Psalmist: “I will extol thee, my God and King, and bless thy name for ever and ever” (Ps 145, 1-2).

At a certain moment this praising of God becomes an irresistible need: an impulse that God himself places in the heart of man, who feels that he wants to dedicate his existence and the whole of eternity to the incessant praise of the Divinity.

The idea of insistent, prolonged, continuous invocation recurs many times in the Bible. But prayer as request of grace finds its getting over, its further perfection in the prayer of pure praise: this in the sense that the orant puts himself wholly in the hands of God and feels God as his Centre, as his own All.

The love of God that in the Gospels is called “the greatest commandment of the Law” (Mt 22, 36) and “the first of all the commandments” (Mk 12, 28) is not conceivable outside this context. It is not conceivable without this complex experience that in the interiority of the devout derives essentially from his feeling himself creature, from his feeling himself creature of such a God, from what is called creatural experience.

Let us recall the famous words of Deuteronomy: “*Shemà Israel*, hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut 6, 4-5).

But why love the Lord Yahweh with such an intense and exclusive love? The reason is given almost immediately by the same text: “And when the Lord your God brings you into the land which he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you, with great and goodly cities, which you did not build, and houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, and cisterns hewn out, which you did not hew, and vineyards and olive trees, which you did not plant, and when you eat and are full,

then take heed lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Deut 6, 10-12).

God is worthy of our ardent, exclusive, unlimited love, because he created us and is creating us ever more in the direction of the greatest good, the greatest happiness, the fullness of being.

In the example just adopted, the thing is explained, obviously not in metaphysical terms, at the time wholly unknown and yet to come, but rather in terms of what was a concrete historical experience of the Jewish people.

The Jewish people felt itself object, precisely at the historical level, of an ongoing creation, not yet completed, but tending towards its completion.

Let us recall that in a certain way the Jewish people was created by its God from nothing. When they generated Isaac, Abraham and his wife Sarah were already old and without hope of humanly having children.

The land of Canaan had already been promised by God to Abraham. The gratuity of the gift, its character of true gift are expressed by the phrases with which it is said that to the people of Israel would be given cities it had not built, cisterns it had not hewn, olive groves and vineyards it had not planted.

The creative work of which Israel is the object takes place at the historical level, in a context of great travail, and is implemented as liberation from a condition of bondage towards the goal of a promised land: “And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the Lord the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction and toil, and our oppression; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm with great terror, with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Deut 26, 6-9).

It is a land of which the image re-evokes that of the earthly paradise and also recalls it symbolically. It is a land of which possession – after many further misfortunes due to Israel’s infidelity – becomes definitive following the messianic restoration.

This most particular creatural experience of the ancient Hebrews, this experience that they have of feeling themselves gradually created at the historical level, such an experience can be further deepened to the point of becoming connoted as experience of feeling oneself being created by God at an even more fundamental level: on a metaphysical level, even before the temporal and mundane level.

But even in this more profound, more metaphysical creatural experience, the essential terms remain the same:

1) Man feels himself created by God in the most original manner: just like the people of Israel was created against all human hope, created, as one might say, from nothing in Isaac.

2) Man not only feels himself created by God right from the beginning, but also feels to be the object of an ongoing creation: a creative process aiming at an ultimate term of perfection.

Whoever considers all this in intellectualistic terms, can “deduce” or “argue” himself a creature; but here he does not yet feel to be a creature, he does not feel creature in the lived immediacy of a creatural experience.

For it is in the creatural experience that man not only becomes conscious of his being a creature but, even before that, experiences it in his own intimacy.

He feels himself indebted for all this to his God, who created him and continues to create him towards the ultimate and definitive term of a fullness of being and good and a condition of felicity of which one cannot possibly conceive an improvement.

The religious man feels all this deep within him: he perceives the divine Love as a live and incandescent working presence that wholly invades him: and he breaks out into

expressions of love of God, adoration and praise of God, that he no longer succeeds in holding back and would like to repeat ad infinitum.

There now arises the problem of what the love of God can imply, what it may mean on the practical level.

On the plane of prayer and interior life, gratitude and love of God find their most immediate expression in the praise of God, in the adoring repetition of his name.

And it is in a closely similar manner that human love can find an outlet in the verbal, gestural, artistic, literary and similar effusions that are so familiar to us.

Nevertheless, in human love there is not only the moment of intimate colloquy, sweet words, ardent exchange of effusions: there is also – rather, temporally far more prolonged – the moment of concrete life as a couple (and afterwards probably more than two) with its innumerable difficulties and vicissitudes and adventures of every kind in situations that (as well we know) are often anything other than idyllic.

It is at this point that the committing words we exchanged in intimacy are put to the test to reveal their authenticity or, as may also be the case, their inconsistency.

The same may be said of the relationship of love that binds man to God. The true faithful, who feels that he receives everything from God, wants to donate the whole of his life to God.

But the life of man has various moments: it cannot be wholly and solely contemplation, unless we are concerned with the existence of a hermit who decides to pass years in an Egyptian tomb, like Saint Anthony Abbot, or on the top of a column, like Simon the Stylite. If we leave aside these limit cases, if we consider the life of a normal and common man, one always has to take account of the need of “acting” in the strict sense.

The very action offered and dedicated to God, oriented and finalized to Him, may be prayer, may be testimony, may be the equivalent of praise and adoration. It is action in which the will of God is done, in which we collaborate with Him in the creation of the universe to its ultimate completion: right through to the ultimate completion of the creation that is the instauration of the Kingdom.

There spontaneously come to mind the words of Jesus: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’, and not do what I tell you?” (Lk 6, 46). And “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of the Father who is in heaven” (Mt 7, 21).

Two passages from the letters of John provide good comment. The first: “By this we know love [in Jesus], that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if any one has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and truth” (1 Jn 3, 16-18).

Second passage: “And this is love [of God]”, says the Apostle John almost as comment: “that we follow his commandments” (2 Jn 6).

We now have to see more precisely what the Lord wants of us.

We have to verify four hypotheses (to put the matter in more schematic terms):

- 1) we have to specify whether what we men realize on the plane of action is wholly devoid of value;
- 2) or whether it has mere instrumental value in relation to contemplation;
- 3) or, again, whether it can have an autonomous value in itself, not in relation to mere contemplation, but in relation to an ultimate finality to which contemplation and action make equal contributions (where action is not reduced to a mere instrument, but collaborates together with contemplation, as we might say, on terms of equal dignity);
- 4) or, lastly, whether what we do on the plane of action can have a value of its own, in total, absolute autonomy.

We can undoubtedly discard the last solution, because it would turn action and certain of its objectives into absolutes in themselves, into “gods” who are counterposed to the sole true God and, at least in the light of the faith, would sooner or later reveal their nature of idols.

This is what, de facto, happened in the course of modern history and the history of modern thought, which saw the absolutization of Nature and History itself, of Art, Science, and Technology, Politics and Economy, Nation and Race, Love and Sex, Success and Sport, Reason, Will, Freedom, Moral Law (considered abstractly in itself), and so on.

Each of these presumed absolutes is never truly such. Each is destined to reveal itself a pseudo-absolute, unless one wants to lead it back to various forms and modes of pursuing the sole absolutely true, in accordance with what might be defined as its individual aspects.

One would also have to discard the first solution: the one that denies any kind of value to what we do on the plane of action. Such a hypothesis would fit in an adequate manner only in an existence like the one of the mentioned hermits.

I am still referring to a Saint Simon the Stylite, a Saint Anthony Abbot. But, even though the latter lived for a certain period enclosed in a sepulchre, in a subsequent period he maintained himself by cultivating a little vegetable garden, finalizing this active moment to the need of keeping alive in order to truly realize himself in the contemplative moment.

Anthony who cultivates his vegetable garden lives in accordance with the second solution. And one can say that the tradition of Christian thought generally adheres to this second perspective.

“Consider, my Lords, how time flies / and how life ebbs away, / and death is o’er our shoulders...” are verses with which Petrarch admonishes the Lords of Italy.

In this vision the world is the dominion of the ephemeral, and at the very most we can conceive it as the theatre where we men are put to the test to be judged worthy or otherwise of entering paradise, the kingdom of the heavens, which is the only eternal one.

We now have to see whether what we do on this earth has to serve only to *merit* admission to the kingdom of God or can also *contribute to edifying it*.

More or less in all the primitive-archaic forms of religion there recurs the idea that man, precisely by means of his everyday human activities, precisely by means of his action in the strict sense (be it even consecrated by rite), helps the divinity to create: at every moment of his action, man contributes to renewing the creation, to regenerate and integrate it.

Man collaborates in this sense: the creative action is accomplished by the divinity, but is accomplished through the work of man: who, consecrating action with rite, ends up by acting as a prolongation of the divinity, as its channel or vehicle. Thus it is the divinity who acts in man and, through man, makes the creation progress at all levels.

Now, it seems to me that this idea returns also in the biblical tradition. With but a single variant, though a most original and extremely important one: the divine creative work is not periodically, cyclically annulled in order to be regenerated with the cooperation of man, but, quite the contrary, proceeds towards a final and irreversible goal.

These considerations (here only very briefly outlined) and others that I omit completely, incline me to preferring the third solution.

Already at the beginning of the Book of Genesis, man’s role is defined as that of a collaborator of God. We may recall certain passages of the Book of Genesis that are particularly meaningful for the purposes of this discourse.

“In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up – for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and *there was no man to till the ground*; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground – then the Lord God formed man” (Gen 2, 4-7).

And man is clearly designed to integrate this creation, to transform the surface of the earth, to integrate it, among others, with the work of irrigation that in the Mesopotamic tradition (from which the Book of Genesis draws quite a few of its elements) is likened in a very particular manner to the creative work.

Indeed, the creative work is the defeat of the chaos that has its symbolic expression in the waters that invade the earth. The creative work is the canalization of the waters, is an operation that means and at the same time implements the reduction of the chaos into *cosmos*, an ordered world.

A second passage of the Book of Genesis that interests us here is to be found just half a page later: “So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave name to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field...” (Gen 2, 19-20).

A phrase, the one that says that God created the animals and “took them to the man”, underscores man’s lordship over the animals. And here the “Yahwist” text that commences with Genesis 2, 4 confirms the “Elohist” text (of a different source, where God is no longer called Yahweh, but Elohim) that immediately precedes it (Gen, all of ch. 1 and verses 1-4 of ch. 2). It is in this Elohist text that we find the following two characteristic passages.

“Then God said: ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth’” (Gen 1, 26).

The second passage repeats the substance of the first, amplifying it in a significant manner when it says that God created the man and the woman in his own image and likeness, defining their role as follows: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen 1, 27-28). From this one evinces that man, created in the image of God, like God, is called upon to subjugate the earth, to till it, to complete its creation and, what is more, reign over the animals, giving each its name.

Apart from the letter of this story, it is a most interesting faculty that God grants man, created in his likeness, to impose their names upon the animals (and – as one might readily extend – to all beings): giving each reality its name is equivalent to attributing its significance to each, defining the essence of all things, means knowing all things and grasping their secrets.

When the Book of Genesis tells us that God took the animals to the man to see what he would have called them, and whatever man said, that was to be their name, it seems to me that we are told something that goes far beyond the letter of the story.

It seems to me that reference is here made to a knowledge that grasps the significance of things and to some extent also shapes them.

And, further, it also seems to me that we are here talking about a knowledge that, possessing the names of the things, possesses the things themselves. It is well known that, in the terms of a mentality that is very widespread among primitive-archaic peoples, knowing the name of any kind of reality, or also person, permits the thing or person to be dominated on the magic level.

All said and done, in the vision of the Book of Genesis man is called by God to know, to dominate, to complete the creation. Man's activity that has to realize all this was later to become more and more complex. The definition of such an activity is nevertheless already pre-contained in the few remarks that the account of Genesis dedicates to the task that God entrusts to the first men.

Here we can talk only in an embryonic manner of science and philosophy, and of artistic creation.

In a more definitive manner one can speak of work and technology.

On the whole, however, one can undoubtedly talk about *humanism* in the sense of a full human life considered in what it has of the truly noble, considered inasmuch as it truly realizes man in his autonomous ambit.

One may well say that in the first pages of the Bible humanism receives its consecration from God: not as something merely instrumental in relation with a life of prayer and personal relationship with God, but as an activity that in the first men seems very natural and spontaneous and contributes in a very necessary and decisive manner to turning man into what he has to be in accordance with his vocation.

With humanism man collaborates in the divine work and bears active witness to the grateful love that binds him to his Creator. Humanism is working adoration. If we consider the ancient motto *ora et labora* in this perspective, it is precisely there that we find the most concrete response of man to God who creates him from nothing for everything, for perfection and infinite joy.

7. Humanism collaborates in the construction of the Kingdom of God

As one proceeds with reading the Old Testament, one can note that the Lord Yahweh calls men, and particularly the men of his chosen people, to an integrally human life, to an integral humanism.

Here there is not only a great deal of space for prayer (and for a continuous prayer, for an entire life as prayer and adoration), but it is also made clear that whenever man does something good and humanly valid, he is sustained by God, draws strength from God. God not only inspires his prophets, suggests to them what they have to say and do, but encourages and sustains them in action, gives them courage and the strength needed even to face martyrdom, and at times saves them in a prodigious manner from death.

But then He blesses and sustains also the ordinary work of man and renders it fertile, helps and guides and sustains men in their everyday life, guides and sustains the traveller and the entire people on the march towards the land that is destined for them, gives courage and strength to the warriors who fight for a just cause, and inspires the artists.

It is clear that the New Testament concentrates its attention on the Jewish people: and therefore many of the things that are said for this people can well apply – in an exemplary, paradigmatic manner – also for other peoples and men in general.

Very well, what is it that Yahweh wants for his people? He wants it to settle in the promised land, or have it return and remain there definitively, in an existence certainly dedicated to the perennial praise of the Lord and a continuous relationship of prayer and grace with Him, but integrated by taking care of constructive works in which each one realizes his best human possibilities.

That should have been man's existence in the terrestrial paradise: such was to be the manner of living of the Hebrews – and, around them, of all men – in the new era that is to be inaugurated by the Messiah. According to the vision of the Old Testament,

according to the spirit that runs through its pages from the first to the last, God calls men to live in a continuous relationship with Him, what can well be defined as integral humanism.

One may ask oneself why the New Testament should have moved away, at least in appearance, from such an integrally humanist vision, where such a great deal of space is accorded to the work of man on this earth as an element that necessarily cooperates in the edification of the Kingdom. Here one may adduce an entire set of explanations.

Jesus wanted to put himself in the hands of God in the expectation of eschatological events that he felt close at hand. As regards the Day of the Lord, the initiative belongs to God alone. Man has completed his active part: he knows that, if that part seeks to subsist by itself, it will be insufficient, but can re-obtain its full value by founding itself in God.

Faced with the kingdom of God that is coming, man converts himself to God, refuses his sin and every presumption that he can live by himself and do by himself, and places himself in the attitude of invocation, adoration, contemplation, listening, availability: in other words, he places himself in an attitude that by its nature is profoundly different from that of action in the strict sense, even though there is a complementarity between the two attitudes (the complementarity that can exist between two moments, both essential, that generally alternate).

Very well, man has acted in the humanist ambit, has done his part, and with this action has in some way prepared the road of the Lord who is coming, has prepared and also elaborated many materials, many stones that serve for the edification of the kingdom: man has thus in some way actively contributed to the edification of the Kingdom.

Now it is no longer the moment of humanism, it is the moment for converting to and receiving the divine action that brings the kingdom into being. After God's judgment of the works of men, after the instauration of the Kingdom, after the assumption in the Kingdom of everything that will have proved valid in the work of man, the humanism assumed in the Kingdom will be able to resume and work in a paradisiac condition not of mere contemplation, but of human life transfigured and yet concrete and full, and also active.

Jesus wanted to *underscore energetically*, as was his style, what man had to do in the imminence of the Kingdom that is coming, which was the thing closest to his heart and the motive on which he concentrated the whole of his preaching: it is the argument he treated in an exclusive manner, because, faced with this urgency, all the rest could wait.

We can also set ourselves another problem, in some way connected with the one we have just discussed. One may note that in the first centuries of Christianity, and at least for the whole of the early Middle Ages, there prevailed the instances of a strongly anti-humanist asceticism, an instance of despoliation of the world, of escape from it and its temporal commitments; and one may also observe that at that time the ideal of the perfect Christian became incarnated in the figure of the hermit and the monk.

To the extent to which the vocation is authentic, the hermit, or the monk, can be defined as a man who benefits from that minimum of human life that enables him to live, here on earth, like an angel, wholly and solely bent on the adoration, contemplation and praise of God.

One can certainly not say that a hermit or a monk can as such express the ideal of a full human life, an integral humanism in the manner I have endeavoured to delineate herein. The economy of the present discourse does not permit me here to dwell on what might have been the historical and philosophical and other factors that caused this anti-humanist orientation.

A great part must undoubtedly have been played by non-biblical spiritual traditions and thought, inspired by an asceticism that devalues the temporal sphere as an ambit in which man cannot realize himself and from which he must evade as from a prison, as from a negative condition, for only by freeing himself of it can he truly realize himself on another and different plane: on the plane of an absolute, of which the world is not a participation but only a degradation.

Elbow room must have been offered to these tendencies by the fact that in the New Testament there is effectively an apparent refusal of the humanist instances.

It is an apparent refusal, in actual fact merely a postponement, if the summary analysis just made is on the mark.

However, this apparent character of refusal of those instances seems intended to encourage the contrary instances, the instances of asceticism as an evasion from the world that I have also outlined.

In any case, humanism could find poor encouragement in an epoch of renewed cultural and civil barbarities like the one that followed the fall of the Roman Empire and the classical civilization.

New encouragements were to come later, round about the year 1000, and then to an ever greater extent in the course of the late Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the modern epoch.

A greater appreciation of the temporal ambit and greater confidence in the resources of man and his autonomous initiatives were to affirm themselves to an ever greater extent in the common feelings of the men of those more recent epochs and in their thought.

All this may induce the theologian to re-think the Gospel in a manner that will clearly bring out the fact that the Gospel concentrates its attention on the invocative moment for the reasons mentioned above, but without in any way excluding the humanist moment, which is only considered as being of lesser urgency, is only postponed: it is confined in the background, as it were, but not denied.

Though the future condition of man in the promised kingdom of God greatly exceeds even the most ambitious humanist aspirations, one can certainly not say that the message of Jesus concentrates attention on humanism. Attention is wholly focused on the religious moment or the moment of faith (whichever you prefer): that is to say, on the moment in which man places himself in the hands of the Lord who is coming: this attitude is the only one appropriate in that eschatological situation, where it would be just as appropriate to suspend every other attitude. Suspending something does not mean renouncing it. Renunciation is one thing, simple postponement quite another.

Everything that Jesus calls the “world” had a very considerable function in preparing the conditions in which the advent of the kingdom of God could take place and assert itself in a mature situation.

The history of salvation and the secular history of men both cooperate in the kingdom in an equally necessary manner, even though secular history, with its “progress”, cooperates in a more indirect and less conscious manner. But the contribution of the latter is also necessary, so that in time it may arrive at its fullness, its maturity. The contribution of the profane history of men is also necessary because it provides necessary and irreplaceable elements, material that will eventually be assumed – for such validity as it may have – in the kingdom in order to complete it.

Humanism not only has a function – complementary, but irreplaceable – in connection with the preparation of the kingdom, but will continue in the kingdom itself. We have said that the perfection that can be attained by men admitted to the kingdom far exceeds the greatest expectations of any humanism.

Though obedient to the will of God, in which they will have recognized their own true will, the men of the Kingdom will really have full dominion over all things. And they will likewise know all things by virtue of what theologians call the “beatific vision”. They will be reinvested with all the perfections in a perfect world.

Now the problem is to be able to specify whether this sum of good things *will be granted by God to men so that it may be passively received by them*, or whether they will be able and, indeed, have to *cooperate in their acquisition*.

We shall limit ourselves to the idea that we have today about the learning process and confront it with the idea that we had of it in former times. Formerly learning was conceived as a passive and specular reception of a set of already organized, prefabricated notions, to be assumed just as they are proposed; today we tend to conceive learning ever more in active and creative terms.

The famous old woman, ignorant and illiterate, but so good and devout who dies and goes to paradise cannot become omniscient (or almost) without having done something to mature herself also intellectually. This intellectual maturation, which certainly calls for a more active commitment of the new blessed soul, seems necessary to enable that soul to progress in knowledge.

Without lingering to give examples of a matter that it would be prudent not to consider in excessive detail, one can assume that, given that in the Kingdom men can pursue different perfections, they can (and must) pursue them by committing themselves to a whole series of humanist activities, giving new force and development to humanism also and specifically within the ambit of the Kingdom.

Let us focus attention on what in the overall life of man is the humanist moment.

We cannot expect to find an adequate valuation of this moment in the Gospels: and this precisely due to the already mentioned fact that the Gospels accentuate the religious moment, in the imminence of the Kingdom of God that is coming: and they accentuate it in that energetic manner, incisive even in its hyperbolas, that is characteristic of the style of Jesus.

Whoever expresses himself in this manner, at the very moment in which he underscores one of the terms of the question in such a strong and exclusive manner, may emarginate other terms to such an extent as to give the impression that these terms have little or no influence or are altogether non-existent. It may be that the person who speaks, by the very act of underscoring the term of immediate interest, concentrating attention on it in an exclusive manner, will end up, even without wanting to do so, by emptying the other terms of the question and, in the limit, annulling them.

If in the Gospels we cannot find an adequate valuation of the humanist moment, we can nevertheless find a clear principle of positive valuation thereof (even if perhaps not yet wholly adequate) in the Old Testament, as we saw earlier on, and one can in any case say with certainty that the impact of the Judeo-Christian tradition on the Western world facilitated in a decisive manner the emergence of an ever more positive valuation of the world, the time, the history, the contingency and the singularity of the creature as such and therefore of man, of human values, of the humanist moment.

It is true that the humanist moment has not always been seen as a pure moment of human life, side by side with an equally essential religious moment. It is true that in the modern epoch humanism has come to be more often connoted as an atheist humanism, obviously excluding the religious moment. But all this does not diminish the importance for the development by the Christian tradition of the fact that the humanist moment should at last be recognized in an adequate manner.

We may recall that the spiritual tradition of the Jewish people became gradually enriched also by the traditions of other peoples with whom the Jewish people subsequently came into contact. We may recall that these contributions were not

transferred lock, stock and barrel into the biblical tradition, but were re-lived in an original manner in the religious experience of the Jews and therefore comprised and gathered and captured precisely in the sense of this experience and precisely within this ambit were convalidated in their value of truth.

Very well, the importance of the humanist moment, the value of humanism in relation to the kingdom of God is a truth. It is a newly acquired truth, but always a Christian truth.

It is so, first and foremost, because it is implicit in Judaism and in Christianity itself. Secondly, it is so because it came to light in an ambit, like the one of the modern Western civilization, that was fecundated in a decisive manner by the impact of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Thirdly, it is so because this truth becomes rediscovered time and time again (and, as one might add, appropriately redimensioned) in the ambit of what is the ongoing Christian experience, namely in the spiritual experience of the Christians of our epoch.

Christianity today increasingly recognizes the value of humanism and recognizes it as a truth that we find only partly consigned in the Bible, inasmuch as it emerged in subsequent epochs, but is nevertheless to be accepted as revealed by God himself.

The same truths that the Jews learnt contingently from other peoples, once they had been re-elaborated, re-lived and convalidated in their religious experience, ended up by being considered, just like the previously acquired ones, as truths revealed by God himself, no matter what might have been the channel of manifestation. Even humanism must therefore be led back to the religious experience of the Judeo-Christian tradition that gradually develops and becomes enriched through all the epochs.

If the Great Commandment of this tradition is the love of God, I should like to conclude with some remarks that make us see rather clearly that humanism, just like every form of legitimate temporal commitment, can be traced back to the love of God in a strict and rigorous manner.

The love of one's God springs essentially from the creatural experience. In one of his last discussions before he died, Saint Camillo De Lellis, speaking of the love of God, confided "that he remained astonished how the creature could fail to unboundedly love his Creator". And it is said that he himself "suffered on account of not loving sufficiently, that is to say, not loving as infinitely as he wanted" (from a biography of the Saint).

Saint Theresa of Lisieux wrote of a love between God and man "that goes to the point of folly" (*The little doctrine of Theresa*). The love in question is potentially unlimited and open to all the consequences, all the implications.

Angela da Foligno wrote that "love makes likeness to be desired" (*Autobiography*). And, referring to Christ who loved and practiced poverty, sorrow, desposal, writing of the love that has to be sustained for him, she expressed herself as follows: "Here one knows whether one's love is pure and true and right: when man loves and works as much as the one whom he loves did love and work" (*Autobiography*).

The love for the Man-God Jesus Christ expresses itself in an ever more intimate participation in his life and also in an "imitation of Christ", as recites the very title of the most famous among the books of meditation of the West.

There can also be a participation in the divine nature as such. If God is supreme activity, loving God is participating in this activity: the love of God is active, is active cooperation offered to God. Thus, if God is omniscient, at a certain point true love of God becomes translated into thirst of knowing: of imitating, i.e. pursuing divine omniscience, be it even to the most imperfect extent of which we men are capable. Thus the artist imitates the divine Artist of the creation, and so on.

If from the theological sphere we come down to examples of human love, we can grasp a fine analogy: we note that when we truly love a person, we not only place this person in the very forefront of our thoughts, but want to be close to the person in everything and also have the desire of being like that person as much as possible in order to live of that person's life.

We therefore not only take an interest in that person's thoughts and interior life, but also hold dear what he/she holds dear, share the same aspirations, desire the same things.

From all this there comes into being within us a commitment to helping the loved person on the plane of action and in pursuit of objectives close to that person's heart.

Many times we say that we love someone, and we are probably fully convinced of it, and yet the person in question remains a stranger for us: we know the person by name and sight, desire that person's company, and possibly cannot even do without it, but are more interested in what he or she represents for us than what he or she actually is and desires and loves and does and aspires to be.

To return to God, we can thus fill our mouth with Him, probably in all sincerity, and can therefore look to God as to an image that is supremely dear to us and an experience that exalts us and gratifies us to a supreme degree.

But who is God really? – as we might well ask ourselves – and what is really his intimate life? What are his thoughts and projects? What and whom does He love? What does He want? What does He really do?

Certainly, God is a profound mystery for us: and whoever poses questions of this type for himself can give the impression of not taking sufficient account of this tremendously mysterious nature and to assume an unduly confidential attitude with his Creator, speaking of him the way we speak of one of our neighbours.

On the other hand, the mystery that surrounds God cannot be invoked as an excuse for disinteresting ourselves in Him. And it is even necessary that we should ask ourselves in all humility whether we want to stop at what God can be for us as regards the solution of our problems, or whether we want to make at least some little effort not, as I would say, to know God in an exhaustive manner, but to consider Him as He is in himself, with his thoughts, with what He loves and really wants, with his real creative project, with what He really expects from each one of us men.

God loves us infinitely and donates himself to us without limits, so that we should not only become sanctified and incarnate Him, but to make us become in every sense and in every respect similar to Him. In the limit, God wants us as omniscient and omnipotent and perfect as He is.

Thus, whoever truly loves God to the very limit pursues not only sanctity, but also every perfection: in the limit, he pursues omniscience; in the limit, he pursues omnipotence; he loves everything that expresses or can express some value of goodness and beauty and some interest of truth.

Niccolò Tommaseo tells the following of Antonio Rosmini: "Praising a person who, among other and greater merits, loved also the arts, he one day told me with sapient simplicity: he loves everything that is good".

In a passage of the Constitutions of his Institute of Charity, Rosmini defined love as "the act with which the will brings itself into the good".

This means that, when love is pure and perfect, man wants only good, and he wants it because it is good, he loves the good wherever it is to be found, loves all the more what is even more good, and in all things pursues the greatest good. And the greatest Good is God.

If we want to take our cue from these thoughts of Rosmini, one may note that those who love God seek Him in every value, in every truth, in every expression of beauty.

Whoever loves God, helps Him to further the creation, so that it may become enriched in awareness, beauty, goodness, justice, enriched in every value.

Certain values, certain implementations are of such a nature that they can be pursued only individually: these are the implementations of certain forms of philosophical research, for example, or artistic or poetical creation.

But there are other values that can be efficaciously pursued only in an organized manner on a vast scale, only by operating in the political sphere.

It is here that, derived from the creatural experience, the love of us creatures for who creates us drives us to cooperate in the creation in the modes of political action.

Made of devotion for the Creator, the creatural attitude becomes interest for the creation.

A coherent religious person has the creation at heart far more than his own things and interests.

The religious soul contemplates in ecstasy the grandiose universal fresco of the creation.

The religious soul that is so to the very full, in all its implications, loves the creatures in God because they bear his imprint, but also loves each creature in itself as God himself loves it.

The religious soul loves each creature as it is in its best potentiality. With a love that expresses itself also in love of knowledge, it studies and wants to know each creature to the full and, in the limit, it wants know the entire creation in all its details.

This passionate interest for the creation, and even more so the true being of the creation that is what it ought to be, its completion, becomes translated into an active commitment: man thus becomes God's collaborator not only on the strictly religious level to promote the sanctification of himself and the others, but also on the humanist plane to advance the construction of the universe to its highest expression.

Entrusting ourselves to God means letting ourselves be created by Him, means letting him create the world also through us.

God creates us even through the activities inspired by Him with which we forge ourselves and give development to our personality.

Humanism is the imitation of the Creator God. At the same time it is seconding the divine creation of the universe, is a collaboration with it.

Even before constituting modes of being of us men, knowing, acting, creating are modes of being of the divinity.

And therefore when we immerse ourselves in an activity of research and study, artistic creation, production in the economic sense, technical realization, social and political commitment, we really immerse ourselves in various modes of being of God.

Immersing ourselves in one of these modes of being of the Creator God is a manner of actively living a relationship with the divinity, is a manner of living the religious experience, is a manner of praying: always provided that we are conscious that the first subject of the action is God, to whom belongs the first initiative, with respect to which our own initiative is nothing other than cooperation.

Acting is letting God act through our personal action. It is bringing the active presence of the divinity onto that particular plane, that particular context. The more we commit ourselves in this situation, the more we let the divine presence – of which we know ourselves to be the bearers, vehicles, means of expression – operate in us and through us.

This is the point where man's action becomes inserted in his entrusting himself to God, and where prayer becomes linked with commitment, attitude of faith with operosity, the vertical dimension with the horizontal one.

It is the creatural experience of feeling oneself created by the divine Love that generates the love of God in the creature; and the love of God finds its expression in the prayer of adoration and praise and then finds its concrete implementation in cooperating with the creation on the plane of temporal commitment, humanism and political action to improve the world. It is in the idea of the creation that prayer and temporal commitment find their synthesis.

8. Christianity and the Earth

Many Christians scandalize us by how they *live* Christianity, how they betray it. And thus far there is no harm in this: I also include myself in their number, and may the Lord pardon us all.

But what creates greater problems is how many Christians *conceive* Christianity: it is the same idea they have of their *having to be* Christians in this world and in the present age.

There is surely something to be learnt from the famous “signs of the times”, if it is true that God speaks to us through all the realities and therefore, above all, through the epochal events of history.

Christians or otherwise, we are all children of the modern age and modern humanism. And, at least tendentially, we have an evolutionist vision of the cosmos and history. Evolutionism has freed itself of the fetters of a certain Darwinian materialism that left no space for any divine intervention. Today a religious vision (for those who have it) and an evolutionist vision (revised and corrected) seem perfectly capable of being integrated.

Certainly, before humanism, evolutionism, proposals of the modern spirit, religious man dedicates privileged attention to the specifically religious instances.

From this point of view it is perfectly right that he should first and foremost concern himself with saving his soul from sin and from every evil that could derive therefrom.

An authentic religious man also feels another instance that can be understood only by those who have matured a similar religious sensitivity: the interior need of mortifying every tendency towards negative behaviours; more generally, it is the impulse of mortifying the “old man” who is in each one of us, namely the egoistic and egocentric man. So that each one of us may make a total gift of himself to the Divinity.

Another religious need is to live as united as possible with God and in his grace. What does that mean? It is an interior experience, a state of consciousness that a religious man feels so positively as to pursue it as the greatest of the good things.

We understand and agree with all this. But we are decidedly contrary to a religion of escape from the world, where each one poses himself nothing other than the problem of saving the soul.

For each one it will be a question of his own soul and possibly also of others, but always the soul of individuals. And we decidedly reject the idea of a salvation that is only of individuals and not of all humanity as a collective body in common with all the creation.

We are equally adverse to the idea of life as an individual test, that Tom passes, obtaining the eternal prize of paradise, and Dick fails, so that he will go to the hell and remain there damned forever without remission.

And unacceptable to us seems even the idea of asceticism as an end in itself, an asceticism that detaches us from this valley of tears to put us in salvation in a transcendental reality,

in a heaven, from which the earth, seen by then from a distance, must some day seem wholly devoid of significance.

Our sense of value is wounded by the despisal of many religious men for the human values of creativity and art, philosophy, the sciences, the technologies, the economic and politico-social activities.

Man who commits himself on a religious road of meditation, prayer and asceticism may consider certain activities as distracting. He will therefore deem it necessary to abstain from them at least for a certain period. But it is one thing to suspend humanism in its concrete exercise (or, said in other words, put it in a refrigerator for a while, if I may use such a homely term); it is quite another to judge humanism as such vain or negative or harmful or useless or, in the most favourable case, possibly utilizable within certain limits, but only in the instrumental sense.

We profoundly feel that God is omniscient, omnipotent, supreme artist of the creation: and that cultivating the sciences, progressing in the technologies, committing oneself in artistic creation is an imitation of God and is therefore not only of a high spiritual value, but is in itself religious.

In our vision humanism collaborates with the divine creation of the universe, continues it, completes it. The contribution of the artist is therefore not only the construction of churches and providing them with statues of saints and frescoes of biblical subjects and then to fill the vaults with the sound of sacred music that will revive the religious feelings of the faithful.

Similarly, the contribution of the scientist, the politician, the captain of industry, the farmer and the technician does not consist only of cooperating in bringing into being a civil structure that limits itself to constituting the most favourable environment for a religious commitment on which admission to paradise will exclusively depend.

Here humanism would be relegated to an instrumental, ancillary function without any direct contribution of its own.

If we develop the consequences implicit in our discourse to the full, humanism is for us a series of activities destined not only to *give us the occasion of meriting paradise*, but to *give us the means for helping to construct it*.

In other words, humanism means cooperating with God in bringing paradise into being as the highest implementation of the entire work of creation.

The construction of paradise or – which is the same thing – the kingdom of God is therefore the collective work of men in cooperation with God; it is the universal historical process carried forward by God, who is the Lord of history.

The construction of the Kingdom implies a “history of salvation” that proceeds at the same pace as the profane history of men, with which it must ultimately merge.

Salvation, and we must really stress this, is not of individuals who attain it individually, but universal, of all. It implies a true historical process. Rather, it constitutes the point of arrival of the entire process of evolution.

These concepts seem certainly in harmony both with an evolutionist vision of nature and the cosmos and a modern conception of history. Indeed, they seem suggested by them.

But let us consider these things with greater attention: we shall then note that this cosmic-historical vision of salvation is already present in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Rather, as we gradually delve deeper, we shall realize that it is there that the idea of history as development first saw the light of day.

And it is from there that later, indirectly, due to the mediation of the modern idea of history as progress, the evolutive idea becomes applied even to the becoming of nature: and hence evolutionism.

It was with Judaism that there took shape for the first time the idea of salvation as a historical process and, more generally, as a process of cosmic evolution, where the whole of mankind and, indeed, the whole of creation is involved: in other words, as universal history of salvation embracing the becoming and the very origin of the worlds.

In the antecedent religious traditions there could be concern for the salvation of an entire people, but as an episode of a cyclic pattern without true development: where, as we might say, a certain people is saved by the Divinity, then finds itself once again in danger, is saved again, and so on, without any true and definitive solution. In such a perspective everything repeats and nothing ever happens that is substantially new.

In these pre-biblical traditions there could also be the case of being concerned with a possibly decisive salvation to be obtained once and for all: but it was always a question of one's own individual salvation, or that of other individuals, without ever going beyond the personal problem of the individual.

Some glimmer of universalism appeared in the later Buddhism of the Major Vehicle (*Mahayana*), where the holy *bodhisattva*, on dying, foregoes entering in the beatitude of the *nirvana* to return indefinitely to becoming reincarnated until such time as all other sentient beings had saved themselves.

Here we clearly have a concern for the salvation of all, each of whom will however have to save himself (or be saved) individually, and never by the grace of a collective process that commits all and sundry. Each climbs by himself or is pulled up individually by some benevolent power: but there is never a team bound by a rope.

In Mazdaism, above all, we have the vision of the final triumph of the good God, Ahura Mazda, and the forces of good. There is also the idea of the final resurrection and the palingenesis of the whole of mankind. Every good work, every positive fact cooperates in the final advent of salvation for all.

Here we have a grandiose and truly universalist background. Even Judaism, when it assumed the most congenial things contained in the different traditions, integrated that idea into its own vision of the history of salvation, which thus came to amplify its perspectives to embrace the whole of humanity, the entire creation.

When we examine this to the full, we discover that Judaism and Christianity (and I would also add Islam) offer us a picture of the universal history of salvation that can be readily inserted in the *vision* of human history and in the wider history of cosmic evolution.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, above all, theorized this agreement in a particularly clear manner. The significance of the theological, philosophical and scientific proposal of the famous French Jesuit seems to me to be well summarized in the words with which Pierre Smulders begins his book *The vision of Teilhard de Chardin*: "All Teilhard's thought aims at a confrontation and a synthesis of the Christian faith and the evolutionist vision of the world and, starting from this synthesis, a new inspiration of the Christian attitude".

Born in 1881 into a noble family of the French province, he entered the Company of Jesus at the age of nineteen, specialized in palaeontology and then spent many years in China, participating in scientific expeditions and making his contribution to important discoveries, always providing positive confirmation of the evolutionist hypotheses.

The collected data also served him to corroborate the lines of a daring and genial conception that he had been elaborating in those years. His outline of scientific and also philosophical and theological thought thus came to assume an ever more precise form and was eventually expressed in numerous essays that in part came to light only after his sudden death in New York in 1955.

Teilhard's meditation develops intuitions and thoughts that had already begun to form in his spirit in childhood. At the age of seven he already felt attracted by something

that he felt present in the heart of matter. For him this mysterious reality proved robust and consistent: its hardness seemed to be the essential characteristic, almost synonymous of permanence even as things changed, and therefore of absoluteness. Naturally, the little Pierre gave to the as yet indefinable sense of all this an imaginative formulation, the only that his infantile soul could as yet provide.

The Christian education that Teilhard received in his family and the schools of the Jesuits developed in him a live sense of the divine presence. A presence that, following the intuitions I mentioned a moment or two ago, he felt in the intimacy of matter and nature, the evolution of the cosmos and also in human history.

Thus the mission of Teilhard became that of affirming the presence of God, of the incarnate God, of Christ, not only in the transcendence of the loftiest heavens, but in the very heart of the earth.

In the Teilhardian vision Christ lives precisely in the mysterious depth of the terrestrial realities that traditional theology looked upon with the greatest suspicion. One should bear in mind the influences that for a long time was exercised on theology, asceticism, Christian mystics, and even the religious feelings of the masses, by a mentality of oriental origin that tended to identify matter with evil and sin. Teilhard, on the other hand, wanted to recuperate the positive sense of matter, creation, man's creativity, human personality, human history as the crowning of the evolution of nature and the cosmos.

God, the supreme Living, incarnates himself in the world and promotes its evolution. The "universal Christ", the "cosmic Christ", is also "evolutor" and "humanizer". All men are invisibly united in Christ in what is traditionally called his "mystic body". All are called upon to incarnate God even on this earth and there to realize the "Man-God".

When Christ, who grows within us, will have reached his fullness, that will be the "Omega point" of the entire creative process. All Christians and all men of good will always feel called upon to hasten this advent.

And every action will have to be finalized to this objective. The old static and abstract morality of mere observance of precepts will be overcome by a dynamic morality proposing the actions that pursue the supreme end only and precisely because they tend towards such a goal.

Teilhard gives the name of "diaphany" to the transparency of the universe that enables a purified and refined spirit to glimpse there the presence of Christ. Such a presence is the motive force not only of the history of salvation, but also of the history of civilization.

It is in Christ that at the end of time civil history will reveal the entire contribution it will have given to the edification of the kingdom of God, the preparation of the full advent of the kingdom of the heavens on earth. And it is in Christ that the synthesis of humanism and religion will become implemented.

Indeed, Teilhard has offered us very adequate and updated logic instruments for such a synthesis. A current of Catholic thought had been pressing in that direction for a long time. The instance was to assume in the Christian vision everything that in modern humanism is compatible with Christianity. In this range of compatibilities there has to be included an entire complex of ideas that seem to be far from the Christian matrix, inasmuch as they were subsequently developed and unduly absolutized and, in short, had somehow lost their way.

In the 19th century the papacy had decidedly put Christians on guard against a humanism that proposed itself in forms that were often excessively atheist (and I shall not say more to avoid straying from my theme). Thus modern civilization was put in quarantine en bloc.

In the long run, however, an attitude of such an integral rejection of modern civilization ended up by revealing itself as negative, if not otherwise, even in pastoral terms. How could one speak to men of that civilization condemning their mode of being in such complete fashion? What is more, it would not even have been right. And not even Christian, if it is true that it is repugnant to charity to think ill of too many things at all costs, without discernment!

Even the ecclesiastics underwent a long period of collective maturation. And towards the middle of the 20th century the Second Vatican Council showed in what way the acceptable ideas or, rather, the originally Christian ideas of modern humanism can be rediscovered, identified and recuperated. Over and above this, it showed in what manner these “Christian ideas run amok” can be abstracted from an improper context, even an atheist context, and once again assumed in a Christian religious perspective.

These ideas have undoubtedly run amok, have absolutized themselves and lost contact with the religious matrix that alone could give them their proper sense; at the same time, however, they also developed in a direction of their own. This development occurred together with the development of the modern spirit.

Prodigal daughters (not so very different from the protagonist of the famous evangelical parabola), the ideas of freedom, humanity, art, science and philosophy, economy, love and sex, philanthropy and sociality, politico-social commitment and so on, somehow lost their way and went off the beaten track; and yet they enriched themselves, matured and grew, became of age.

Modern humanism borrowed them as germs. It now returns them as a splendid harvest. It returns them in the rediscovered consciousness of the function that each one is called upon to perform in the kingdom of God.

At this point it was Christianity itself that could usefully draw from modern thought, from the spirit of this civilization. They thus mutually integrate each other. Even though it has often betrayed the teaching of its divine Master, historical Christianity is nevertheless inspired at its root by the invisible and yet real presence of Christ.

But the same may be said of the hidden presence of the God incarnate in matter and the becoming of nature and human history, profane history included, notwithstanding all these diaphragms that hide from sight, deform and hinder, diaphragms that some day will have to fall.

Then the city of God will discover the presence of God himself, the incarnate God, in the city of man. And the mutual integration will occur in this final encounter.

The cosmos of matter, of life, of humanity can be assumed in the kingdom of God inasmuch as God himself is present there. It is due to the incarnation of God in the earth that the earth is redeemed and made worthy. And thus the fruits of the earth, offered to God, are thereby sanctified or, rather divinized, so that matter becomes the body of the Divinity. This corresponds to what takes place in the Eucharist.

The cosmic significance of the sacrifice is expressed in the touching, sublime words that Teilhard has left us in memory of the “Mass of the world” that he celebrated when, especially in the course of scientific expeditions in distant parts, he found himself in the impossibility of absolving his own daily office as priest in the customary ritual forms: “Because today, I, your priest, have neither bread nor wine nor altar, I stretch out my hands over the totality of the universe and take its immensity as matter of my sacrifice” (Teilhard, *The priest*).

This is what God does through men when, incarnating himself, he calls upon all to be priests and consecrators in expectation and prefiguration of the ultimate and eternal Liturgy.

9. Christian love and its humanist implications

Here we shall try to highlight to the greatest possible extent that humanism derives from Christianity and has its origin of sense in the experience of Christian love. And we shall try to show that the authentic values brought to light and made to emerge ever more explicitly from modern humanism during the last few centuries can be traced back to a Christian matrix, where alone they can find their full significance.

There is fifteenth-century humanism, and the importance of that epoch seems fundamental in human history. When I speak of “humanism”, I do however intend to range far beyond the limits of that period and its particular civilization.

By “humanism” I understand, albeit with far greater amplex, all the instances of attention for man and the promotion of man that in the fifteenth century came to the fore, came to be specified in an altogether particular manner. A movement that, nevertheless, owed its preparation to the travail of antecedent epochs and, what is more, became explicated in an extreme wealth of forms in the course of subsequent centuries, right through to the present epoch.

Attention for man, exaltation and valorization of man, promotion and also – as we say today – liberation of man: liberation from what oppresses him, from what stands in the way of the full development of his personality.

Not exactly all the forms of liberation of man that are being proposed today seem equally acceptable. But it seems to me that we have to be interested in a particular manner in the basic instance, which is *love* of man.

This instance is often expressed in very arid forms. We need only think of the cold conceptuality of many doctrinal and normative formulations. Or of the interior aridity of many administrators of charity or, to give a very different example, that of many professional politicians and also professional revolutionaries: men who work for man and fight for man and yet no longer seem to have him in front of their eyes.

It may happen that the instance of love of man comes to explode in more violent and cruel forms. We may ask the most pitiless red and black “brigaders” for what and for whom they put up their fight. One may expect them to reply that they fought for a better society, for a better humanity. And why did they do it? But, obviously, for love of man! This “tangle of the heart of man”, as Alessandro Manzoni called it, truly consists of widely different and often even contrasting elements.

Nobody can say that the element *love of man*, when and to the extent to which it is present, cannot prove to be genuine, at least in its principle. The fact that a river seems turbid and tortuous and deviating from its course on account of what it encounters on its way, does not exclude that it may spring from a pure source.

One may love in very strange forms that would induce us to prefer not being loved at all. There is an entire pathology of love. And yet, the love that man may bear for his like, when considered in its principle, seems something very real and genuine. Our Christian religious experience tells us that man’s love of man, lived in a certain manner, considered in a certain manner, can be traced back to the love of God.

The Gospel underscores the love that the disciple of Christ must have for the others, for his neighbour. Nevertheless, the love that the Christian must have for man is not only love for the other: it is also love for oneself, for one’s own I.

It is not a question, be it clear, of egoistic love, but of “rightful” love. I must not love the “old man” in me, with all his negative inclinations, with the motions of “nature” that go against the motions of “grace”.

Quite the contrary, I have to love the “new man” in me. I have to love the presence within me of the God who, though transcending me from deep within, i.e. though being “other” to me in his being more intimate even than the most intimate I can have within

myself, is the true centre of my personality. In the orderly love that I can have for the others or for myself I shall endeavour, in the limit, to love each as God loves him.

In what manner can we say that God loves each one of us? He loves each individually. Certainly not in his sin, but in his singularity, in his creativity, in his being different from any other, in his being an autonomous creature, in his being *himself with* a consistency of his own.

God loves each one of us with everything that legitimately is close to his heart. Purifying us from all dross, God assumes us in his kingdom with everything that we *are* in the positive sense.

He does not limit himself to seeing and loving in each man the pure reflection of God, but, quite the contrary, sees and loves in each the unique and unrepeatable creature. God loves each man, each creature, with everything that characterizes the creature as individual and distinct: distinct from the others, distinct from God himself.

If he limited himself to loving himself, He would not even create. It is in the logic of the creation that God loves and saves each creature, rendering it eternal in its singularity: Mario Rossi as Mario Rossi, Rosina Bianchi precisely as Rosina Bianchi, but each elevated to the limit of his or her best and highest and most unsuspected possibilities.

In the vision of Christianity we scrutinize ourselves in profundity. And this certainly does not happen in the horizon of the humanism of our epoch. Our modern humanism that has taken shape in the last few centuries seems wholly enclosed in a pure earthly experience. It studies man in the world, on this earth, highlighting everything that is earthly in him and neglecting, forgetting, passing in silence everything that in him is aspiration for heaven and testimony of heaven.

Let us consider what characterizes the love of man that expresses itself in the humanism of the modern age in the most peculiar manner: we shall not fail to see that this love has as its object a humanity closed in the world, a “natural” humanity, a humanity that does not see or does not want to see itself in its supernatural dimension.

This is certainly negative. But let us not go beyond considering man in his natural dimension, man inasmuch as he lives in the world. We cannot fail to see the constant and passionate effort of modern humanism to improve the life of man at least within these limits.

And here is another point that must not be overlooked, must not be ignored by our Christian sensitivity: the best instances of modern humanism can be traced back to Christian instances. In other words, in their profound and original spirit the humanist instances of the modern epoch are to be considered developments and applications and manifestations of Christian love.

Certainly, we have often lost sight of what is the source of primary significance of many applications of Christian love. Could there ever be an authentic Christian love for man without the love of God, without a thou-to-thou relationship with a God? Surely not. And yet certain applications that are made today, no matter how limited and closed their horizon may appear, bear de facto witness to live Christian sensitivity for man.

It is a sensitivity often unconscious of its own Christian inspiration. Nevertheless, it is a substantial reality that cannot be passed in silence. For all Christians, it always represents a touchstone and a challenge, if not altogether a motive for admonishment.

Let me try to produce some example. In the modern and contemporaneous age there is gradually taking shape an attention for man that expresses itself in many different ways and at many different levels. Within the limits of the present discourse, it is sufficient to refer to certain socio-political principles that we find affirmed to a growing extent in the historic declarations of rights and more or less in the individual democratic constitutions.

Unfortunately, these principles are not always and everywhere implemented. And yet they are affirmed in theory. And it is already a far from negligible advantage with respect to the past when the more widely accepted doctrines enounced wholly different and opposite principles.

Today there is affirmed the principle of personal liberty, to be safeguarded against every possible arbitrary act of the executive powers. Whereas, to give the simple example of absolutist France, it is well known that a simple *lettre de cachet* of the King was sufficient to have any one of his subjects imprisoned in the Bastille for the duration of the sovereign's pleasure.

It may well be that the "Most Christian King" was convinced that he thus acted as a good father. And at times it could even be a father of a family to beg the King, father of all the French, to have his profligate son imprisoned for some time in the hope that a lesson of that kind could prove useful.

In that case the King certainly acted for a good purpose. And his intervention could at times prove beneficial. But can a benefit of that kind compensate the immense ill deriving from such a macroscopic negation of the dignity of man and the citizen? And is such a negation of human dignity nearer to Christian love than the effort to affirm this dignity in concrete terms in a more just and also more human order?

Let us now rapidly review other liberties and other principles, where the affirmation of the dignity of man can express itself to an incomparably greater extent than when politics were based on opposite principles and the negation of these liberties.

According to the tendency that prevails today, freedom of religion has taken the place of the wars of religion and the persecution of "heretics".

For the most part freedom of speech and press banishes every censorship and every penal action that seek to assert crimes of opinion. Freedom of meeting and association assures that there can be neither political trials nor political prisoners (in spite of the fact that in our country there are still people who affirm to have been put on trial for political reasons, while in other countries there continue to be true political prisoners without even being put on trial).

Equality takes the place of privilege, even though one has to close one's eyes to the privileges that survive as factual realities, and to the whole of the new feudalism of the parties and their clientele and the parcelling out of power that at least has the advantage of seeming illegal and immoral to us, whereas it was once accepted as legitimate even by way of principle.

Women, plebeians, heretics, Jews and Negroes were once considered second- or third-class citizens. In our own days we have the principle of political and civil parity, against every form of discrimination and segregation.

"The law is equal for all" is today written in every courtroom in our country, where in other epochs it was the law itself that had different procedures and penalties for nobles and plebeians.

An ongoing process today aims at the emancipation of women, who formerly were excessively underprivileged, relegated to more limited functions, inhibited from developing their personalities in a more integral manner by fully participating in the life of society, considered as inferior beings, deprived of the right of voting and exercising a profession in the same way as men.

These limitations subsisted even in those social circles where noblewomen were placed on a pedestal and revered in accordance with the rules of chivalry: but always relegated to a role they could not overstep unless they were a queen or a feudal lady reigning in her own right.

Today the states are multiplying their initiatives to extend basic education, which is rendered obligatory and free of charge, whereas once it was reserved to those whom their

families could maintain at school (and in spite of everything, even today there persists a selection that emarginates those of more limited means and, in any case, maintains them in conditions of inferiority).

There has been an increasing tendency to assist the poor, the sick, the orphans, the invalids and the old: an assistance not conceived as alms, but as a legal right of each citizen to be helped by the community in case of need.

The ancient forms of slavery, serfdom of the glebe, etc., have gradually been abolished, even though their place has been taken by new forms of exploitation that call for more toil and struggles to be eliminated.

In many parts of the world there has now been abolished the penalty of death, which in former epochs was often executed in a most atrocious manner. Torture, which once formed part of the common judiciary procedure, has now become illegal. Nevertheless, it is unfortunately well known that it is still being practiced by the police forces of the very countries that call themselves civil, though in illegal and hidden forms, without witnesses and without leaving excessively visible traces.

Though the conditions of many, indeed, far too many prisons are sadly known, prison treatment has been gradually improved in recent centuries and efforts are being made to render it more human, aiming at the rehabilitation of the detainees and, even before that, at their re-education (even though this seems highly problematical in the actual conditions of our prisons).

However, in many countries it has become part of the judicial procedure that an accused is not to be considered guilty before the passing of a definitive sentence. In other times the accused was treated as a delinquent as soon as he was arrested. And often the defence was granted, and even then only within very narrow limits, by sovereign concession. It was not conceived as a right.

All these rights, which are today affirmed in the democratic constitutions, are conceived, just like those that the citizen has as such, inasmuch as they derive from his dignity of man.

Let us concentrate attention on the Italian constitution, where Article 2 already recites: "The Republic recognizes and guarantees the inviolable rights of man, both as an individual and in the social formations where his personality is developed, and calls for compliance with the ineludible duties of political, economic and social solidarity".

Here it is said that the state has duties, ineludible duties. In other words, as we might add, we here have imperatives that are neither hypothetical nor conditional, but categorical, absolute.

They are underlain by an ethic, even though this is not mentioned in an explicit manner. And, when one delves a little further in the implications of the text we are examining and the whole of its context in general, we find that this ethic, in its turn, derives, albeit wholly implicitly, from a particular ontology and metaphysics.

Who or what is this man who has "inviolable rights"? What is the special thing he has that distinguishes him from any other being – animal, plant or thing – that anybody could consider with respect and even care for with love, but which nobody would ever dream of considering as possessing inviolable rights, a dignity equal to that of man?

There is something more, far more, in man. In him there is something extraordinary that arouses astonishment and almost adoration. Let us even say that in man there is expressed something sacred, an absolute value.

It is in a particular experience that we grasp this absolute value, this divine that is in man, in us men as such. And yet it is not always grasped. The forgetfulness that follows therefrom can lead us to seeing man as nothing other than a simple means or a mere obstacle. It can thus induce in us the temptation of instrumentalizing man for our

own purposes, if possible as a means, or, if an obstacle, striking him down, destroying him, as one does without a moment's hesitation with material obstacles.

In any case, one can induce oneself to treat man as a thing. It is in a religious experience that we become aware of man in this absolute, metaphysical dimension at the moment when we establish a thou-to-thou relationship of profound communion with the individual.

Certainly, in the cold enunciation of an article of a constitution, no matter how significant it may be, there remains only the bare echo of such a pregnant experience. There remains a faded and opaque image.

A living experience has become transformed into a series of concepts. A "thou" has become a "he" and eventually an "it" to be objectivated and analyzed under a glass cover.

Nevertheless, there remains something essential that, formulated in that manner and in those terms, can serve to clarify everything that is implicit in it. There remains something of which the conceptual definition facilitates the definition of the objectives and contributes to impressing a more precise orientation upon action.

There thus takes shape an entire complex of ideological veins that end up by merging and finding their synthesis in such an exemplary manner in the more doctrinal section of a modern democratic constitution like the Italian one.

In our own constitution, we find the appropriate points enounced in the introductory part bearing the title "Fundamental Principles" and then, more diffusedly, in Part I under the title "Rights and Duties of Citizens".

Among those who wrote our constitution, only a limited number drew their inspiration in an explicit and conscious manner from their Christian religious faith. Among the members of the constituent assembly there were many avowed or professed atheists and many others wholly alien to any problematics or interest of a metaphysical nature. And yet, whether we like it or not, whether or not we are conscious of it, the very clear affirmation of the dignity of man that is implicit in the whole of this text is the expression of a metaphysical principle: *in some way, man is an absolute*.

One may limit oneself to affirming the dignity of man without delving into the metaphysical foundation of this affirmation, without coming to grips with metaphysical or ethical thematics (as is done by our own constitution in its explicit text, on the specific plane and within the limits of its own function).

One may go further and undertake a metaphysical research. Then, through what in the last resort is a metaphysical experience, one may arrive at becoming aware of the absoluteness of man, of his sacrality.

Taking this metaphysical research even further, one may ask oneself whether the absoluteness of man does not derive from an even more originary absoluteness: from the absoluteness of the God who alone can define himself as the true Absolute.

One may thus arrive at a religious experience in the true and proper sense, discovering that man derives his own absoluteness, dignity, sacrality from the fact of being a creature moulded in the image and likeness of God: a creature in whom God himself then becomes incarnated precisely in order to assume the human nature.

It is in this religious experience or, more exactly, it is in this Christian religious experience that the entire discourse of the dignity and the rights of man finds its primary source of significance. One may say that historically such a discourse *de facto* derives from Christian premises.

It is a discourse where one has to make a distinction between two principal veins: the vein of social solidarity and the one of civil and political liberties.

Let us briefly dwell on the first aspect. Historically social solidarity is almost unknown and the initiatives of beneficence and assistance are of an altogether

exceptional character. It is with the advent of Christianity that solidarity comes to be conceived as a fundamental duty vis-à-vis our neighbour, in whom we glimpse the presence of God, the incarnate and suffering God.

Within the ambit of Christianity, side by side with hospitals of every kind, there come to be multiplied the hospices for travellers and pilgrims and strangers, the orphanages, the homes for old people, the houses for widows and abandoned virgins and redeemed prostitutes, the asylums for the poor, initiatives for succouring the imprisoned and burying the abandoned bodies and freeing slaves and endowing poor girls and for the various forms of assistance in the home and even helping those who, being in need of a cash loan, would otherwise fall into the clutches of usurers.

In particular, we should here recall the schools free of charge and all the work done by the Church in the cultural field, in this dimension so essential for humanism.

All these multifarious initiatives of social assistance were born in a Christian climate, within the Church, to comply with the commandment of charity.

Little by little, many social initiatives of every kind passed into the hands of the lay authorities of the medieval communes and then the modern states, this to the extent to which first the former and then the latter acquired consistency and power and capacity of intervention.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern era there was such an increase of pauperism that the traditional initiatives of Christian charity and ecclesiastic assistance were no longer sufficient to come to grips with the problems; there was felt the need for the intervention of the state that had by then acquired an ever greater consistency.

We shall not here consider the industrial revolution, the new imposing wave of pauperism to which it gave rise and the ever greater intervention of the state made necessary to face all these enormous new problems. We shall also forego discussion of the new economic and political phenomena, the new political doctrines and state conceptions. We shall only say a few words about the new spirit with which the act of social solidarity was undertaken by the public authorities.

With the passing of the centuries needy man was being seen to an ever lesser extent as a needy brother in Christ who had to be assisted as a duty of charity on account of the love one bears for Christ present also in this brother. Rather, he was seen, and always to a greater extent, as a citizen who, by virtue of being such, had the right of being assisted by civil society and the state. What acts here is no longer the love for man seen as the image of God and Christ, but rather the love or at least the attention for man considered in a more autonomous manner, in himself, in his peculiar and distinct nature, in his dignity.

It is no longer man who adores and loves and serves the image and the participation of God in the other man; but man who, considering his human nature as such, feels its dignity and therefore recognizes himself as the subject of inviolable rights.

In contrast with the modern principles of social solidarity, the affirmation of the dignity of man and the connected rights of liberty do not derive so much from the *love of our neighbour* – for our neighbour as such, as “other” – but rather from a feeling of *rightful love of oneself*.

This is a feeling that constitutes the other face of charity and, just like love of our neighbour, derives from the sense of the presence of God in man.

Liberal thought received its first clear and complete formulation in the seventeenth century from the English philosopher John Locke. But, inasmuch as it traced the rights of liberty to the laws that are inscribed in the nature of man, the first liberalism was connected with the thought of the Dutch jurist Huig de Groot (Grotius), of an earlier generation.

Now, as far as Grotius was concerned, the laws that express themselves in the rational nature of man have been inscribed there by God, are the reflection of divine law. And this is a concept that, far from being unfamiliar to Locke, Grotius had derived from the Jesuit Francisco Suarez (1548-1617).

In his turn, Suarez had received it – rather clearly – from Saint Thomas Aquinas. It is not therefore difficult to trace the first germ (necessarily in great part still unexpressed and implicit), the first origin of modern political liberal-democratic thought to the philosophy of a Christian imprint and, more particularly, to Thomism.

Certainly, nobody can say that the political thought of Catholic inspiration remained always faithful to the line I have just mentioned. To be honest, this thought did not always oppose absolutism, even though at times it contributed to limiting it.

In clear contrast with the attitude of a Suarez, there later came about the famous alliance between throne and altar, there were the compromises with the absolute monarchies and, later still, with the dictatorships of the modern epoch.

In spite of all this, it seems to me that, taken on the whole, the liberal-democratic line of solidarity is far closer to the Christian vision of man. Here we find ourselves faced with the figure of a man who receives being, value and dignity from God and cannot but appear as the subject of rights.

Such a man is not only bound to love God and his neighbour, but also – and in a rightful manner – himself. God, the others, we ourselves: here we have three different aspects of one and the same Christian love.

In such a context man is called upon to be the jealous custodian of every good entrusted him by God and therefore, in the first place, of that inestimable treasure constituted by his own humanity. Man must not enclose this treasure in a strongbox. He must undoubtedly conserve it, defend it against every possible attack, but must do this above all by exploiting and increasing it. The human person is thus called upon to develop itself in all its potentialities and in all its *talents* (and it is not by chance that we call them by this name).

Integrally developing itself, the human person edifies the *regnum hominis* that completes the kingdom of God and advances the creation to its highest level.

As regards the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas, let us recall that it considered the natural law to be the moral law, inasmuch as it regulates the relations between men in society. This law, which human reason simply recognizes, is the reflection of divine Reason, just as moral law and natural right are the reflection and participation in man of the eternal Law.

It is from God that the law comes to man, it is from the participation of God that there derives to the human person that particular and most high dignity that renders it subject of rights, so that the state cannot finalize itself unto itself (as in the absolutist forms), but remains finalized to the human person and its development. It seems to me that liberalism and democracy, in everything that is most valid in them, are here already contained *in nuce*.

In general principle, humanism is thus derived with perfect coherence from Christian creationism: the more the creature is created, the more is it autonomous, even though it remains ordained to the Creator.

Now, humanism derives from Christianity not only in general principle, but also de facto, historically. Better awareness of all this could help us to trace humanism, the dignity of man, liberty, democracy, sociality back to the experience of Christian love, where alone they can rediscover both their profound significance and their authentic light.