

The Believing Pessimist

A Philosophical Reading of Qoheleth

This study will take us through the Book of Qoheleth to a description of the believing pessimist/the pessimistic believer. Drawing on our treatments of pessimism and the anguished, dialectical affirmation of God, and using Qoheleth as embodiment of the existential stance of pessimism in belief, we will attempt to answer the questions we proposed to work on in this study. We will therefore start off with an examination of the sentiments of Qoheleth, “the philosopher” of Biblical tradition. This will demand from us an exegetical treatment of the book, using accepted hermeneutical norms. Granted the limitations of this study, however, we will confine ourselves to an exegetical analysis of selected texts, basing our selection on the relevance of the passages to our study, taking care however to do justice to the integrity of the book and maintaining consistency with its intentionality. Having made an exegesis of texts of Qoheleth, it will be possible for us to systematize his insights to some extent, and to reflect on these philosophically. Our conclusions aspire to be a synthesis of what our philosophical reading of Qoheleth yields and our conclusions on pessimism and the dialectics of the affirmation of God.

A. *Qoheleth*

The Book is known by two names: “Qoheleth” and “Ecclesiastes”, a Greek rendering of the understanding of the designation “Qoheleth”. *Qoheleth* is in the participial feminine singular that may be seen to come from the verb qahal, “to assemble,” or the noun: qahal, “the assembly.” The

word is feminine, and so are many others denoting a function. *Qoheleth* would therefore mean: one who holds the office of a speaker in the assembly.¹ From an understanding of *Qoheleth* as preacher in the assembly, Jerome adopted the designation "conciniator". Buck points out, however, that what is suggested by the word is not so much a preacher, as a teacher of wisdom. This would place *Qoheleth* within the sapiential tradition of Scriptures.²

The authorship of *Qoheleth* and the date of its composition are more difficult to handle. The book itself claims authorship by "the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1.1). It used to be thought, therefore, that *Qoheleth* was identical to Solomon, king of Jerusalem and Son of David. This would have given the book the time around 950 B.C. as the date of its origin. A number of biblical literature, claiming Solomonic origin, used to be ascribed to this royal figure, proverbial for his wisdom, e.g., the Proverbs, the Song of Solomon and the Wisdom of Solomon. Internal and external reasons, however, have led a greater number of scholars to conclude that the Book of *Qoheleth* could not have been the product of King Solomon's literary activity. The language used — late Hebrew — already indicates to scholars a time of origin hundreds of years after Solomon's reign. At the same time, acquaintance with Biblical, Semitic style keeps us from crying "foul" to the claims to Solomonic authorship. To enhance the importance of a work and to lend it greater prestige, authors of the time found nothing wrong in ascribing their own pieces to some outstanding personage, the very recall of whose name would evoke sentiments of admiration and respect. Our copyright laws and measures that wall-off intellectual property in much the same way as fields are fenced are rather of recent vintage. And so it is common opinion among Biblical experts that the Book of *Qoheleth* dates back to a time closer to the Christian era than the golden age of Solomon's rule. On the basis of linguistic style, Margoliouth of Oxford proposed a period of origin some time before 350 B.C..³ On the strength of other evidences, other scholars have settled for a period close to Margoliouth's estimate.

¹F. Buck, "Ecclesiastes" in *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, Reginald Fuller, editor, (London Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1969), p. 512.

²Buck, op. cit., p. 512.

³Mitchell Dahood, "Canaanite-Phoenician Influence in *Qoheleth*" *Biblica* 33 (1952), p. 31.

From the observation that, on the one hand, the Book of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus, ca. 180 B.C.) uses some of the doctrines of Qoheleth and that fragments of Qoheleth dating to the middle of the second century B.C. have been found at Qumran, and on the other, that the Hellenistic influences could not have come from a time before Alexander, Buck settles for the period between 250-200 B.C..⁴ Murphy finds the evidence for Greek influence on Qoheleth hardly visible but is more or less in agreement as to the date of origin, with margins widened however. The traces of Persian words in Qoheleth indicate for Murphy a *terminus a quo* of ca. 500 B.C., and the copy in circulation of Qumran points to an *ad quem* of 150 B.C..⁵

Is one author responsible for Qoheleth or is the book the end product of a process of compilation? Judgement is not unanimous. The book itself indicates that, at least, two persons were at work: Qoheleth himself and another who, in 12, 9 - 10, refers to Qoheleth in the third person. Thus, there is recognized an epilogue to Qoheleth. But there are hardly any other points of concurrence. Some scholars (Murphy mentions Siegfried and Po-dechard) see evidences of later glossators; other postulate a multiplicity of authors, apparently supported in this conclusion by what appear to be the unrelated aphorisms the book contains. It is not necessary, however, for every author, especially of the kind of literature with which we deal, to develop his thoughts according to the systematic procedure of a treatise.

It (Qoheleth) belongs rather to the genre of Paschal's *Pensees*, or Thoughts: reflections and jottings of a mature man on the meaning of life, edited and perhaps to a certain extent reworked by one of his students.⁶

Others have argued very strongly for the unity of the book and, as we see, it is not impossible to evaluate the progression of thoughts along some intelli-

⁴Buck, op. cit., pp. 512-513.

⁵Ronald Murphy, "Ecclesiastes", in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmeyer, Roland Murphy, eds. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 534.

⁶Roland Murphy, *Seven Books of Wisdom* (Milwaukee: the Bruce Pub. Co., 1960), p. 88.

gible course. The favored opinion seems to be that which considers the work one piece.⁷ With regard to style and doctrine, Qoheleth stands out as unique. This among others explains why not all scholars agree in assigning him Palestinian origin. Those who have detected familiarity with Egyptian wisdom in Qoheleth postulate an Alexandrian setting. Mitchell Dahood has repeatedly argued for a Phoenician background. He states his thesis: "The Book of Ecclesiastes was originally composed by an author who wrote in Hebrew but who employed Phoenician orthography and whose composition shows heavy Canaanite-Phoenician literary influence."⁸ Dahood draws our attention to the fact that after the destruction of Jerusalem and South Judah in 587 B.C. the center of culture shifted to North Galilee which was not devastated by the Chaldean onslaught. A large number of Jews moved north, and some may have taken residence in Phoenician cities. Qoheleth could have been a resident of a Phoenician city. Advancing a number of arguments, e.g., the unhebraic use of propositions, constructions with parallels in Phoenician inscriptions, Dahood explains the stylistic peculiarities of Qoheleth as the result of the linguistic ambience (Dahood admits that Qoheleth wrote in Hebrew) from affiliations with a Phoenician city-state.⁹ Allusions to Jerusalem, the temple, etc., indicate for others a Palestinian setting. The complexity of the problem of the origins of Qoheleth points to the uniqueness of Qoheleth who, though he undoubtedly stands in many respects in the Judaic sapiential tradition, distinguishes himself and calls for attentive hearing.

The problem of a plan for the Book of Ecclesiastes leads us into another thorny issue. Between those who deny Qoheleth any order at all and those who theorize a strict thematic arrangement lies a gamut of possible patterns. This writer believes that to deny Qoheleth any semblance of logical procedure does not adequately consider evidences within the text itself for such an order. After the title of the book (1,1) and before the epilogue (starting 12, 9), "Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas" apparently states the theme and embodies the conclusion of the work, a kind of an "inclusion",

⁷Murphy, "Ecclesiastes", p. 534.

⁸Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁹Mitchell Dahood, "The Phoenician Background of Qoheleth" *Biblica* 47 (1966), pp. 265-282.

supplying a literary-doctrinal frame. We must grant, however, that there seems to be no general agreement as to the division of the book. It is also a fact that the structures different authors present depend, to a large extent, on their own particular "reading" of Qoheleth. Addison Wright, on the basis of verbal and thoughts analysis which he verifies by numerical patterns, offers an outline that makes of the Book of Qoheleth an organized composition.

Wright's Outline ¹⁰

Title	1, 1
Poem on Toil	1, 2 - 11
I. <i>Investigation of Life</i>	1, 12 - 6, 9
Double introduction	1, 12 - 15
	1, 16 - 18
1. Study of Pleasure seeking	2, 1 - 11
2. Study of Wisdom and Folly	2, 12 - 17
3. Study of the Fruits of Toil	
a) one has to leave them to another	2, 18 - 26
b) one cannot hit on the right time to act	3, 1 - 4, 6
c) the problem of a "second one"	4, 7 - 16
d) one can lose all that one accumulates	4, 17 - 6, 9
II <i>Qoheleth's Conclusions</i>	
Introduction	6, 10 - 12
A. Man cannot find out what is good for him to do.	
Critique of traditional wisdom	
1. On the day of prosperity and adversity	7, 1 - 14

¹⁰ Addison Wright, "The Riddle of the Sphinx" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968), p. 325; and Addison Wright, "The Riddle of the Sphinx Revisited: Numerical Patterns in the Book of Qoheleth" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42:1 (January, 1980), p. 49.

- 2. On justice and wickedness 7, 15 - 24
- 3. On woman and folly 7, 25 - 29
- 4. On the wise man and the king 8, 1 - 17

B. Man does not know what will come after him.

- 1. He knows he will die 9, 1 - 6
- 2. There is no knowledge in Sheol 9, 7 - 10
- 3. Man does not know his time 9, 11 - 12
- 4. Man does not know what will be 9, 13 - 10, 15
- 5. He does not know what evil will come 10, 16 - 11, 2
- 6. He does not know what good will come 11, 3 - 6
- Poems of Youth and Old Age 11, 7 - 12, 9

Epilogue 12, 9 - 14

It will be observed that the *New American Bible* goes by Wright's division. There are many other divisions possible. We will present one more, proposed by Augustin (later Cardinal) Bea:

- 1, 2 - 3: Theme
- 1, 4 - 2, 26: Neither the study of nature nor pleasure, not wisdom satisfies man;
- 3, 1 - 7, 24: Wisdom cannot solve the enigmas of life
- 2, 25 - 9, 17: Study of the practical utility of Wisdom
- 9, 18 - 12, 8: Practical advice
- 12, 9 - 13: Epilogue

With this introduction to Qoheleth, we are ready to commence an exegesis of selected texts.

Exegesis and Systematization

The concept that has been represented by the Latin "vanitas", the English "vanity" and the Greek "mataiotes" is, in the Hebrew original *hebbhel*. Statistically, over half of the occurrences of the noun in the Old

Testament are accounted for in the Book of Ecclesiastes. What, within the Semitic universe of discourse, did hebhel mean?

Ecclesiastes presents a number of constructions using hebhel¹¹ They are not, however, unrelated. Let us examine different uses of "hebhel" in the Old Testament.

1. Gen 4, 2a: "And again, she bore his brother Abel." This is the only instance of Abel (hebhel) as name, and when in Gen 4, 8 we read how Hebhel's life is snuffed out by Cain his brother, we understand why scholars are generally agreed that such an unusual name is an allusion to his fleeting life.¹²
2. Ps 62, 9: Men of low estate are but a breath,
men of high estate are a delusion;
in the balances they go up;
they are together lighter than a breath. (RSV)

Verumtamen vanitas filii Adam
mendacium filii hominum
In stateram si consendant,
super fumum leves sunt omnes. (N. Vulgata)

The first two lines clearly represent parallelism of thought: whether of high or low estate, man is insignificant. Man's confidence cannot be in man. The insight is not far different from that of Buddhism. The cause of suffering is the passion for "unrealities", for the things of this world that are really insubstantial. To speak of man as "hebhel" is therefore not only to say something about the human reality but more, to manifest one's attitudinal evaluation of man. In this same sense, the validity of the Buddhist "anicca" and "anatta" doctrines should be determined from within attitudinal (existential-ontological) perspective.

¹¹K. Seybold, "Hebhel, habhal" in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Volume III, J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, eds. (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1978), p. 313.

¹²Seybold, op. cit., pp. 315-316; Fuller, op. cit., p. 182.

3. Ps 144,4: Man is like a breath,
(Homo vanitati similis factus est-N. Vulgata)
his days are like a passing shadow. (RSV)

In these last two uses of the word *hebhēl*, the common theme is worthlessness which the breath-image very well suggests.

4. Is 49, 4: Et ego dixi: In vacuum laboravi
sine causa et vane fortitudinem meam
consumpsi, (N. Vulgata)

Here the Latin rendering - "in vacuum" - of *hebhēl* makes it clear that the term now connotes the abstract concept "emptiness, uselessness". A general pessimistic assessment of human life marks the transitoriness and fleetingness of human existence.¹³ A derisive note is added in dominance when the term is used in polemic against the worship of idols, as in the following text:

- Jer 10, 14-15: Stultus factus est omnis homo abs-
que scientia; confusus est omnis
artifex in sculptili, quoniam fal-
sum est, quod conflavit, et non
est spiritus in eis.
Vana sunt et opus risu dignum;
in tempore visitationis suae peribunt.

If it is admitted that Qoheleth's is the voice of a critic of sapiential tradition, his use of *hebhēl* suits his purpose of devaluation with a critico-polemical intention.¹⁴ In 2, 11.17.26; 4,4.16 and 6,9, "vanity" is coupled with the suggestive phrase "striving after wind" (RVS: chase after wind — NAB; afflictio spiritus — N. Vulgata). Although the image may be that of gasping (straining) for breath, it may also be that of running after something uselessly. It is equally significant that in Qoheleth, "*hebhēl*" is not confined to specified activities of man. Not idols, nor riches alone, neither pleasure is

¹³Seybold, op. cit., p. 317.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 318-319; Eichrodt, op. cit., p. 494.

hebhel but *hakkol* — ALL! 1,2 and 12,8 only summarize what the investigation of life yields: *omnia vanitas*!

In summary, our excursus on the concept “*hebhel*” shows: *first*, the word, originally meaning “breath, whiff or puff of smoke”, suggests in its visual imagery that which is light, transitory, disappearing; *second*, it easily lent itself therefore to an abstraction-expansion of its connotation to “insignificant, insubstantial, worthless”; *third*, *hebhel*, in *Qoheleth*, is used in its different nuances; it is dominantly an evaluative concept which expresses *Qoheleth*’s negative judgement over “*hakkol*” — all things. Our familiarity within this dominant concept in *Qoheleth* enables us to proceed to an analysis of texts.

1,1 - 11 and 3,1 - 13

We will study these sections together principally because of their thematic affinity. Following Wright’s outline and NAB’s division, 1, 1-11 constitutes the first part of the Introduction. It therefore not only states the idea to be developed; it also sets the mood, and *Qoheleth* achieves this rather attractively by statements of disgust and ennui and by evoking a vivid image of a monotonous, cyclic succession of events. The sun that rises, the irreversible flow of wind, the endless meandering of streams towards the sea that is never filled — these are the cosmic manifestations of the wearisome existence of man. There is ennui because man’s existence is a life of drudgery, and despite all appearances, there really is no progress. Nothing is new, so life is trapped within an ever-recurrent cycle, and not only this; *before* and *here-after* there are thresholds of oblivion. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be of things later yet to happen. Yet, “*nihil sub sole novum*”. Human achievement never really takes man forward. The step he takes was the very step taken long ago, now forgotten. In 3,1 - 13, it is this same directionless, monotonous and wearisome succession of events, intransigently established, that *Qoheleth* dwells on.

The series of verses, on the contrasts of time, is well-known. The dominant thought expressed is the fixedness of events and the immutability of an order decreed by God. “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” (3.1) There can be no doubt that the universe is the result of the Governing Intelligence “who has made everything beautiful

in its time." Seen within the context of the succeeding verses (vv. 14-15), the enumeration of the fixed order of events becomes more than a mere observation of the harmony of nature. It acquires emotional coloring. Man finds himself in a universe characterized by a pre-determined cycle of events. He does not govern this order; he is rather taken up by it.

The change in the evaluation of the autonomy of nature which was accomplished in the work of Deutero-Isaiah received its most refined expression in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Here, the alien and incomprehensible quality of the cosmos has become so intensified that the regularity of its ordinances is no longer presented as an occasion for joy and wonder, but for "wearisome", profound disillusionment and dejection. It seems no more than the running of a soulless piece of precision mechanism having no understandable purpose, nor any share in the sufferings and desires, the torments and hopes of mankind.¹⁵

There is much in the texts of Qoheleth himself to support scholars who take concept of time to be cyclic.¹⁶ When time is perceived cyclically, the accompanying mood is understandable pessimism. Indeed, verse 9 which apparently concludes the litany of times and seasons, indicates the mood with which Qoheleth views the intractable order: "Quid lucri habet, qui operatur, de labore suo?", a question that brings his reader to recognize that it is not so much the cosmic order that impresses Qoheleth as the unyielding, wearisome recurrence of events — what the Buddhists call "samsara"!

3,9: Quid lucri habet, qui operatur, de labore suo?

1,3: Quid lucri est homini

de universo labore suo quo laborat sub sole? (N. Vulgata)

Notice that preceding 3,9 is the literary fixed times and seasons, and following 1,3 is the narration of the interminable cycles of nature, leading to the expression of utter exasperation:

1.8: All things are full of weariness;
a man cannot utter it;

¹⁵Eichrodt, op.cit., p. 161.

¹⁶Breton cites Rodriguez-Ochoa and Galling in Santiago Breton, "Qoheleth-Recent Studies" *Theology Digest* 28:2 (Summer, 1980), pp. 147-151.

the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
nor the ear filled with hearing. (RSV)¹⁷

There are two possible readings for verse 11. The RSV has:

He has made everything beautiful in its time;
also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet
so that he cannot find out what God has done
from the beginning to the end.

According to this reading, which the NAB prefers (Timeless - in opposition to "time"), the lamentable disparity is between the fixedness of things in time and the timelessness in man's heart. The Neo-Vulgata however offers an alternative reading:

Cuncta fecit bona in tempore suo; et *mundum*
tradidit disputationi eorum, ut non inveniat homo
opus quod operatus est Deus ab initio usque
ad finem.

Because nothing less than the world itself is in man's heart, its immensity leaves him utterly confounded. Whichever reading, however, we opt for, man is decidedly in tension; there is a limitlessness, an immensity in him that does not find correspondence in the world. Somehow, man is not to be satisfied and he remains in a state of unknowing about God's work in the world.

2,12 - 18

The epilogue to Qoheleth, 12,9, assigns him to the roster of sapiential writers. Ironically, however, he assumes a critical position towards Israel's wisdom tradition. Throughout Scripture, wisdom is extolled, and besides the wise man, there hardly is any other paradigm of blessed life.

Beatus homo, qui invenit sapientiam,
et qui affluit prudentia;
melior est acquisitio eius negotiatione argenti,
et auro primo fructus eius.

¹⁷NAB offers a slightly different reading for the first line: "All speech is labored/
There is nothing man can say."

Pretiosior est cunctis gemmis,
 et omnia pretiosa tua huic non valent comparari.
 (Prov 3, 13-15)

Qoheleth's assessment of wisdom follows his judgement on pleasure-seeking: vanity and striving after wind. In no way does he deny the importance of wisdom. What he does, however, is to situate even man's seemingly most valuable acquisition within the perspective of death, the ultimate leveller. Very aptly has death been portrayed as the sickle that makes all fall, high and low alike. Within the perspective of the one fate that awaits sage as well as fool not even wisdom promises an advantage. Even recognizing its rather theoretical value, Qoheleth's judgement cannot be mitigated: even wisdom is vanity! Death and the consequent disappearance into oblivion relativize all human value; in fact, because death must finally punctuate life, everything is pointless, futile and hateful! The fate that makes all so pointless is not found here alone. In another place, Qoheleth pursues his point:

But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hate, man does not know. Everything before them is vanity, since one fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean. . .
 (Eccl 9, 1-2 RSV)

We would, of course, be reading Qoheleth wrongly were we to assess his moral teaching as one of indifferentism. He frequently calls on his readers to "fear God". But it would certainly be ignoring the uniquely challenging position of Qoheleth not to see that for him, death radically undermines every attempt at absolutization. Life itself cannot be absolutized. The living seemingly have an edge over the dead only in that they know they will die, while the dead know nothing. (9,5)

Only in one place, where the Septuagint renders the Hebrew "bittahon" (trust) by *elpis* (hope) does he (Qoheleth) expressly deal with the problem of hope. Eccles 9, 11 ff. refers to the fact that all human life on earth has the same destiny. Death is the all-powerful leveller. In this connection the Preacher says: "But he who is joined with all the living has hope (bittahon), for a living dog is better than a dead lion". (v.4) If we next ask whether the

hope of the living is really any advantage, any "plus", we hear first (v.5) the sarcastic answer: "For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing." But from v.7 comes the exhortation to enjoy what is given in the present.¹⁸

For the teachers of traditional wisdom, Divine retribution followed quite a predictable logical pattern: suffering was God's punishment for iniquity; a good life was his recompense for righteousness.¹⁹ Seeing Job utterly miserable, his friends could not but conclude that he had sinned grievously. Job protested in innocence, cursed the day of his birth, and challenged God to defend his moral order. Evil is no less a problem for Qoheleth and the inconsistencies strengthen him in his polemic against wisdom tradition and underscores the relativity of one's concept of the moral order. In more places than one, Qoheleth raises the issue:

- 7,15: In my vain life I have seen everything; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evil-doing.
- 3,16: Moreover I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.
- 10,5-6: There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. (RSV)

What confounds us even more, however, is that while Qoheleth can be utterly skeptical about tradition on the moral order, we have passages where he stubbornly affirms the belief that God rewards the good and punishes evil, e.g., 8,12-13. For this reason, experts sometimes theorize of these verses the animadversions of a later hand. H.P. Muller and Pfeiffer are convinced that the fear of God Qoheleth calls for is meaningless, or at least powerless over his obsession that life and world are meaningless.²⁰

¹⁸Walter Zimmerli, *Man and His Hope in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1971), pp. 20-21.

¹⁹The writer is grateful to Fr. Frederic Scharpf for the development of this insight.

²⁰Breton, op. cit., pp. 149-150.

In 9, 11-12, Qoheleth once more takes up the theme of a "re-ordered" (or should we rather say: disordered) reality. Time is man's oppressor and chance, the destroyer of all certainty. Courage, astuteness, intelligence and wisdom do not earn for man a better place in this "re-ordered" world. The uncertainty of the future does not inspire trust; there is rather that foreboding that man is taken "in a fatal net, trapped in the snare."

In the face of death, is there anything so special about man? The leveling effect of death is taken up by Qoheleth in a most powerful - and therefore troublesome - manner in 3, 18-21. This passage known for its boldness, comes in the context of Qoheleth's complaint on finding wickedness where there ought to be righteousness. In exasperation he muses:

I said in my heart with regard to the sons of men that God is testing them to show them that they are but beasts. For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They have all the same breath and man has no advantage over the beasts; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth? (RSV)

Qoheleth is not saying that man and beast are really indistinct; his was not a metaphysical inquiry into essence. What he asserts is the common fate of man and beast. Let us not ask Qoheleth whether he denies the immortality of the soul; he would not even have understood the question. Biblical anthropology *lacks* the refinement of philosophical reflection. According to Gen 2 man is formed of dust from the ground and the breath of life. When he dies, his body returns to the dust from which it was made and a "shadowy form" enters the pit of Sheol, the abyss of shades. This is not really survival, and the shadowy perdurance in Sheol never inspired hope. Not even the perspicacity of Aquinas' intellect could find real place for such a statement as Qoheleth's in Scripture. Advancing Eccl 3, 19 as an objection against his thesis on the immortality of the soul, he argues that "Salomon in libro Sap. loquitur, quasi concinator, nunc ex persona sapientum, nunc ex persona stultorum; verbum autem inductum (Eccl 3, 19) loquitur ex persona stultorum."²¹ While such a manner of treatment conveniently eliminates

²¹ *Quaestio Disputata De Anima*, a. 14, ad 1^m

the problem, it seems to involve more eisegesis than exegesis! Because the breath of life in man and beast alike must one day depart, man is really no better off than beast. Let us not neutralize the impact of the passage by interrelating Qoheleth as saying merely that man and beast alike die; this would be belaboring the obvious! The point rather is: granted the fact that man and beast are no different in death, what advantage has man really over beast? It is difficult to deny that here we have the pessimism of Qoheleth succinctly expressed.

Even accepting the fact that the world frequently appears to man in a topsy-turvy condition, one cannot explain the maladministration of justice (3,16-22), and an appeal to God does not really solve the problem. Giving vent to pessimism, Qoheleth is led to put on the same level men and beasts (3,19-22); he even asks doubtfully whether the spirit (*ruah*) of man and beast have different destination.²²

The practical resolve of 3,22 does not lighten the situation. Given the fore-ordained destiny of man, let him enjoy his work legitimately. The last question — who can bring him to see what will be after him? — suggests the hue that darkens the horizon.

3.14 - 22

As we have already commented on verses 16-22, we are really concerned mainly with verses 14-15; Qoheleth tells us his understanding of the relation between God and the world order. Although Buck warns that the thought of an unchanging world is not to be equated with a pessimistic outlook on life, we may not be able to shake off the gloom that sets in these passages. A comparison with Chapter I sets the tone for a reading of the passage.

3.14: I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it nor anything taken from it. . .

²²George Castellino, "Qoheleth and His Wisdom" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968), p. 21.

3,15: That which is, already	1, 9: What has been is what
has been; that which is	will be, and what has
to be, already has been;	been done is what will be
and God seeks what has	done, and there is no-
been driven away.	thing new under the sun.

The order God has established is fixed; it is not man's to change. It however governs man and grinds him beneath its wearisome pace and tireless recurrence. What ever happens merely follows a general law of events that run a sequence marking no progress. Indeed, according to the law of eternal return, a law which God has made to endure, nothing really new ever happens.²³ And God has made it so that man might fear him. "Fear God" appears in other places:

5, 7: For when dreams increase, empty words grow many:
but do you fear God. (RSV)

(For every dream, a vanity to match/Too many words, a
chasing of wind, Therefore fear God. - JB)

5,18: . . .for he who fears God shall come forth from them all.

"Fear God" is also a statement of a relation between God and man. In Ex 19,16, on the morning of the awesome theophany at Sinai, the mountain is wreathed in smoke, loud trumpet blasts rend the air, and the camp trembles. Again in Ex 20,18, we are told that the people stood afar off, because they were afraid. In the Gospel of Luke, Zechariah is overcome by fear when he beholds the angel of the annunciation (Lk 1,12). The shepherds are filled with fear at the sight of the angel and the glory of the Lord (Kabod Yahweh) (Lk 2,9). *Fear* then overcomes man in the presence of divinity. It is born of the experience of the transcendent majesty of God. It is constitutive of an experience of the total-otherness of God. What inspires fear is the awesome "plenitudo divinitatis" that forces upon man the realization of his utter vulnerability and nothingness. It may be interesting to note the fact that Qoheleth never refers to God as Yahweh, the name revealed in Ex 3,14, by which God was known to his people Israel. In Ecclesiastes, the generic term "God" is preferred.

²³Ibid., p. 18.

6, 1 - 2

These two verses are part of a section where Qoheleth, studying the fruits of toil, concludes that all is vanity and striving after wind since one can lose all that one accumulates. Card. Bea's outline puts these verses in the section on the inability of wisdom to solve the enigmas of life. We are interested in them because of the conviction they embody that God disposes of all things regardless of man's efforts and in the concept of "evil". We may structure the verses in the following manner:

6,1: There is an evil

6,2^a: God gives

6,2^b: God does not give

6,2^c: This is vanity.

Qoheleth frames his problem within the judgement that it is evil. In 2,21b, we have the phrase: *vanity and great evil*. These two therefore express the same devaluative stance. The problem apparently involves God: the absolute sovereignty of God that gives one riches and denies him the right to enjoy them makes the situation evil and vain. Qoheleth does not say that God is evil, neither does he suggest this. If he did, his book would have been burned by a less tolerant age rather than preserved in the cannon of Scripture. The situation is rather *evil* and *vain* for man who is utterly subject to the inscrutable sovereignty of God, who disposes of things without being bound by man's efforts and aspirations. Before this Absolute Freedom of God, man is utterly helpless. His feeble voice of protest is no sooner raised than fades out before the immensity and transcendence of God.

Qoheleth sees this as *evil*. What is connoted by the term? Let us turn to an examination of its use in Qoheleth.

3,21: that a man who toils with diligence must leave all to be enjoyed by one who did not toil at all is *evil*;

5,13,16: that a man should go as naked as when he came from his mother's womb and take nothing for his toil is *evil*.

9,3: that one fate comes to all is *evil*.

It is clear that we do not deal with human malice (moral evil) but with the situation of a "re-ordered" reality that frustrates human designs and aspirations and that leaves him with a sense of meaninglessness. That which is evil is beyond man's doing and only forces man to confront the helplessness of his situation. Castellino comments on the concept of evil in Qoheleth:

Finally as for ra'ah, and ra' (evil), it is to be observed that these bear an ethical connotation and could be the counterpart of *vanity*! While this last term points to irreality, unsubstantiality, non-entity, ra'ah and ra' mark the impact of non-reality on man who, as a consequence, finds evil and distress where he thought he would find satisfaction and pleasure. Or temporal and local contingencies may bring about for man a situation of frustration or suffering (physical and moral) that can be called an "evil."²⁴

The refined metaphysical discrimination between God's "willing" and "permitting" evil would come centuries after Qoheleth, and the concept of causality is notorious for its ambiguity. We do not say that for Qoheleth, God causes evil (not *privatio boni*, but the impact of irreality on man). God's sovereignty however orders things independently of human aspirations, and because of his craving, man feels the impact of a world that does not respond to him — the depressing experience of unreality — and finds himself face to face with evil. For Qoheleth, human life is punctuated by ra'ah.

8,16 - 9,6

By taking these verses together, we are of course trespassing the boundaries set by Wright's division of topics. But Murphy supports us in this sectioning (actually he takes 8,16 - 9,10 under the heading: *The Same Lot for All*) and so does the *Jerusalem Bible*. We believe that literary - thematic links unite the section.

8,16: applied my mind -- 9,1: laid to heart examining
(cum opposui cor meum) (contuli in corde meo)

8,17^b: though a wise -- 9,1^b: man does not know
man claims to
know

²⁴Ibid., p. 17.

The textual problem, the transposition of "neither day nor night one's eyes see sleep" (RSV: 8, 16) to 8, 17 in the NAB so that instead of referring to the business done on earth (RSV) it refers to the efforts of man to find out God's work (NAB) does not seriously alter the author's point: wisdom yields no answer to the enigma of God's work, so that all discrimination between love and hate, good and evil seems to disappear.

We have already noted Qoheleth's disappointing experience with freedom, and here he comes back with even more force against the pretensions of those who claim "to know". On all the claims of the sages, to all theological interpretations, Qoheleth slams the door and asserts: even the wise man cannot find out. With this Qoheleth assumes an existential stance that shatters any philosophy of life that inspires confidence. One can almost hear him scream into the faces of cock-eyed optimists: You do not know! One thing is certain: things are not as man would want them to be and whatever kind of man one might be, the jaws of death devour all alike. Indeed, by what right can anyone have confidence in life? The key to life's meaning is lost for man and so he must pass the days of his vain life seeing no point to it all.

If Archimedes cried: I have found it! — Qoheleth could only moan: Man has not found out and cannot find out. Man's unknowing - and therefore unfamiliarity with and radical helplessness in the world - is definitely a primitive fact for Qoheleth.

- 3,11: Man cannot find out what God has done from beginning to end
- 3,21: No one really knows whether man's spirit goes upward, and the beast's downward.
- 6,12a: No one knows what is good for a man while he lives;
- 6,12b: No one knows what will be after him under the sun.
- 7,24: Who can find out that which is far off and deep?
- 9,12: Man does not know his time.
- 11,5: Man does not know the work of God who orders everything.

Let us note that in all these instances it is not the incapacity of the intellect to know what Qoheleth bewails. It is rather that an irreversible discrepancy exists between man's understanding and God's world; it is the key itself to

life that is missing, and this is the skepticism that cannot be silenced by compelling proofs of the intentionality of consciousness and of the reliability of the sensory apparatus. Man must live his days on earth without the light of the intuition of meaning. The fate of a blind man cannot be a happy one, and it is man's lot to grope and stumble through life, not knowing his place in the sun.

12,1 - 8

These verses of Qoheleth's last chapter constitute his thanatology, rich in metaphor, compelling in imagery, unmistakable in dejection and pessimism. Qoheleth starts out by counselling piety, something he has consistently done throughout his "tractatus de vanitate", advice that not all commentators easily fit into the general pattern of his thought. But if it is remembered that for Qoheleth, there is no doubt that the universe is God's, it is not difficult to understand that he could have shared the Jewish conviction that man's deportment before the Creator of all had to be marked with piety and fear. The exact interpretation of each metaphor is disputed and an understanding of Qoheleth needs not exhaust such details. The evil days are described in terms of *darkened* sun, *trembling* house-keepers, *bent* strongmen, *dimmed* vision, *shut* doors, *low* voices, *failing* desires (RSV). The days of one's approaching death are days of decline, loss and gloom. There is nothing in Qoheleth to encourage a "death-as-act" interpretation. Death is the utter discontinuity of life: *snapping* of the silver cord, the *breaking* of the golden bowl, the *breaking* of the pulley at the cistern. And when Qoheleth speaks of man going to his "eternal home" (12,5), he does not have in mind heaven; as in Tob 3,6 Tobit, oppressed by false reproaches prays that he may depart, become dust and go to the eternal abode, what is meant is simply the grave. So too, in 12,7, the spirit's return to God is not to be read with the Aristotelico-Thomistic frame of reference; *spirit* is not soul; it simply is the life-breath which, since it could not have come from the earth, had to come from God (Gen 2,7). Death is therefore existence's end, life's breaking, man's disappearance. Although we have already remarked that 12, 8 and 1, 2 constitute a literary inclusion, "Vanity of vanities" also fittingly summarized Qoheleth's grim outlook on death. For him, it could not have been otherwise!

Systematization

Human Life. Man is creature of God, fully under his sovereign rule; in accordance with Biblical anthropology, Qoheleth conceives of man as dust that breathes, and man lives only for as long as he has in him the "breath of life" which comes from God and returns to him. This creaturely and fragile situation of man is strongly manifest in Qoheleth especially in man's inability to master events to his advantage. The intense examination of The Preacher concludes with a demythologization of human potential and the acceptance of disquiet and insecurity.²⁵ Events slip through man's hands and his endeavours are aborted because he really "does not know" and "cannot find out". If it is knowledge, an intuition of value-patterns, that lends man direction and security, then most certainly, man is in the pathetic state of forever being in need of it without ever achieving it. All attempts of man at finding meaning in existence are doomed to fail, and no amount of trying will ever succeed in assigning life in the world some meaning. Between man and the world there are two different rhythms that cannot be synchronized. Man in Qoheleth is man who raises the fundamental questions, the same man who must concede that there is no meaning in human life.

How does man experience this meaninglessness? Human life is spent in toil, but toil brings the laborer no rewards; to be sure, there may be food, drink and pleasure in abundance, but it is an experience, as old as man himself, that these do not bring man the satisfaction of that drive within him that underlies all his activities. The fruits of his toil can at any time be forever lost to one who never lifted a finger to gain them, besides, man never lives long enough to enjoy the fruits of his labor. After having worked to earn them, he must leave them for someone else to enjoy. One finds meaning in life only where there is something to live for, a goal to achieve, and so meaning is inevitably linked to progressive movement towards that which is not yet attained. But despite appearances, there really is no progress. There is nothing new under the sun and man merely treads the round that others' footsteps before him have already tread. What sense can there be in this?

²⁵ cf. Breton, op. cit., p. 148.

There is nothing more destructive of meaning than a cyclic conception of human time and of history, one ending up just at the point from which one started off. Systems of thought with the "nirvana" concepts do not find human fulfillment within the *samsaric* world. Liberation, in their framework, consists precisely in the destruction of *samsara* by a supreme act of interior vision and will. For Qoheleth there is no such liberation. The immensity of God's creation and the mystery of the universe exert a crippling effect on the inner vision of man. And death is not the reintegration into supreme consciousness, but the return of the "ruah" to God who gave it and the body to dust, and man ceasing to be! If it is wisdom not only to know what things are but more so, to grasp the scheme of things according to the Divine ordering, then wisdom is beyond man. The man who claims to know really does not know! Why should God have given man this vain life at all? -- no answer will ever be forthcoming; it is just like asking why a righteous man should perish in his righteousness and an evil man survive in his iniquity. The facts are incontrovertible and obstinate in their incomprehensibility. And this already sad story of man must end in final, irreparable dissonance -- death. Because at some time he does not know, everything must just end for man, all is only of relative value. Death dissolves distinctions between pious and impious, and renders all things (there is no mistaking the universality) "vanity and chase of wind".

What have we to say on the frequently repeated invitation in Qoheleth to enjoyment? Joy is a gift from God and man must enjoy it while he can. But the feasting and merriment cannot render meaningful that which is meaningless, cannot turn fruitful that which is effete. In fact, the exhortation to enjoy life while one can is a concession to the profitlessness of one's toil.²⁶ Hovering over all banquet halls is the spectre of death; behind all mirth is the rhythm of the dirge. The shadow of joy, in Qoheleth, is death, and as it is a gift from God, at any time, one's ticket to this life's merriment can be revoked. The fleeting moments of joy cannot overcome melancholy.²⁷

Reality. The world is God's; it therefore bears the marks of the enigmatic piety. The laws that govern it are fixed and unchanging, but there is a

²⁶Johnston, op. cit., p. 18.

recurrence of events and a cyclic pattern of temporality that precludes any novelty and progress. The regularity of cycles, however, in no way makes the world easy to understand. In fact the apparently senseless round conceals the meaning and purpose of creation and try as he may, man cannot penetrate the cloud of unknowing that envelops reality. We therefore understand what Eichrodt means when he posits that in Qoheleth is completed the depersonalization of the natural order.²⁸ To the Psalmist's triumphal celebration of man on whom God has conferred dominion over the works of His hand, putting all things under this wondrous mortal's feet, Qoheleth offers the hard facts of experience for consideration. The problem is one of synchronization: man just cannot keep to the beat of reality. The regular, unyielding measures of reality defy all attempts of man to keep in time. There is timelessness in his heart, but it is with time that he must contend. This discord between man and reality is as absurd, vexing and frustrating a situation as having an appetite only for summer food in the rainy season!

"Under the sun" man toils -- uselessly; "under the sun" Qoheleth sees evil, striving after wind, wickedness, oppression, vanity, unrewarded labor and confusion, (Eccl) 1,3.14; 2,11.17.22; 3,16; 4,1.3.7; 5,13.18; 6,1.12; 8,9.15.17; 9,3.6.9.11). The world is the scene of man's labors; it is also the scene of his failure and frustration.

The dissonant chord that is man-in-the-world arises out only because time plods a boring, sterile course. The world of Qoheleth is, as we have described it, "re-ordered" reality, a world where the mortal order has broken down and where the harmony is destroyed.²⁹ Life's events in such a world -- a "cosmos" running by some weird logic -- can only be irrational.³⁰ Man does not recognize it as his home; he is not sheltered by it; he feels rather threatened by its unpredictability and incorrigible illogicality! The distinction between good and evil cannot be rooted in the world for there is evil where good should be and both good and wicked alike are subject to misfortune. Whatever befalls man is ultimately inexplicable and therefore no rap-

²⁷Lang, op. cit., p. 18.

²⁸Eichrodt, op. cit., p. 161.

²⁹cf. Lang, op. cit., p. 112.

³⁰cf. Breton, op. cit. p. 151.

port at all can be well established between man and world. But man's days are to be spent in toil "under the sun". Qoheleth does not deny human freedom, or else his exhortations are meaningless. But man's mastery over himself and over his destiny are, to say the least, seriously undermined by the uncertainties of life in the world. This is part of the demythologized vision of man that Qoheleth presents. Very aptly, Lang describes the world according to Qoheleth as a Labyrinth, and man must find his way through.³¹

Man therefore experiences the world as that which does not conform to how things should be. In other words, there is an eerie unreality about the world; it is this that Qoheleth means when he complains that the world is evil, *ra'ah*. But he says this not with the detached posture of a metaphysician passing judgement on substance and insubstantiality; his is a complaint that issues from an encounter with irreality, from the impact of non-being on man's quest for what truly and enduringly *is*. And because there cannot but be revulsion for what is not, Qoheleth does not hesitate to express his disgust with the world in strong terms and his despair over the inutility of human toil in a cruelly indifferent world.

God. There is no better way to summarize Qoheleth's doctrine on the relation between God and man than in his own words: "... for God is in heaven, and you upon earth." (5,2) This unbridgeable gap between heaven and earth moves man to realize in abject reverence his lowly state. He then must "fear God". God in Qoheleth is uncompromisingly Transcendent. He is not even called by that name that placed Israel in a special dialogical relation with God. There is no doubt about his existence neither about his dominion over the world. In fact, as work of God, everything is beautiful in its time but man is always, one can almost say "doomed", to be off-beat. And so the perfect conformity that exist between the world order and God's intent are not meant to be man's pleasure. They are rather his vexation!

God wills man to do good and to reject evil and Qoheleth in some way clings to the conviction that it pays to do God's bidding. At the same time, he frankly confronts the insurmountable fact of death and the ultimate disappearance of any distinction between good and evil in death. It then is not

³¹Lang, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

to be wondered why some hold his "fear God" exhortations to be empty, unsupported by an "evil" universe. While Breton insists that Qoheleth's skepticism is directed against man and the world and not against God, he concedes --

True, Qoheleth's God is remote and somewhat depersonalized -- he is never called Yah-weh. He intervenes, but not so that people can understand. Hence one detects in Qoheleth a passivity or "fatalism" -- based on man's inability to discover the reasons for God's activity.³²

It is interesting to focus attention on the role God plays in human anguish and despair. Before the sovereign God, not what man desires but what God wills matters. Therefore God gives pleasure and takes it away at will. It is God who gives man the unhappy business of toiling in a world that does not really reward man. What God has done cannot be undone; but what is is apparently at variance with man, but man must submit. *Is Qoheleth's God capricious?* Caprice is defined in terms of what man expects reasonable behaviour to be. But it is not man who determines what *is* and *should be*. The universe is fully God's, and so he determines the rules and in fact goes by them. But these rules, man does not know and cannot know. Before God, man does not *know*; he ought only to fear. It is therefore clear that Qoheleth does not share the optimism that allowed Thomas to say of the natural desire in man for eternal life; *Naturale autem desiderium non potest esse inane*. Marcel appeals to an Absolute Thou because he cannot see how the love two people share can be so meaningless as to be utterly reversed by death. Qoheleth would never have grasped Marcel's confidence in meaning!

B. *The Pessimistic Believer/The Believing Pessimist*

Our exegetical inquiry into the Book of Qoheleth and our attempts at a systematization of his "philosophy" leaves us the picture of a man who lives in the consciousness of God's dominion over creation but is painfully aware of man's frustrating existence. God gives man the breath of life and the universe in which to try to find himself and his fulfillment. But the universe is perpetually and irretrievable beyond man and all of man's strivings are, in

³²Breton, op. cit., p. 148.

the last analysis, "chase of wind". Therefore man dies, disappears forever as naked as when he came from the womb. In life, there really is no progress; man merely relives what has been lived before. Death, the unrelenting leveller, is the "lot" of all men, rich or poor, good or bad. But if all must eventually die, do good and evil make any difference? Qoheleth doggedly maintains the faith of the Bible that good is recompensed and evil, punished but there seems to be no real defence against the ultimate meaninglessness of life that must end in death.

Does Qoheleth believe in God? The whole Book of Qoheleth supposes the existence of God, and "the Philosopher" gives us no reason to doubt that God's being was for him a basic fact. God is co-constitutive of the problematique of the Book of Qoheleth. In fact, one can say that the situation would be, at least intellectually, more "tolerable" in Qoheleth if God did not exist. The transcendent freedom of the Deity lies behind the re-ordered reality that is Qoheleth's word and the seat of his pessimism. Let us now turn our attention to a philosophical description of the believing pessimism.

Human Project

Man is a being who realized his being in becoming. Human becoming is however a becoming that presupposes man's being. Man becomes by truly being-in-the-world, by authentically existing. And man exists in the consciousness of his being as *project*. Therefore his metabolism with the world is not a spontaneous motor response which would mean that man is "taken up" in the world. While man is in a very real sense "in" the world in that he is, as a corporeal being, not only spatially *in* but grounded in relation to the world, "world" in reference to man is never brute reality. It is human reality, reality that has somehow stand in relation to man. Man is characteristically a creative being — for this is merely another way of saying that he is project, and it is as creative being that he exists in the world. We therefore reject any reduction of human interaction with the world to the adjustive and autoregulative system of a machine. Such a reduction misses the specific characteristic of human being-in: creativity.

Si e messo in luce la loro inadeguatezza a spiegare la complessita dei fenomeni psichici e il mondo affettivo umano. Si e fatto notare che venivano dimenticati alcuni aspetti fondamentali e

specifici della attività umana, come la capacità creativa e l'intriseo carattere morale di essa. Se infatti è vero che l'attività della macchina può dirsi intenzionale, lo si può solo nel senso che *ha* una meta da raggiungere (magari operando successivi aggiustamenti e autocorrezioni), ma *non* nel senso che *si pone* una meta . . .³³

Project and temporality are co-implicative. Project is becoming towards a future and the future, as human future, exists in the present as project. This means that for a being that has no real future, there is no room for becoming. And Thomas of Aquinas seems to sustain us on this point. He accepts Boethius' definition; *aeternitas est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfect possessio*. In fact, Aquinas deepens our understanding of *time* by associating it with *becoming*. It is because there are *entia in fieri* that there is time. Therefore, of God, Aquinas says: "Ratio aeternitatis consequitur immutabilitatem, sicut ratio temporis consequitur motum. Unde, cum Deus sit maxime immutabilis, sibi maxime competit esse aeternum. Nec solum est aeternus, sed est sua aeternitas."³⁴ "Aeternitas est mensura esse permanentis, tempus vero est mensura motus."³⁵

In other words, as human becoming creates time, human project not only lies in the future of man but is his future.

The human transcendence implied by project, which we referred to when we spoke earlier of man as not being "taken up" by the world, is, however, the transcendence of incarnate subjectivity. It is transcendence that is not prior to the world: rather it is transcendence that characterizes the very being of man in the world. Therefore the existentiality of man encounters the world also as resistant, as the "other pole" of an existential bi-polarity. In fact, man does experience the world as "given"; the realization that the world does not depend on him need not lead one immediately to the affirmation of a Creator. But it certainly forces on man the brutal fact that he has to be in a world that is alien to him, that in a certain way also determines him. This is what is involved in the whole existentialist concept of *facticity*, and here we see how facticity and project are actually correlative concepts.

³³Carlo Nanni, "L'uomo e il suo destino nelle scienze umane" *Seminarium* XX; I (Ianuario-Martio, 1980), pp. 54-55.

³⁴Summa Theol. I, Q. 10, a. 2, corpus

³⁵Summa Theol. I, q. 10. a. 4, corpus

"Resistance" of the world is not an anthropomorphism because the resistance of the world is the resistance — to use Sartrean terminology — of *massivity* and *opacity*. Biblical language also reflects this binomial character of the world; the land is God's gift to his people; the world is, however, also the domain of the prince of darkness. Man therefore is conscious of his having to be in the world, of his role as creator. In fact his vision of the future is inextricably linked to his project. At the same time he experiences the world precisely in its opposition to his objectivity. The world is that which is other than the self, which resists reduction to the subjective pole.

Human toil is the existential expression of man's awareness of himself as project and it is to human toil that Qoheleth has given much of his attention. In his judgement, man's toil is for nothing. He gains nothing by it, and all is but striving after wind. "Vain" (hebhel) is the judgement that goes not only for the work of one's hands but for wisdom as well. But if the realization of man as project is an impossible aspiration, there then is no real future for man. "What has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun." Qoheleth's vision of an eternally recurrent cycle extinguishes all of man's hopes for achievement and progress. But if man lives his being by moving forward into the future, then there where the future does not really exist and where man's every step is that of a hamster in a rotating cage fixed on an axis, there man is broken!

The root of man's failure in the world is to be traced to his failure to gain foothold on the rhythm of the universe. The world is not man's doing: it is governed by laws that are incomprehensible to man, pursuing a plan forever hidden to man. In other words, the world is not man's sanctuary. It is not really hostile to man, for hostility supposes a "stand towards"; the world according to Qoheleth, is simply indifferent to man. Existential ennui is man in the face of an indifferent world. There are the philosophical ramifications of Qoheleth's impersonal universe. This then is an important mark of a pessimist's world view: its radical and ultimate impersonal character. But is this an existentially authentic position? Is it not rather a pathological disorder? This is the same thing as asking whether pessimism is a truly human (and humanizing) possibility. Let us base our answer on the premise that in the matter of world-view, we do not pass judgement according to categories of *correct* and *wrong*, not because we refrain from taking sides but because we

cannot pass such judgement. One's world view which may be either pessimist or optimist comes from a fundamental intuition and is therefore an apprehension of the world. As such, it shares in the immediacy of all apprehension, a region where truth and falsehood are not valid categories.

One's world-view is not so much an explanation of the world as it is his basic apprehension or feeling of the world in which he lives and acts. . . All our feeling, willing and knowing occur within the world and are oriented in terms of our apprehension of the world. For this reason our world-view, our sense or intuition of what the world ultimately is or means, will color and shape every aspect of our experience and activity.³⁶

Let us not take this to mean however that one's world-view whether pessimistic or optimistic, is "purely subjective", in the sense of being arbitrary. It definitely has to do with subjectivity, and thus the "truth" of one's world-view is subjectual. But by subjectivity we do not understand a self-locked inferiority, an immanent consciousness. We mean rather a subjectivity that is subjective in its "opposition" to objectivity. And by objectivity, we do not refer to noumena, but to reality that is affirmed by subjectivity, the only reality that is "real" to man. Each world-view will therefore share in the subjectivity of the subject and in the objectivity of the world the subject confronts. The world-view should neither be thought to enjoy chronological priority. Its priority rather lies in the noetic order. Therefore while one's experiences in life are interpreted within the frame provided by the world-view, they also construct this world-view.

Does a pessimistic *zeitgeist* divorce man from the world in such a way that man and world would constitute separately closed systems? Is the existence conceived of from within pessimism "monadic"? This is a first uncritical impression and is no more than that. The pessimist rather grasps man correctly in his existential situation as "in-the-world", as committed to and involved in the world. But through "boundary situations" and the full impact of negativity, the pessimist sees the ultimate failure of man. To be man, one has to find his way to harmony with the world; this way, man

³⁶Gordon Daufman, *God the Problem* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 206-207.

never finds, therefore the world continually carries with it the mark of being indifferent to man's aspirations. And thus to be man, according to man's own vision of what becoming man is and as a conclusion of his own endeavours, is an impossible ideal.

We had occasion to refer to the "impersonal" character of the world. Let us make ourselves clear. In the forum of the empirical sciences, the law of entropy, for example, is said to be impersonal in the sense that with or without a person's willing it, energy tends to be reduced to zero efficiency. For the believing pessimist, this obviously is not the case when he speaks of an "impersonal" world. He recognized contingency in the sense of dependence on the personal will of God. God has ordained nature to be so and has put infinity into man's hearts. Is this Divine caprice? We have answered that it is not, because it does not belong to man to lay down the rules of the game! Within the believing-pessimist's horizon is the creator God, free and personal. But God, precisely as God, as the Infinite boundary of one's horizon is insurpassable. In other words, creation is taken up in the mystery of its creator and is utterly steeped in his incomprehensibility. And so it is that even if man must concede that his own prospects are ultimately bleak and that life is one big frustration, it will forever be unanswered why God should have given man such "unhappy business".

There are two aspects of mystery: *participation* or encounter, and *concealment*. Mystery is not mystery unless there is some encounter with it. God is a mystery to man because God had "encountered" man and man has encountered God. Existence is a mystery to man because he participates in it and cannot therefore approach it directly in the manner of a problem but only obliquely. The aspect of concealment evokes a corresponding existential reaction; that of uncanniness. Man is not perfect quietude in existence because existence is really "concealed" from him. He does not know exactly what is in store for him. And God's presence is not unqualifiedly comforting because God is concealed presence. The believing pessimist lives in the full awareness of the mysteriousness of existence and of the world. God is *the Mystery* and the world bears the imprint of the mystery by which it has come to be. There is dominant in the horizon of the believing pessimist the aspect of concealment, and correspondingly, the cloud of unknowing that shrouds man's life-vision. And when man does not see, he must go through

life without any sense of ultimate direction, without any idea of what it all adds up to. Mystery does not necessarily lend man comfort, the assurance amidst the darkness that things will ultimately turn out aright for man, for the determinative term in mystery is not the person of man, but the mysterious, Transcendence of God. It must not be thought, however, that the believing pessimist misses the participative dimension of mystery; while it is true that the nuance between *mysterious* and the *alien* lies in the fact that alienation is the absence of participation, there remains the character of "alterity", and therefore of the alien in that which is mysterious. There can be no identification of self with mystery. Participation in mystery, in the world and in God's universal, creative design are present to the believing pessimist but while this leads the optimist to the comforting thought that all will eventually — according to God's will — be reconciled, the believing pessimist is confined within his unknowing, overwhelmed by the alterity of God and of his creation, and it cannot be said that this is not as possible a position as the "blind leap" of the faith that all will be as, in the depths of my being, I really long for.

Human dynamism, therefore, is not merely an ontological assertion about man. It is also a statement of human experience. There is, in other words, a drive within man towards fulfillment and wholeness. On the cognitive level, this is experienced as the "eros of understanding", the insatiable movement of the intellect towards an infinite horizon which, transcendental philosophy points out, is the ground of the possibility of cognition and of questioning. There is hardly any better way to put it than in the words of Thomas.

Ultima et perfecta beatitudo non potest esse nisi in visione divinae essentiae. . . Obiectum autem intellectus est "quod quid est", idest essentia rei; unde intantum procedit perfectio intellectus, inquantum cognoscit essentiam alicuius rei. Si ergo intellectus aliquis cognoscat essentiam alicuius effectus, per quam non possit cognosci essentia causae, ut scilicet sciatur de cause *quid est*; non dicitur intellectus attingere ad causa simpliciter, quamvis per effectum cognoscere possit de causa an sit. *Et ideo remanet naturaliter homini desiderium cum cognoscit effectum, et sciet sum habere causam ut etiam sciat de causa quid est.*³⁷

³⁷ Summa Theologica Ia-IIae, q. 3, a. 8, corp., underscoring ours

On the level of affectivity, human dynamism concretizes itself in the "appetitus" — one can almost say: craving — for the good.

Necesse est quod omnis homo beatitudinem velit. Ratio autem beatitudinis communis est ut sit bonum perfectum, sicut dictum est. Cum autem bonum sit obiectum voluntatis, perfectum bonum est alicuius, quod totaliter eius voluntati satisfacit. Unde appetere beatitudinem nihil aliud est quam appetere ut voluntas satietur. Quod quilibet vult.³⁸

Man's *becoming* is given to him in freedom and therefore he projects his future. Bergson points out to us that duration is the time of agency, freedom and creative novelty and is thus "the indivisible and indestructible continuity of a melody where the past enters into the present and forms with it an undivided whole which remains undivided and even indivisible in spite of what is added at every instant, or rather, thanks to what is added."³⁹ His future is co-determined by his present, but as future must be authentically future, man is not yet his future. This means in the first place that man has to do, or rather, to become himself, for any resting in the complacency of the present spells the death of him. Could it not have been this weighing realization of man's interminable becoming that found systematization and conceptualization in the Buddhist doctrine of *samsara*, the dizzying cycle of birth and re-birth?

The fulfillment that man envisions therefore is one that depends on the work of his hands. If he is a believer, he will affirm Divine causality but will never take it as a substitute for the human enterprise. Whenever he falls into the temptation of leaving "the job" to God, it does not take long before it dawns upon him that the job will never be done for him. He does the job because God has so ordained. For project to be meaningful, man must gain a foothold in the world. When the world is confronted not so much as "womb" as "opponent", as alien to and opposed to human project, man's response is either a metabolism of violence or surrender, e.g., manifest in forms of superstition and magic. But even an exploitative relation with the

³⁸Summa Theologica, Ia-IIae, q. 5, a. 8 corp.

³⁹Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind* in James Felt, "Philosophic Understanding and the Continuity of Becoming", *IPQ* XVIII:4 (December, 1978), pp. 375-393

world wearies man and leaves him dreading the day when his powers having failed him, the forces hostile to him shall overcome. And so it is that when one's experience is marked by the brevity of human success and the fruitlessness of toil, that uncanny feeling that is man's in anxiety, that discomfiture at having to be is confirmed in negativity and pessimism. There is existential ennui because there is no exit. Man becomes trapped in the quagmire of existence! Life given by God becomes an almost intolerable burden.

The pessimism that negates meaning of human existence is thus born of frustration which is more than the mere failure to achieve some goal. In frustration, the world fails man and man fails himself. Human project is destined for nullity and human becoming, at most a transient, often pyrrhic, victory. We referred to the cognitive and effective levels in relation to human dynamism. Consequently the failure to know and to rest in the univocal good oppress man with the miserable conclusion that he just cannot make it!

Between skepticism and pessimism, there is a direct relation. Skepticism need not be understood in the sense in which it has been refuted by the well-worn *reductio ad absurdum* technique. The skepticism that is concomittant with or at least, related to, pessimism is that *ultimate unknowing* in the face of incomprehensible reality. David Hume states the case on philosophical grounds.

Hence we may discover the reason why no philosopher, who is rational and modest, has ever pretended to assign the ultimate cause of any natural operation, or to show distinctly the action of that power, which produces any single effect in the universe. It is confessed, that the utmost effort of human reason is to reduce the principles, productive of natural phenomena, to a greater simplicity, and to resolve the many particular effects into a few general causes, by means of reasonings from analogy, experience and observation. But as to the causes of these general causes, we should in vain attempt their discover; nor shall we ever be able to satisfy ourselves, by any particular explication of them. These ultimate springs and principles are totally shut up from human curiosity and enquiry.⁴⁰

⁴⁰David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Great Books of the Western World, Robert Hutchins, ed. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952. Sect. IV, Pt. I, p. 26

Existentially, skepticism is not an impossible position. Here, of course, the traditional objection that skepticism makes human life impossible is not to the point. What we deal with is the phenomenon of total bewilderment, an overwhelming unknowing in the face of our knowledge which, as it increases, also unmask our ignorance. The end is nowhere in sight and the acquisitions of human intelligence seem to be suspended in an ever-expanding vacuum. In the face of a horizon that recedes into infinity, what do we really know? And if man's intellectual light fails, where does he stand?

The quest for "beatitude" does not fare any better. "*Similiter etiam desiderium boni in hac vita satiari non potest. Naturaliter enim homo desiderat permanentiam eius boni quod habet. Bona autem praesentis vitae transitoria sunt: cum et ipsa vita transeat, quam naturaliter desideramus, et eam perpetuo permanere vellemus, quia naturaliter homo refugit mortem. Unde impossibile est quod in hac vita vera beatitudo habeatur.*"⁴¹ That which, in the intellectualistic model of Thomas of Aquinas, alone can bring to rest the insatiable desiderium in man is the vision of the Divine essence. But the acquisition of this beatitude is utterly beyond the powers of man. "*Videre autem Deum per essentiam est supra naturam non solum hominis, sed etiam omnis creaturae. . . Unde nec homo, nec aliqua creatura, potest consequi beatitudinem ultimam per sua naturalia.*"⁴² And therefore, the beatitude that alone brings man happiness (i.e., quietatio appetitus in bono) in God's, in his freedom and sovereignty, to give. But the believer, qua believer, need not be blessed ipso facto by the assurance of ultimate satisfaction. To affirm that in my being, I depend on God is not, at the same time, to presume that God will condescend to satiate the desiderium plenitudinem essendi by the vision of His Essence. To deny this is to make of Judaism an impossible religion!

And therefore man who experiences himself as project also experiences his project as ultimately — and this is not only in point of time — stunted. The affirmation of God as God does not fail thereby. The fact that my being as project is destined to ultimate frustration is no denial that I experience my being as given, that my existential experience is one of grace!

⁴¹*Summ. Theol. Ia-IIae, q. 5, a. 3, corp., underscoring ours.*

⁴²*Summ. Theol. Ia-IIae, q. 5, a. 5, corp., underscoring ours.*

The believing pessimist, as a man, is present to himself as being whose becoming is the soul of his being. In other words, the believing pessimist experiences, rather intuitively, his existence as project. But project as project is never *given*, never *factum esse* but *having-to-be*, therefore a reference to my endeavors and active, humanizing metabolism with the universe. No one can *become* for me. And therefore what I will be cannot be purely "grace". In fact, one envisions his being as that towards which *he now becomes*. But the believing pessimist's vision of time is cyclical, not evolutive. One ends up at the point of take-off; there is no progress, appearances notwithstanding. There is no future and man's drive to become ends in frustration. The scheme of things, the *ordo essendi*, is shrouded in mystery and man does not know. His life cannot be directed by his sense of direction for he does not assign directions; God does, but what it is that God does, man does not and cannot know.

Factual Existence

It is the factual being of man that is unveiled to him in anxiety, and from this, the very possibility of his being, he flees. As Luijpen very well puts it, man is a *having-to-be* but as already-embarked in an undertaking which he has neither asked for nor chosen.⁴³

Is it not possible then to be pessimistic in the face of this thrown-ness even if one realizes that the ground of this factual existence is God? Is it not possible to despair over *having-to-be* in a world that stands resistant in the massivity of what happens to be so constituted?

God has thrown me into the world. My presence in the world is not an ultimate contingency: it is rooted in Absolute Freedom that is also Absolute Goodness. My being presents itself to me in anxiety as factual project and as embracing the ultimate possibility (death) which is the end of all possibility. I am pessimistic and am convinced that all my striving is vain, that all human life is chase of wind. My conclusion is dismal: Everything is useless. There seems to be no clearer way of expressing existential pessimism. One question remains, however, that springs from the recognition of a Transcendent, and

⁴³Luijpen, *Existential Phenomenology*, p. 341

subsistent Transcendence at that; if all human striving is ultimately a losing venture, why being at all? The question indeed calls for an answer, but one's pessimism allows one only to go so far as to admit defeat in this ultimate attempt at intelligibility. Vulgarized: the position would be -- My life is ultimately useless to me. Is it of any purpose to God? It is useless to find out!

Life I have come to hate, for what is done under the sun
disgusts me, since all is vanity and chasing of the wind. (Eccl. 2,17
SBJ).

There is no mistaking Qoheleth's category for human life and endeavour: *hebhel*. And if asked whether the *hebhel* to man which is his own existence has any purpose to the Creator, Qoheleth replies: "When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to observe what is done on earth, *I recognized that man is unable to find out all God's work* that is done under the sun, even though neither by day nor by night do his eyes find rest in sleep. However much man toils in searching, he does not find it out; and even if the wise man says that he knows, he is unable to find out." (Eccl. 9,16 - 17 NAB). "Just as you know not how the breath of life fashions the human person in the mother's womb, so you know not the work of God which he is accomplishing in the universe." (Eccl. 11,5 NAB). And so already pessimistic about his life-project, man is even denied the Stoic's heroism for whether in the face of God his useless existence should have any meaning and purpose lies in the void of the unknown and the impenetrable.

In this case what form would the existential affirmation of God take? A "concedo" to a *demonstratio* is not the point here. Rather, one lives within the convictions that life and life's pleasures are from God, that somehow, one is in His sight. Such an existential affirmation will consist in submission to the lordship of God, in avoiding what one considers to be against his Will not necessarily because one trusts in the promise of the reward of eternal life but because one lives in *conspectu Dei* and because God judges. God has given me a life of vain struggle. But I am in his presence; he knows and judges, therefore I fear the Lord. I am in him, and I love him but my life is ultimately pointless. The fact that God is the ultimate value says nothing to me about the value of my own life. In fact, before the Transcendent Absolute value that is God, earthly and human values shrink away into oblivion.

What we are trying to say then is that faith in God and the existential affirmation of God need not entail an affirmation of the meaning of human life (*quoad nos*) because the unbridgeable "otherness" of God and his independence do not in any way necessitate God to give man's striving any meaning. But would not God then be an irrational force who brings forth meaningless existence? One's existential theism convinces one that human life, as is the whole of creation, is in God's hands, that "everything has been made beautiful in its time." *Quoad nos*, our striving leads to naught. Our project at becoming is destined for the ultimate unbecoming-death! *Quoad Deo*, it is impossible to know and vain to try! And thus is man left in the pessimism of his existential outlook.

It is interesting that many of the theologies of our day take up the confident and self-assured position against which Qoheleth waged war in his days. It is surprising that at times, the very theologies that pontificate on the absolute independence of God leave practically no room for Divine freedom with regard to human destiny. One cannot help but get the impression that much of what we have today is confidence not so much in God as in theology! Berdyaev cites Sergius Bulgakov, a Russian dogmatician, from whom eternal hell is inconceivable as the failure of God, as the defeat of God by the powers of darkness.⁴⁴

Berdyaev himself very well represents the optimism of many of the theologies of our age that could well have provoked Qoheleth. It is the idea of hell Berdyaev repudiates and of course, hell is the summary concept for absolute meaninglessness (one eternally desires to behold God, realizing meanwhile that his desire is to be eternally frustrated.)

There is no shared, no corporate destiny of mankind and an eternal division is made part of it. Either I shall be cast into hell and my good friends will be in heaven, or they will be cast into hell and I shall be in heaven. But neither of these alternatives can be accepted by conscience. Man must all be saved together . . .

Hell is an undoubted success for the devil and a revelation of

⁴⁴Berdyaev, *Truth and Revelation*, p. 133.

his might. But it still remains a paradox that men should wish to regard hell with its eternal suffering as a department of the kingdom of God, the one in which primitive justice flourishes triumphant.⁴⁵

We have in this regard much to learn from the sobriety of Thomas of Aquinas so often villified today. In discussing the question on the immortality of the soul, he maintains the position that, as it is subsistent it cannot be corrupted accidentally, neither can it be corrupted in itself because it is form alone, i.e., substantially simple. There remains one possibility: annihilation by God. There is no question that it is within God's power to annihilate the human soul: " . . . id quod est ex nihilo vertibile est in nihil, nisi manu gubernantis conservetur." ⁴⁶ And " . . . sicut posse creari dicitur aliquid non per potentiam passivam, sed solum per potentiam activam Creantis, qui ex nihilo potest aliquid producere; ita cum dicitur aliquid vertibile in nihil, non importatur in creatura potentia ad non esse, sed in Creatore potentia ad hoc quod esse non influat." ⁴⁷ The next question is distinct: Will God not annihilate the soul? Will he keep it in existence? And here it is interesting to note the very formulation of Thomas.

Signum autem huius (quod anima humana incorruptibilis) . . . ex naturali appetitu qui in nulla re frustrari potest. Videmus enim hominibus appetitum esse perpetuitatis. Et hoc rationabiliter: quia cum ipsum esse secundum se sit appetibile, oportet quod ab intelligente qui apprehendit esse simpliciter, et non hic et nunc, appetatur esse simpliciter et secundum omne tempus. Unde videtur quod appetitus non sit inanis; sed quod homo secundum animam intellectivam sit incorruptibilis.⁴⁸

The natural desiderium of the soul for perpetuity is a "sign" that God keeps it forever in existence, giving meaning to this innate propensity for Being. Man's desire is not the reason God should keep him in existence. Our desires

⁴⁵Ibid, pp. 136-137.

⁴⁶*De Anima*, 15, ad. 19

⁴⁷*S.T. I*, q. 175, a.6, and 2.

⁴⁸*De Anima*, 5, c; also cf. *S.T. I*, qu. 75, a.6,

and aspirations do not of necessity, whether metaphysical or logical, impose a correspondence on the Divine side.

One can therefore really believe and fall in adoration before the God who has given me everything and who sustains me in being and yet remain fully pessimistic about my life-long struggle at self-becoming.

Finitude and Relativity

Finitude is not primarily a metaphysical conclusion; it is rather an existential experience. Man has varied experiences of his finitude, not only in the so-called border situations but in all of human activity. Some experiences, particularly more painful than others, bring man face to face with that of which he always is aware, though non-thetically, his finitude. My experience of finitude is the experience of the fragility of my existence and of my limited say over things. Though I construct my world, it is as much a part of my existence that I do not determine how things are. In fact, necessarily involved in the encounter with finitude is the surfacing of thrownness. Among the most brutal facts man must confront is the fact that he was born without liking to be born, without having had anything to do about his birth, without having any option about his parents, but all these are determinative facts — facticities. Man has to be without having chosen to be; he simply is “there” in a world that is “other than” him over which classical metaphysicians have called contingency. On the epistemological plane, this is the radical questionability of what is and primarily, of one’s own being. But when man consciously concedes his thrown-ness, he does so not impassively as when he recites the Pythagorean formula for right triangles. One is overcome with nausea, with disgust, and one also pronounces the death sentence over oneself. But maturation consists in dealing squarely with one’s limited control over the turn of events. Authentic human existence is living one’s finitude without illusions and false promises! Denying that man can attain in this life the perfect good, Thomas says of the fragility of human life:

In hac autem vita non potest omne malum excludi. Multis enim malis praesens vita subiacet, quae vitari non possunt: et ignorantiae ex parte intellectus, et inordinatae affectioni ex parte appetitus, et multiplicibus poenalitibus ex parte corporis . . . Bona autem praesentis vitae transitoria sunt: cum et ipsa vita tran-

seat, quam naturaliter desideramus, et eam perpetua permanere vellemus, quia naturaliter homo refugit mortem.⁴⁹

Finitude and contingency also punctuate the moral order, man's values and value systems. That which man pursues, as good or rejects as evil sustains a relation of either good or evil with man because of man's valuating activity and presence. We do not deny the *fundamentum in re* of values but a thing is valuable in reference to man who sets values and pursues them. The radical contingency that permeates his existence cannot leave aside his value relations. Man's values must then also be radically contingent and finite. While it is true that men hold certain "values" like honor, courage and honesty to be worth life itself, to possess such enduring qualities and to make such uncompromising demands on life itself, it remains that the priority I give dignity and honor ultimately refer to my irreplaceable, finite existence. It can never be said that I value honor in exactly the same manner as you value it, for there is simply no exactness of existence and of stances. Along this line, it may be well to consider what some contemporary ethical theoreticians call the "naturalistic fallacy", i.e., the fallacy of explaining ethical statements by a "state of affairs" outside the ethical framework itself. According to these theoreticians, ethical statements cannot be reduced into more elemental components. We do not entirely subscribe to their interpretation but we share the insight that the moral order, the system of values, is, in a certain sense, contingent. In reference to man (and there is no other being for whom there is a moral order), the moral order is indeed contingent.

It is at this point of our discussion on contingency and finitude that we call to the foreground the believing pessimist. Qoheleth, the paradigm of the study, protests against a moral order gone away: evil where there should be good, the exaltation of malefactors, the triumph of oppression, one common fate for good and evil. Our believing pessimist does not deny the distinction between good and evil; what he bewails is the fact that in the world, good is hardly ever good and evil is profitably good. Now, the appeal to another world where this imbalance will be redressed is not the only option possible. In fact, it is part of the temperament of our age to dismiss such an appeal as

⁴⁹Summa. Theol. I-II, Q. 5, a.3, corpus

escapist! It is also to discount the reality of the impact of evil on those who suffer. The promise of a future "hell" for the perpetrators of evil in no way diminishes the "hell" now being experienced by victims of oppression. In other words, what strikes our believing pessimist is the utter contingency of values and value-systems. This not only means that in death, the demarcation between good and evil disappears; this also means that between what "ought to be" or what one would like to be and what actually is there is not always a correspondence. Does God not guarantee for the moral order? Does not the contingency of reality argue for a Necessary Being, the *ens a se non habens causam necessitatis aliunde, sed quod est causa necessitatis aliiis*? There can be no doubt, in the mind of the believer, that God wills that man do good and avoid evil. But this does not mean that God makes it easy for man to do the good. In fact, what is that which is really good? That which man holds to be good, is it always that which God ordains to be good? The affirmation of God in faith in no way eliminates the experience of finitude; it does not in anyway render unreal the very real situation of evil where there should be good. Believing man expects the order to be otherwise because he holds some notion of what God wills to be good-which he nevertheless finds unconfirmed in the world. He therefore rebels either finally conceding: *Dominus est!* like Job or destroying every pretense at coherence and meaning, like Qoheleth! Things should be otherwise: a man who has toiled his whole life long should be given the fruits of his toil to enjoy, but he dies even before he can enjoy them and one who has never lifted a finger to make a fortune for himself receives the bounty of another's labor; wisdom ought to bring man light and direction, but it only brings him to see that all is vanity and chase of wind and that wisdom is itself destined to a common end with folly! This state of affairs does not argue against the reality of God. True, unbelievers down the centuries have pointed to the difformity between man's moral expectations and the world true situation as an indication of the solitude of man in a world without God, but the arguments are as unconvincing as those from the other side of the fence, for the situation always lends itself to an interpretation founded on the subject's world-view. This is a point vital to our study: the fact that the believer encounters the world following an "order" different from that he expects it to pursue does not necessarily mark God's grave. It rather speaks more strongly of man's limits - of his unmitigated finitude. Man does not have the world as he would like to have

it. It is in order at this point to draw attention to Gordon Kaufman's observations on "God-talk". The linguistic situation within which there is God-talk is the experience of finitude, limitation, guilt and sin. A necessary correlate then of God-talk is man's thrownness.

It is in the context of these questions and problems about man's finitude and the significance of his existence in the light of this finitude that the meaning and use of the word "God" should be understood. That is, our speech about this Other arises because certain features of experience force us up against the limit(s) of all possible knowledge and experience. If there were no experience within the world which brought us in this world -- if there would be no justification for the use of "God-language".⁵⁰

God is The Limit; as such, he is unsurpassable and whatever else man may affirm about God must be coupled with the qualification of God as ultimate limit. Optimist and pessimist alike recognize the finitude of man but while the optimist affirms that *despite* finitude, there is an enduring sense and value in human existence, the pessimist confronts finitude as that which finally overtakes man and belies all progress and achievement. Within his finite situation, man does act but the finitude and limitation that permeate his being deny his very existence any lasting significance. Is the pessimist then still a believer? There is absolutely no reason why he should not be! Following in the lead of Kaufman, we have observed that finitude and mystery are not mutually exclusive. In fact, finitude seems to be the necessary precondition for the recognition of mystery. Imagining the constitutive experience of limitation as personal, as God, need not attenuate the full impact of finitude. God is not the *breaking thru* from finitude. In fact, God is the full affirmation of human limitation. And if the experience of finitude brings the pessimistic believer to the unrelenting conclusion that eventually, human finitude renders all of human life relative, of transitory value and, in its totality, pointless striving after that which man cannot really become, he does so as one who is as unrelenting in his "apprehension" of God as THE limit to human possibility and power. We do not see any contradiction here unless one insists that the "apprehension" of God must include the affirma-

⁵⁰Kaufman, *God The Problem*, p. 49.

tion that, in God, man breaks thru his finitude. But we have already argued that this need not be so.

Human finitude and relativity lend themselves in fact to a religious interpretation. And here we do not refer to the *via ex possibili et necessario*. The *classic approach* has been: from the experience of finitude and relativity, one proceeds to conclude to the existence of an Infinite, absolute Being that is the sufficient reason for the being of that which is finite and relative. This is a metaphysical framework that renders ultimately intelligible the contingent and finite situation of creaturely reality. The given-ness and thrownness of man in situation are embraced by the metaphysical explanation of reality as contingent, depending on the Necessary Being. This is immediately evident, especially in Thomas' treatment of the demonstrability of God's existence. In describing the *demonstratio quia*, he proposes to proceed *per effectum ad cognitionem causae*. Unde Deum esse, secundum quod non est per se notum quoad nos, demonstrabile est per effectus nobis notos. In other words, the situation as given, the finitude of human existence, is intelligible because it is the effect that points to the cause. Hence, the finite is grounded in the Infinite, the contingent on the Necessary. Contingency and finitude are relativized.

When we speak of the religious interpretation of finitude and relativity, we do not refer to a "proof" for the existence of God. The religious interpretation that we will discuss does not relativize the experience of finitude, nor is there a movement from effect to cause, from finite to infinite. For the man on whom finitude and relativity make a definitive impact, life-situations are arbitrary effects of causes which must finally remain unintelligible. Qoheleth makes no attempt to establish a coherent pattern within which misfortune and the tragic manifestations of limitation may fit. In fact, his is a polemic against all such self-confident "explanations". For him, the situation of man remains and will remain desperately unintelligible. The fascination with the facticity of the real will not always lead to an attempt to found the contingent on the Necessary. This is not the only way. In fact, it seems to be the characteristic of the new "*weltanschauung*" to accept unquestioningly contingency. The Transcendent then is not the ultimately intelligible but the totally unknown. Because he does not hope to find intelligibility, man believes, not to re-establish intelligibility, but because the Unknown is

indicated by the unknown and unknowable universe. In other words, the Transcendent - God - is the peak of unintelligibility who in no way resolves the finite and the unintelligible but is rather the confirmation of incomprehensibility and "arbitrariness."⁵¹

The movement from ambiguous experience to religious interpretation is therefore not the same as the way of Transcendental philosophy (Rahner and symphatizers). The movement is not towards intelligibility, and no jump is made from contingent being to Necessary Being. Rather the affirmation of Transcendence is within the anguish and uneasiness of non-intelligibility. Contingency is such an overpowering reality and attempts at discovering the logic of existence yield no fruit, so that man existentially abandons the quest for intelligibility. Everything happens to be. He is himself an utterly gratuitous existence and there is nothing whatsoever that can be found to justify, anchor and give meaning to his existence. Because of its all-pervasiveness, the experience of finitude and contingency is the encounter with the unconditioned and the all-comprehensive. The gratuity of a particular existent merely instantiates a more enveloping gratuity, and hence there is at the same time an encounter with *all*, with the un-bounded, with the transcendent horizon, with the ultimate.

The movement is not rational, neither is it irrational, because the rational-irrational disjunction is not complete, meaning that it is not by argument that one proceeds from anguish to Transcendence. We discussed this thoroughly in the chapter on the anguished assent of faith. It is also obvious that the movement is always dialectical. Therefore demanding explanation on consistency between the all-comprehensive experience of contingency (factual existence) and the affirmation of the Transcendent as God is to ask something that cannot be answered. It is to treat the existential, experiential, non-notional as the speculative, logical, rational. It should be sufficient to understand that when one is overpowered by contingency, one has an experience of the *overpowering*. When one meets the non-justified in a particular non-justified existence, one has an index for a transcendent non-intelligibility, in other words for a horizon.

⁵¹Louis Dupre, *The Other Dimension: A Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes*. (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1972), pp. 27-30.

The affirmation of the Transcendent, or God, does not end the anguish of one's contingency. The very complexities that triggered the surrender to total contingency do not resolve themselves. The Transcendent does not re-establish intelligibility for if it did the very experience by which its affirmation is sustained would dissolve. Again we must resist the temptation of attempting to render consistent Transcendent Reality with absolute contingency. Such an attempt would prescind from the experience of man, the experience of anguish within faith, that this thesis is concerned with. The religious affirmation need not necessarily be the affirmation of the metaphysical categories of cause, sufficient reason and final cause which, in the light (or rather in the darkness) of a failing coherent intelligibility seems to lose all existential relevance. The Transcendent affirmed is of course not grasped as contingent, in the sense that it is something that just happens to be there; in the existential affirmation, it is neither asked to explain itself. It is rather affirmed as the *completion* of incomprehensibility.

If then an approach to God is conceivable from contingency, from the undiminished impact of finitude and limitation on man that does not relativize the agonizing situation of human existence, then we have also established that in his pessimism that is born from an experience of the finality of human relativity, the believer can remain committed in faith. Does then the affirmation of God not spell any difference at all? Does Divine presence leave unchanged the horizon of the believing pessimist? When God as the Final Unknowable is affirmed, when the pessimist who concedes in defeat to unintelligibility makes the leap of faith, what happens is more than a mere quantitative augmentation of unknowing. Rather, the horizon of the pessimist is qualitatively transformed, not in the sense that the pessimist becomes optimistic, but in the sense that the incoherence, resistance and impenetrability of the factual order ceases to be an isolated experience; it rather becomes situated within that which is bounded by the *Totaliter aliter*, by the Surmounting Incomprehensible. And so there is a note of finality that pervades the factual order and the limitations of man.

A final statement must be made about the "relativity" of the moral order, which we take in a wider sense to include the order of reality. Does value not rest on God rather than on the "foundationlessness" of my free choice? First it should be remembered that ever where value is grounded on

God, specifically the value of human existence, it is always grounded on the freedom of God. Again, St. Thomas' treatment of the question is enlightening. Does God will whatever he wills from absolute necessity? With regard to his own goodness, it cannot be otherwise. (This is in keeping with the Thomistic model of Divine perfection). But of all other things, Thomas avers:

Unde, cum bonitas Dei sit perfecta, et esse possit sine aliis, cum nihil ei perfectionis ex aliis accrescat; sequitur quod alia a se eum velle, non sit necessarium absolute. Et tamen necessarium est ex suppositione: supposito enim quod valit, non potest non velle, quia non potest voluntas eius mutari.⁵²

And again, on the question: *Utrum his processerint a Deo per necessitatem naturae vel per arbitrium voluntatis*, Thomas maintains:

Dicendum quod, absque omni dubio, tenendum est quod Deus ex libero arbitrio suae voluntatis creaturas in esse produxit nulla naturali necessitate.

XXX

Ad decimum dicendum, quod licet Deus operetur in quantum est bonus, et bonitas ei necessario insit, non tamen sequitur quod de necessitate operetur. Bonitas enim mediante voluntate operatur, in quantum est eius obiectum vel finis; voluntas autem non necessario se habet ad ea quae sunt ad finem; licet respectu ultimi finis necessitatem habeat.⁵³

Note that although Thomas works on metaphysical principles it is nevertheless clear that the foundation of what is, and therefore also of value, is the freedom of God. Within this framework, the impact of contingency, of finitude, still remains: everything rests on Divine Freedom and Divine Freedom is, by "definition" comprehensively unattainable and consequently existentially discomfoting. It may very well then also be that the believer sees dissolving before him the very values he has created, since God's sovereignty, precisely as free, leaves them utterly dependent upon the complete vacuity of man's freedom.

⁵²Summ. Theol. I, q. 19, 1. 3, cop.

⁵³*Quaestio Disputata de Potentia*, q. 3, a. 15, corpus atque ad 10.

Death

Any discussion on human finitude of its nature leads to a treatment on death. In the chapter on pessimism, we undertook an examination of the pessimistic standpoint on death. We now take a look at death from the perspective of pessimism in belief. Faith, we earlier remarked, involves a qualitative transformation of one's horizon, and therefore there must be something to be said about death from the standpoint of a pessimistic believer that has not yet been said under pessimism.

Our philosophical description of the existential stance of pessimism in belief so far presents the believing pessimist as one who finds no way of attenuating human contingency. The affirmation of God does not resolve the utter gratuity of human existence. Not even an appeal to the "will" of God gives man the comfort of anchoring his existence on something other than contingency because God is affirmed as the Limit, the totally unsurpassable boundary of human possibility and intelligibility. There is no compromise with the factual existence of man. Man is without having chosen to be in a world that is also alien, at times adverse, to him. The believer affirms God as "cause" of man's factual existence and therefore the believer sees himself as the product of a sovereign will that really "calls the shots". This does not eliminate facticity; it rather establishes it in relation to the absolute freedom of the Transcendent, thereby also placing it perpetually beyond man's reach. The affirmation of Transcendent does not necessarily carry with it the promise that in the end, this thrown-ness will work to man's advantage. Every human experience confirms the pessimist in his resentment over thrown-ness. He is thrown into existence, and thrown by God who has thrown him for seemingly no purpose at all. God is God and he must have acted for some reason, but what is reasonable to the Transcendent to the "unsurpassable Limit" will not necessarily be coherent to man. Therefore, that which is purposive to God is not in any way submitted to the criteria of human purposiveness. Therefore, man can rightfully conclude meaninglessness with respect to his existence *as his*, for he lives by the sense of meaning which he himself intuits (or fails to grasp) and not God's. And if man's self-consciousness is awareness of having-to-be, the pessimist thinks of man as working to no avail. Human project gets him nowhere, but it is God who gives man his toil to be busy with. The world's order is not the reliable field

of human activity; it is treacherous and eventually unrewarding. It is distant from and non-conformable to human domination and design because it reflects an order that is not of man's willing and doing.

The givenness of man to himself as finite is also his givenness as *unto-death* ("mortal" is not as existentially effective as term). We will not now discuss whether death is constitutive of human existence. This belongs to the domain of human ontology, but the "foreboding" of death is inevitably part of his self-awareness as limited. How death is given to me as the possibility of my non-being, and much more, as a possibility that cannot be out-ripped. But is it not a fact that in every man is the "life-urge", the inner desire for perpetual identity? (Let us note in passing that it is not an indeterminate continuation of this life that man desires; in fact, it is rightly remarked by observers of man that should it be given to man to live on indefinitely, he would in the same instant feel himself condemned.) But there also is an inner desire for the finality of quietude in the good (*beatitudo*) which however is definitely unattainable, at least not yet. Indeed, in every affirmation, even in the affirmation of the inevitability of death, the affirmation of self is concurrent, and therefore the total non-being of self is hardly conceivable, which does not mean that the non-being of the self is impossible. In fact, the basic human affective state of anxiety gives me as irreducible datum the possibility of my non-being.

Does death not hold a promise as man's own-most possibility? Let us not forget that the possibility we are dealing with here is the possibility of the *impossibility of all further possibility*. Hence it is open to the interpretations of either optimistic or pessimistic world views. Indeed there is a bipolarity with respect to death as possibility. While death fully individuates, in the sense that *I*, in my irreplaceability must die, death is also ultimately the dissolution of every relative distinction. A good man dies, and so does a bad man, and in death as the complete concession of non-being, the distinction between good and bad disappears. We do not of course refer here to the memory of good and bad men, but memory, as memory, is the fixation of the past. The state of affairs in death is that neither good or bad man is anymore. This we referred to earlier as the 'levelling' effect of death. But this is none other than the confirmation of human relativity, the demonstration of the contingency of the moral order. And even with regard to the indivi-

duction that death brings, it is individuation that prefaces the annihilation of the individual. If, according to the "dark model" of death we outlined earlier, death breaks the whole person and poses a dyslogical breach of the consistency of human existence and of its expectations, even the promised individuation of death feeds the consuming flames of pessimism. Does the affirmation of God not provide the guarantee that righteousness does make a difference that survives death? In Qoheleth, we get two answers not easily reconcilable with one another: the righteous and their deeds are in the hand of God (9,1), yet, the one fate comes to all; as is the good man, so is the sinner. (9,2) Rather than dismissing this as a hopeless contradiction on Qoheleth's part, it is from this that we take our clue. The believer, as believer, cannot compromise God's righteousness. We have already seen, however, that speaking of Divine righteousness is nothing less than touching on the very mystery of God himself; the affirmation of Divine righteousness therefore situates us once more in the realm of the unknown, and because God, not man, is the measure, man has naught with which to go by. But when the pessimistic believer holds fast to the affirmation of God, which is also the affirmation of his righteousness and of the vindication of good, he does not all the same time affirm that the justice man has lived by will be vindicated by "life-eternal". Our Christian logic of existence that holds the promise of participation in the risen life of Jesus is not necessarily the logic of every believer. Qoheleth was unyielding in his affirmation of God and the triumph of righteousness, but he was as firm in his protest over the "incontrovertible" manifest fate that came to good and evil men alike. We have therefore here an instance of a believer who nevertheless remains pessimistic about the ultimate destiny of man because he does not draw the connection between the vindication of God's righteousness and the favorable destiny of man. Is Qoheleth's faith to be debunked as "this-worldly"? He definitely holds a "Trancendence" of righteousness, but the Transcendence of good is not the same thing as the enduring value of human existence. Is it not rather the optimistic believer who must in some way indicate that the connection he draws between the vindication of Divine righteousness and his hope for life with God is an intellectually honest move? We will not pass judgement on Christianity's claims; this is beyond the interests of the philosopher!

Death therefore comes to the pessimistic believer as the "ultimate absurdity", that which renders all of human striving vain and illusory. Under

the shadow of death, evil (which we have already described) makes itself felt. And because death itself cannot be beyond the ambit of Divine mystery, it also bears God's mark. When we say that death is in the hands of God, we are not saying that the dead rest secure in the hands of God. Qoheleth knows of no such assurance. But it is God who dispenses death as he does life. It is man's ordained fate, and the sickle must one day fall on man because God wills it so. Because of God, therefore, there is a determinative character that qualifies the already grasped inevitability of death. Death is inevitable, not only because man as man happens to be unto-death but because God takes back from him the breath of life which once he gave. And if we should stubbornly ask: For what then? Qoheleth reminds us: Man cannot find out; God is not bound to offer man explanations; he is in heaven, you are on earth!

In a very real sense, the surrender to God is also the surrender to death and in this, we have not only the shadow of faith that is truly "a leap". Man does not surrender to death with the assurance that God will see to his survival even after death. Rather, man surrenders in faith to God who wills it so. Faith is never an investment; if it were it would not survive. Faith is one's unconditional commitment to God even at the cost of my existence. It is in this light that we understand the holy enthusiasm with which mystics have expressed willingness to be cast into the depths of "hell" if God willed it so! For the Christian horizon, the commitment to God carries with it the promise that *my life* is not futile in the sense that with Jesus, *I will live*. It may be the blessing of a Christian that he has confidence in such promise. Still, faith is conceivable, in fact seems to be in its form of "unconditioned surrender" when, without any promise of future life, man commits himself to God. When one most fully submits to contingency, finitude and death, one is in a position to commit fully to the sovereign will of God in faith. Hence pessimism over the ultimate destiny of man can truly be coupled with uncompromising surrender to God! Aldwinckle, commenting on what he calls "theologies without hope" summarizes our point very neatly: Whatever may be said about God, there is only this present world as far as men are concerned.⁵⁴

⁵⁴Russel Aldwinckle, *Death in the Secular City* (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1972), pp. 42-43.

God

We finally turn our attention to the God affirmed by the pessimist in faith, and here we must start by limiting ourselves according to the terms of our study. We set out to understand why one who believes in God can at the same time be pessimistic about human life and deny it all meaning, and in defining "believer", we spoke of one who affirms thematically as well as existentially that God is God, that all comes from Him; in other words, the God we speak of is the God of theistic faith and the believer, be he a pessimist or an optimist, is one whose horizon has room for the Transcendent, not merely as an entity among others, but as governing, determinative Being. The *situation* of the believer has been well described by John Hick.

Finally, enfolding and interpenetrating this inter-locking mass of finite situations there is also, according to the insistent witness of theistic religion, the all-encompassing situation of being in the presence of God and within the sphere of an on-going divine purpose.⁵⁵

But it is important to bring foreground the dominant characteristics of a pessimist's "conception" of God. In a sense, the ambiguity that is Transcendence lends itself to "conceptualization" according to the horizon in which Transcendence is present, thematically.

The affirmation of God inevitably involves the tension of immanence and transcendence. The dialectic is essential to faith, and neither pole can stand without the other. Transcendence without immanence (which is actually a contradiction in terms) makes of God an irrelevant "x" factor. Immanence that resolves the dialectic into itself renders an uninteresting, inner-wordly, superfluous entity.⁵⁶ But without undoing the dialectic, a determined world-view may be characterized by an overwhelming sense of

⁵⁵John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd., 1978), p. 107.

⁵⁶cf. Ranhilio C. Aquino, "The Dialectic of Immanence and Transcendence from an Oriental Perspective", *Journal of Graduate Research* - University of Sto. Tomas, Vol. 10, No. 1 (October, 1980), pp. 3-33.

Divine Transcendence. What retains the relevance of Divine Transcendence to man is of course its immanence, but an immanence that is thoroughly qualified by God's irrevocable, irreconcilable "otherness". From Qoheleth, we learned that man's proper stance is to "fear God", and to fear God means to recognize the unbridgeable distance between God and man.

For the pessimistic believer, man is fully within God's domain. In fact, nothing at all fails outside the sphere permeated by the Divine Will. What we are saying then is that man is wholly at God's disposal and subject to Divine purpose. If God is affirmed as God; then he is affirmed as purposive Agent. Man belongs to that sphere within which God effects purposive activity. Does this then not restore meaning to human existence and render impossible the position of the believing pessimist? Elsewhere, we have suggested the answer that here we develop. For Qoheleth, the believing pessimist, all that God has done, and so too all that he plans, is as immense as man is finite. Therefore the 'purpose' and 'meaning' we refer to are Divine purpose and meaning. Inasfar as man is concerned, the order of the universe and the fortune of human existence are insolubly factual, irreconcilably contingent, and they acquire a definitive qualification that comes from the fact that *what is* so ordained by God in Absolute Freedom. Furthermore, *human meaning* is the existential purpose which man grasps, at the same time that he creates it, by his meaning-giving presence and activity in the world. It therefore always is "that which my life leads to be for me", and when this is absent, life leads to nothing. This is the pessimistic stand. Now, to affirm Divine purpose -- which seems to be an inseparable corollary of the affirmation of God -- is to affirm that whatever God has made leads to something for God, but that which is *for God* is, by definition, unattainable, "alien" to man. An eternal purpose ordained by the Divine Will is infinitely distant and disparate from that which leads to something *for man*. The "Gospel" of Christianity is precisely that the "eternal purpose" for which God created the world is the participation of man in the life of God. The Christian message is that God has given himself to be man's future. It is *good news* because it is something that cannot point to its origins in the human situation itself, nor in man's assent in faith. That God is man's future is, at least according to the claims of the Christian religion, a free gift of the love of God; it is something however, that believing man does not, as a matter of "right", have. What we are saying then is that the world-view of the believing pessimist

includes all that is affirmed and affirmable in the on-going realization of Divine purpose, and thus, man, fully within the domain of God, falls completely within the plan of God which is forever hidden from him. What matters therefore is that what God has ordained reaches fulfillment; the fulfillment of man cannot be the governing principle of the universe, not even of his own existence which is never independent of Divine purposiveness. Faith in God does not mean the expectation that God will act in *my* favor, it rather means that whatever it means (or does not mean) for me, I remain committed to God. According to Thomas, whom we rejoin here, the necessary object of God's will is his own goodness, not the *beatitudinem hominis*.

Circa divina igitur hoc considerandum est, quod aliquid Deum velle est necessarium absolute: non tamen hoc est verum de omnibus quae vult. Voluntas enim divina necessariam habitudinem habet ad bonitatem suam, quae est proprium eius obiectum.⁵⁷

The utter denial of universal meaning is hardly possible, existentially, in fact it seems to be contradiction. And so the pessimistic believer can believe in meaning, in the sense that he affirms God, that God gets somewhere with what he had done. But the denial of meaning to human existence, as man conceives and projects his life's meaning is a possibility, an option for one who has committed himself unconditionally to God.

Summary Conclusion

Our study leads us to the conclusion that *it is possible for one who affirms God to be pessimistic about human life*. That this is a possible stance for man, we conclude from some indicators derived from a philosophical reading of Qoheleth.

1. The meaning of human existence is correlative to human project. When the believer perceives human activity, and consequently human becoming, within a world-view that pushes to foreground the nullity of project in and through experiences of failure and vacuity; he can be reasonably pessimistic about human existence.

⁵⁷*Summa. Theol.* I, q. 19, a.3, corpus

2. The radical contingency of factual being that makes its impact on man can provide the setting for the affirmation of God as the "culmination" of the utterly unknowable, the Unsurpassable whose unsurpassability confines man within total factual existence. If then the affirmation of God can take place in the context of human finitude and limitation, man can be overcome by the throwness of his existence, affirming in the same instant God as the Limit of experience, intelligibility and power.
3. Death as the possibility of man which cannot be outstripped holds no promises of meaning; in fact, it is the possibility of the ultimate relativization of all human achievement and even of the "order" according to which man pursues purposeful activity. The Affirmation of God establishes death as man's ordained destiny, and therefore as his irremediable end. In the face of death, the believer sees no significance to his life that must end in non-being.
4. Man as creature is utterly subject to the sovereignty of God. Human existence is therefore assigned by God a purpose that is beyond man's horizon and is inaccessible to Him. What is given in the affirmation of God is that what God has set out to do will be done, and therefore the pessimist who sees nothing in store for human existence, who concedes that, in the end, his was merely a span of seventy or eighty years come and forever gone, can unconditionally commit himself to God who works out what he has, from all eternity, willed.

We have undertaken our study within the forum of philosophy. Christianity may present a different state of affairs; that is for the theologians to show and for the believers to accept or to reject. We have tried to establish, however, that pessimism in faith is a possible and a reasonable human position. Our description may have shown that to dismiss the pessimism of a believer as an "emotional aberration" or as "speculative inconsistency" may be too simplistic a reduction of the complex whole that is man's assent in faith and his intuition of human existence. Finally, it has been our stand that faith is unconditioned, "unwarranted" commitment; man assents to God in faith because God has entered into his experience, not because God assures man of a reward for belief. Faith is never "profitable investment"; it is man's anguished,

uncompromising leap into the immensity of God and the ultimate surrender of any claim for himself.

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. Eccl. 12,13.

RANHILIO CALLANGAN AQUINO
University of Sto. Tomas
and Vigan Major Seminary