

# LETTER XIII

## Death, Arcanum of Subtraction

### Quotations for Reflection

Our empirical experience of death is the *disappearance* from the physical plane of living beings. Such is the fact of our experience from without, that we have by means of our five senses. But the *disappearance* as such is not confined to the domain of outward experience of the senses. It is experienced also in the domain of inner experience, in that of consciousness. There the images and representations disappear just as living beings do so for the experience of the senses. This is what we call “forgetting”. And this forgetting extends each night to the totality of our memory, will and understanding—of a kind such that we forget ourselves entirely. This is what we call “sleep”. (page 342)

Forgetting is to sleep as sleep is to death. Or again: forgetting is to memory as sleep is to consciousness, and sleep is to consciousness as death is to life. (page 342)

When Nature forgets us, then we die; when we forget ourselves, then we fall asleep; and when we lose active interest in something, then we forget it. (page 342)

For it is not nerves and muscles which are manifested in smiling, but rather joy. (page 347)

Freedom is a miracle and man is only free in so far as he is not a machine—physical, psychic and intellectual. We have no other choice than between the machine and slavery, on the one hand, and the miracle and freedom, on the other hand. (pages 349-50)

It is only the *functioning* of the human machine when a rich man declares himself anti-communist and a poor man declares himself pro-communist. But it is a *miracle*—that is to say an act of freedom—when a rich man abandons his possessions and embraces poverty, as did St. Anthony the Great and also many other saints, and also Carmelites, Franciscans, Dominicans, etc., who took the vow of poverty. The *miracle* of St. Francis is not only the healing of a leper but also the love of St. Francis for “Lady Poverty”. Did not the miracles of Jesus Christ, after the resurrection of Lazarus, culminate in the cross on Calvary where, in the full agony of torture, he said: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke xxiii, 34)? (page 350)

Now, there is no one who does not know through experience that all conscious effort entails concentration or contemplation, and that concentration and contemplation signify conscious and willed *forgetting* of many things which do not relate to the subject of concentration or contemplation... The three stages on the way towards the soul’s union

with God—those of purification, illumination and union—are simply the history of a single growing effort of concentration of the entire soul upon God. (page 351)

In order to fall asleep one has to be able to forget. Insomnia is due to the inability to forget. (page 352)

If the soul's mystical union with God is forgetting of the phenomenal world *and* recall of God, death is simultaneously the *call* from above and *forgetting* below. The three stages of the way leading to the soul's union with God—purification, illumination and union—are repeated after death: *purgatory* is purification (*catharsis*), which precedes illumination or *heaven*, and heaven is the state of the soul when it arrives at union with God, analogous to that experienced by mystics during their terrestrial life. (page 352)

Resurrection is not only the triumph of Life over Death, but is moreover the triumph of Life over life. (page 362)

There is in the first place the traditional mystical way of purification, illumination and union, which is the voluntary and conscious experience of the three stages of the way of the human soul after death—through purgatory to heaven, and from heaven to God. You will find this not only with the great Christian mystics such as Dionysius the Areopagite, Bonaventura, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross...not only in the pre-Christian teachings of the Hermetic treatises attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, such as *The Divine Pyramander*, but also in the great mysteries of pagans, Egyptians, and others, where the three stages of *catharsis* (purification), *photismos* (illumination) and *henosis* (union, or identification with the Divine) give consciousness of the *post-mortem* states and certainty of immortality. (page 366)

Just as the practice of *concentration* is the “art of forgetting” and the practice of profound communion, or *meditation*, is the mastering of the “art of sleeping”, so does the *contemplation* of authentic initiation signify the mastering of the “art of dying”. It is through mastering forgetting, sleep and death that one arrived in the past, that one arrives today, and that one will arrive in the future, at the mystical experience of the soul united with God, and therefore at the absolute certainty of immortality. And one arrived there, one arrives there, and one will arrive there through the three stages of the eternal mystical way: those of purification, illumination and union. St. John of the Cross shows that it is authentic *faith* which is revealed, acts, and increases in purification; that it is *hope* which is simultaneously both the agent and the fruit of illumination; and that, lastly, it is *charity* which achieves union of the soul with God. (page 366)

For just as we believe in God, so also does God believe in us—but with a divinely greater and more elevated faith; his hope with regard to this immense community of free beings that we call the “world” is infinite, just as his love for these beings is infinite. We do not worship God because he is able to do more than us, or because he knows more than us, but rather because he has more faith, more hope and more love than us. Our God is infinitely *noble and generous*, and not only all-powerful and all-informed! (page 368)