

## *The Texts of the Convivium*

### **FUNDAMENTALISM: AN INFANTILE MINDSET THAT STUNTS BOTH RELIGION AND FRONTIER PARAPSYCHOLOGY**

The meaning of *religious fundamentalism* is fairly well known and clear. A fundamentalist in this sense is someone who takes a sacred text literally, as if God Himself had dictated word by word to the prophet (or apostle, or evangelist, or sacred writer as it may be). Here the prophet, or someone writing for him, would be limited to a mere amanuensis.

Let us imagine receiving a letter from someone we know well; it is not in his handwriting, because he dictated it to someone else, but his clear and unequivocal signature is at the end. Well then, according to the fundamentalist, the words of a sacred text, written by men, all come from God as if He had dictated them one by one. And the signature? The signature is the miracles by which God attests to the truth of his revelation.

Let's put the question of the signature in parentheses for a moment; let's even leave it out of consideration. Just what certain so-called "miracles" really are, whether they are a *quid* that truly overcomes the laws of nature (so that only God could be their author), is very difficult to resolve, unless one has conducted a truly deep and exhaustive study of the paranormal and its possibilities, something that the religious in general take great care to avoid doing.

For the fundamentalist, the sacred text, the Bible, is the word of God from top to bottom, in every detail. God personally dictated it to the writers, safeguarding them from any error or misunderstanding. Can we doubt its veracity?

It is as if someone we truly esteemed in every way wrote us a letter: could we doubt the full and perfect veracity of every sentence? Then, if this person were even omniscient, could we doubt that those words expressed the absolute truth of things? Now, the fundamentalist concludes, unlike even the most esteemed man, God is truly omniscient, so it follows that his dictations are not only veracious, but also absolutely true.

I remember the case of a friend of mine, a quite cultured woman of delicate sensibility. One day, this person—who certainly is not stupid; she's just a fundamentalist—told me that the world has not been in existence for billions of years, as was my opinion, but about 6500, not much more.

Asked the source for this information, she responded, "Well, the Bible!" In effect, a calculation of Biblical chronology yields roughly that total.

"And the calculations of modern astronomers and cosmologists...?" "They're certainly wrong: who would dare to contradict the information God himself deigns to provide us?"

"So, one must infer that the Bible is the best text not only for spirituality, but for history, geography, astronomy, and so on?" "Certainly!"

As you can see, fundamentalism is a very naïve position, one belonging to the childhood of the religions. One acquires discernment later, and with discernment, one develops a critical sense.

In what sense do I define fundamentalism as an infantile disease? I would say, in the sense of its prolonged infantilism. The fundamentalist is a religious person who does not grow, just as an infantile person is a child who remains such even at fifty years of age.

In general, what kind of person is this fundamentalist? I would define him as someone who is insecure and needs absolute certainty and guarantees at any cost. Such insecurity makes him incapable of making autonomous decisions. He always wants to depend on someone. He is a sheep by vocation, a follower who asks no questions, but only obeys orders, whatever they may be.

Have I drawn a rather merciless portrait? I would never permit myself to be cruel about an attitude that might have arisen from the most painful motivations. And for that matter, the portrait I have delineated is the most extreme example. In many cases, fundamentalism can also be just a tendency, which reduces the damage, without suppressing it entirely.

I will limit myself to noting that the fundamentalist accepts the whole block of the sacred text literally, because he fears that the least concession to a rightful criticism would put everything in danger. It would be like saying, “Woe if I give in on this point: everything will come crashing down!”

It’s not at all true that giving in on a reasonable critical claim would necessarily make us lose religion. Our faith couldn’t help but be strengthened on the whole. It is very possible to contrast fundamentalism with a faith that is much more reasonable and mature, and because of this, stronger and more solid.

After every reading of a holy text at Mass, in conclusion, the lector says, “Word of God.” Does this perhaps mean that God dictated the text word for word? Affirming that a scripture bears the mark of a divine inspiration does not at all exclude the fact that it reached us through the inevitable psychic, historical, and cultural conditionings of a human intermediary; be he a prophet, psalmist, evangelist, apostle or any other kind of sacred writer, he is always a man with all the limits of his humanity.

Certainly, in an inspired word there is always something that well exceeds those human and historical conditionings: this, in fact, is inspiration. However, this does not at all void the conditionings. On the contrary, it clearly lets them subsist—and let us add, too—often in the most onerous way.

Thus, it is necessary to discern well the inspiration that, while perceived through conditionings, transcends them. A particular sensibility enables us to glean the divine content of an inspiration, to see how much in it surely comes from God. Reason, culture, and common sense, then, provide the mental equilibrium that leads us to prune away “human, all too human.”

Religious sensitivity, reason, culture, common sense, and mental equilibrium help us together to arrive at good discernment. On the other hand, it is not a given that discernment attained through these means is necessarily infallible. Each new era, each individual must take up this process from the start again, and the results that can be attained are nonetheless always limited and relative.

In any case, there is always the risk of attributing divinity to that which is simply human. The important thing is that the spiritual intelligence of men gradually deepens.

However that may be, even a non-fundamentalist faith is based on the sense that God exists, and that we realize an immediate contact with Him—an intimate experience, a profound intuition that cannot lie to us.

Having said this, I would like to discuss another attitude of the same kind, which one can assume in a different setting: I’ll call it *parapsychological fundamentalism*. I intend to ascribe it, not to an animistic parapsychology reduced to studying the less

relevant phenomena, but to a “frontier parapsychology” open to the other world and to the concrete possibilities of communicating with that dimension and learning something from it.

Before defining parapsychological fundamentalism, I would like to give some good news right away: the emotional relationship that binds an entity to one of its family members or a friend left living on this earth can be so close that it acts as a magnet and makes contact between the two much easier than one would think.

To give a concrete example, let’s look at the case of a mother whose child passed on at a young age to the other dimension because of an accident or sickness. Love is a force that unites. What love is greater than that of a mother and child? The two are already united to each other by a very close bond.

Once the mother decides to enter into communication with her child, either using a medium or being one herself, it is unlikely that the two would not come into contact quickly.

Let us now propose the case in which the entity of another child puts himself in the middle, pretending to be the son of that mother. Why would he do this? Not necessarily because he wants to make fun of them. He could have a human motivation, in the most heartbroken and anguished sense. It is probable that he does so because he yearns to feel the warmth of maternal affection, that of his mother, who no longer thinks of him as existing because she does not believe he has survived physical death.

What will happen, then? The false son, who so longs for affection, will succeed in making her believe he is the true son, and will wrongly supplant the other. This can happen once, but cannot continue; it cannot perpetuate itself in the case that the mother wants to repeat the experience.

The reciprocal attraction between the mother and her child (the true one) is such that the two will connect, necessarily unhorsing—so to speak—the intruder, throwing him by a reaction that is unconscious and automatic, rather than willed.

So, I have expressed my conviction that, given an intense emotional relationship, we are already united to our beloved in the other dimension and able to establish a mediumistic connection any time that an authentic mediumism comes to our aid. At this point I can establish a parallel with something to which I previously alluded: just as in a strong parapsychological experience we are already in direct contact with our beloved, one can say that in an authentic religious experience we already realize a very close contact with God, with that God who is that experience’s goal or end.

One can note this close analogy between the experience of the religious relationship with God and that of the relationship of communication with a soul who is very dear to us. Similarly, there can be two parallel forms of fundamentalism.

Having proposed an at least approximate explanation of what can be understood as *religious fundamentalism*, I will now try to give an idea of that *parapsychological fundamentalism* to which I have so far dedicated only a hint.

I will go right to the heart of the question, moving from a problem that can emerge in a concrete case. A person of this earth (let us say a mother) can truly enter into contact with a beloved soul in the other dimension (let us say her child “in heaven”), but this does not necessarily mean that the communicating soul (the son) makes himself fully recognizable. If the medium does not know the personal facts of the two who are communicating, his ignorance acts like a wall.

A breach can be opened in this wall by the flash of the faculty of telepathy or clairvoyance, if the medium is so endowed.

A second phenomenon could also happen: the fact that the person involved (the mother) is physically present at the séance could produce the effect of channeling certain memories.

But it could be that none of this happens. In such a case, the information would not pass to the medium, and thus could not even channel through him.

Thus we could find ourselves in a contradictory, apparently absurd, situation: the son is present in person, but cannot manifest himself in such a way that his mother can recognize him. I would like to say to this mother, “Be careful. The fact that at this moment you aren’t able to recognize your son, does not necessarily mean that he is not present next to you.

“Even though you are blocked from recognizing him, your loved one is nonetheless very close. But, even when he manages to give you some sign that enables you to recognize him, be careful not to commit what would be a big mistake: don’t expect him to be able to recall all your shared memories. Don’t expect him to be able to repeat the nickname you called him when he was little, or to remember exactly what happened on that memorable outing you had together when he was fifteen.”

The paranormal phenomenon comes as it comes. It makes no sense to insist at all costs that it come the way we want. There are those who contain themselves, as if saying, “Dear phenomenon, if you want me to take you into consideration, you must be like so, like so, and like so.”

How does the phenomenon respond or react to an attitude of the kind? Let’s say it: the paranormal phenomenon is more sensitive than a primadonna. If it is not accepted as it should be, if it is offended, it withdraws, so “good bye and good luck!”

While the *metapsychics* of the 1800s were open to phenomena, having a multitude of conspicuous ones, the *parapsychologists* of the 1900s faced them with a much more inquisitory attitude, with the result of literally making the phenomena, at least the most significant ones, disappear.

Thus, in the place of the great experiments of the past, today little experiments are conducted, and in comparison, they say little or almost nothing.

In addition, today, the important experiments take place in non-scientific settings. This is a pity, because we lose the more rigorous verifications that in any other field of inquiry are deemed necessary for true progress in knowledge.

In the face of the paranormal, opposite attitudes are possible: on the one hand, *there is the person with a far too rational forma mentis*, far too prone to analysis, objectivization, intellectualism, scientism; on the other, *there is the person who is all faith*, because he/she needs absolute certainties and guarantees at all costs.

*The hyperrational subject* is loath to accept anything that is not proposed in the most evident and certain way, a hundred percent. When dealing with the paranormal, such an attitude seems decidedly negative.

A figure from Greek mythology, a certain Proustes, welcomed into his own home passers by, served them dinner and finally, brought them to bed. Up to this point, it was all according to the customs of the time. But Proustes expected the guest to correspond exactly to the length of the bed, and if the guest was too short, he lengthened him, while if he was too tall, he cut off his feet and a piece of his legs.

So now, the experimenters who want phenomena to be to their exact measure, in correspondence with their precise expectations, act like this Proustes: they make the phenomenon lie in “the bed of Proustes.”

*The hyperrational person* should be told to relax and accept the phenomenon as it is, as it spontaneously happens. An act of faith, an attitude of availability facilitates the emergence of the phenomenon.

Jesus himself demanded an act of trust from anyone asking for a healing, such that, having worked the miracle, he could say, as he did to the woman with the hemorrhage, "...Your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease" (Mk 5, 34), as he also said to the blind man of Jericho (Mk 10, 52). He told two other blind men, "According to your faith let it be done to you" and their eyes were opened (Mt 9, 29). When he arrived in Nazareth, because of the incredulity of his neighbors, "He could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them" (Mk 6, 5). It was like saying He was limited to curing a couple of head colds.

Faith does not mean blind trust, but reasonable trust, motivated by observing that the person in whom one places one's trust has already shown himself worthy. Trust should not be dispensed left and right without criterion; otherwise, it is just gullibility. The faith of a fundamentalist is immature, unjustified, and credulous. The best advice he can be given is to try to grow up, to mature, to come out of his shell without fear of facing some inevitable risks.

It is not necessarily true that examining certain unjustified beliefs will inevitably lead to a loss of faith. Those who have the courage to study things and penetrate deep down are well repaid with the acquisition of a much surer faith, built on incomparably more solid foundations.

At this point, the discussion turns more strictly to what I have called *parapsychological fundamentalism*. Just as the religious fundamentalist accepts God's messages word for word, as if they were directly dictated, so the parapsychological fundamentalist accepts the mediumistic messages as if the entity transmitted them word for word.

I think that this is a mark of great naivety, a huge mistake. The need for a truth to accept as a block is profoundly human, typical of a certain *hyperfideism*. But I ask myself, what happens when our *hyperfideist* discovers apparent incongruities between the messages received from two different mediums?

He would realize that the mediums do not act at all like mere telephones, but filter the message through their personalities, their culture, and even their ignorance. Thus the same entity will express itself through the medium Catherine "in Catherine style" and through Joan "in Joan style." So it is senseless to exclaim, "But my father never expressed himself this way; he never used these words!" In the mediumistic conditionings in which your father is incarnated, as it were, he does what he can, and you cannot ask more of him!

A mother could ask, "How do explain why, instead of listening to my son as if he were talking on the phone, or instead of reading a message of his word for word, I receive a message that is so altered, so full of interference? Well then, it's not true that I'm speaking with my son: I'm speaking with the medium, or with myself. I can't believe in the validity of mediumistic communications anymore!"

This is a decidedly negative conclusion: if everything does not stand up to scrutiny, the whole thing collapses! In the beginning the fideist comes to learn that communications with the other world exist, and she throws herself into it with great enthusiasm, finding in it absolute truth, as if all of a sudden she had won a huge sum in the lottery, shooting from the depths of desperation to the heights of great revelation! Then, however, she discovers that there are striking fissures in the communication, and she goes into a crisis, no longer believing anything, and hurtles from the heights to the depths again.

True, there are fideist temperaments that are always disposed to believe, and continue believing, notwithstanding evidence to the contrary in concrete experience.

But there are also those who shipwreck in a disappointment from which there is no recovery. I note it with the greatest respect for the pain of so many of these people, for whom I feel empathy and compassion.

Although I am not a fideist, I do speak as a believer. I am certain that the Bible is divinely inspired, in substance, but I hold that such inspiration passes through human channels, conditioned in the extreme. And just as I believe firmly in the Christian revelation, I also have an analogous faith in the revelation of the other world, in survival and the possibility of communicating with those souls, in short, in everything that is the object of study of frontier parapsychology.

Returning to the case at hand, I am fully convinced that a son who has passed to the other dimension attains a very close contact with his mother, given the emotional bond that unites them. I am equally aware, however, of the human conditionings through which the message is forced to pass, undergoing losses and deformations. My faith in a substantial truth is much less endangered than that of a faith in a monolithic truth accepted as a block, literally.

At any rate, there are those who feel an absolute need for this monolithic faith. Once, when I was explaining my reasoning, a friend interrupted me, exclaiming, "Filippo, you're destroying everything for us!" I responded, "It's not true that I'm destroying everything for you, but I'm inviting you to discern the essential, the essential that will always stand, notwithstanding every possible criticism. In other words, I'm teaching you how to land like cats." "Land like cats? What do you mean?" "It means landing on your feet without getting hurt. You land on your feet when you have already examined everything in depth; you have delved into the problems and found all the solutions, and thus you have answers ready for every possible criticism."

What response can be given to parapsychological fundamentalism? I like to offer a double example to my own interlocutor. "Let's say," I tell him, "that I write you a letter. I am the sender, and you are the recipient: you just receive it. It's my letter; I wrote it. I am the author of every single word and I take all moral, penal and civil responsibility for it. I could say the same for a telephone call. What I say to you is all mine: you just listen, receive it.

"Now let's say that I have passed over to the other dimension and I communicate to you, whether you are helped by a medium or you act as a medium yourself. In this case, could you say that you just receive my message? Could you say that you are just the recipient? Certainly not!

"Even though we allow that the message comes from me, dearly departed Filippo from the other dimension, it's filtered by you, the recipient, and it's filtered by the medium, and by the entire setting where the communication takes place. The message is essentially processed on the unconscious level. Because of the message's nature, the determination of the modes through which it takes form, and the factors converging to constitute it, should be entrusted to the psychology of the profound.

"Thoughts that are strongly thought in that same setting could also insert themselves wherever they find a mediumistic opening through which they can express themselves. It can happen that the message of the entity Filippo speaks in favor of reincarnation, though the entity itself knows nothing about it. One explanation could be that reincarnation, a strong belief, a thought that is strongly thought in the setting, could constitute a psychic formation ready to manifest itself wherever it finds a chink.

"When you receive a letter, you can say 'Filippo wrote this, that, and the other.' But when you receive a mediumistic message you could rightly say, 'Filippo told me this, that, and the other' only on the level of emotions and friendship, but never in a scientifically rigorous sense. You should only say, 'These, those, and the other words

came.' Just how much comes from Filippo, and how much derives from some different factor remains an open question.

This line of thought is analogous to what can be said about the sacred scriptures, especially messages believed to be sent by God through a prophet. Those who live with intensity an experience of faith can sense the divine presence, and thus are sure of the divine origin of the message. However, the problem is identifying the territories through which the river passes; it certainly gushes forth pure from the divine Spring, but along the way, it picks up and carries along the debris of everything it encounters.

Certainty of finding oneself in direct relationship with God, and equal certainty of communicating directly with your beloved departed: here is an excellent double point of departure. And the point of arrival...? It coincides with the point of departure, to which one returns in a more mature, deeper, and more interiorized way. Thus, in terms of the experiences we can have of the other dimension, we are already inside, and have been since the beginning. Nothing remains but to deepen ever more our awareness and knowledge of it.