

*A Patristic Commentary*



# THE BOOK OF Ecclesiastes

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## CHAPTER ONE

### VANITY OF LIFE NOT CENTERED ON GOD

If we accept "Qoheleth" (the preacher) as Solomon, we will behold him in this book after a temporary apostasy from the Lord, confessing and forsaking evil, and finding mercy. We behold him returning from the broken and empty cisterns of the world, to the Fountain of living water, recording for admonition of future ages his own folly and shame, the bitterness of his disappointment, and the salutary lessons he had learned from seeking happiness in the vanities of the world without God<sup>1</sup>.

In this chapter we have,

1. Introduction [1].
  2. Theme: The vanity of life apart from God [2, 3].
  3. The arguments:
    - a. The shortness of human life [4].
    - b. The inconstant nature of all the creatures [5-7].
    - c. The abundant toil man has about them [8].
    - d. Nothing new [9, 10].
    - e. Former things are forgotten [11].
  4. Pursuit after human knowledge vain [12-15].
  5. Pursuit after human wisdom vain [16-18].
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### INTRODUCTION

*"The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem"* [1].

Solomon, although not identified by name becomes the literary spokesman for the observations and convictions of the author. He is the king in Jerusalem who because of his wealth, wisdom, and worldly concern has ample opportunity to sample all of life.

He conceals his name Solomon, "peaceable," because by his sin he had brought trouble upon himself and his kingdom, had broken peace with God, and therefore was no more worthy of that name. Call me not Solomon, call me Marah, for, behold, for peace I had great bitterness (Isa. 38:17).

"Qoheleth" which comes from a word signifies "to gather," is a "penitent soul," or one "gathered," one that had gone astray like a lost sheep, but was "gathered" in from his wanderings. Being himself "gathered," and being reconciled to the church, he endeavors to gather others to her that had gone astray like him.

His being "The Son of David" gives him no excuse, for he is the son of a good man. It also encouraged him to repent and hope for mercy, for David had fallen into sin, and repented, and therein he took example from him and found mercy as he did.

"King of Jerusalem." God had done much for him, in raising him to the throne in the city of God where the house of God is located, and yet he had so ill requited him.

### 2. THE ARGUMENT:

The Theme of the Book: *"Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity"* [2].

The word translated "vanity" denotes a breath-exhaled air that disappears<sup>2</sup> (see Isa. 57:13) or "vapor" (see Prov. 21:6), like the condensed breath that one breathes on a cold day. It appears to imply here both

1. that which is transitory, and

2. that which is futile. It emphasizes how swiftly earthly things pass away, and how little they offer while one has them (cf. Job. 4:14). This concept is given greater stress by the repeated use of the superlative, vanity of vanities.

Many speak contemptuously of the world because they are hermits, and know it not, or poor, and have it not; but Solomon knew it. He had dived into nature's depths (1 Kings 4:33), and he had it, more of it perhaps than ever any man had.

#### WHY ALL HUMAN THINGS ARE VAIN?

1. As God created the world for the sake of His most beloved creature, i.e., man, all things were good; but as apostate man puts them out of place, and expects from them what is not in them, they vanish in disappointment.

+ If they are God's works, how are they vain? And great is the dispute concerning these things. But hearken, beloved: it is not the works of God which he calls vain; God forbid! The Heaven is not vain; the earth is not vain,-God forbid!-nor the sun, nor the moon and stars, nor our own body. No, all these are "very good" (Gen. 1:31). But what is vain? Let us hear the Preacher himself, what he says; "I planted me vineyards, I gat me men singers and women singers, I made me pools of water, I had great possession of herds and flocks, I gathered me also silver and gold, and I saw that these are vanity." (Eccles. 2:4-8). And again, "Vanity of vanities, all things are vanity" (Eccles. 12:8). Hear also what the Prophet says, "He heaps up riches, and know not who shall gather them" (Ps. 39:6). Such is "vanity of vanities," your splendid buildings, your vast and overflowing riches, the herds of slaves that bustle along the public square, your pomp and vainglory, your high thoughts, and your ostentation. For all these are vain; they came not from the hand of God, but are of our own creating. But why then are they vain? Because they have no useful end.<sup>3</sup>

+ "In the vanity," he says, "of their mind." (Eph. 4: 4). What is vanity of mind? It is the being busied about vain things. And what are those vain things, but all things in the present life? Of which the Preacher says, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." (Eccl. 1: 2). But a man will say, If they be vain and vanity, wherefore were they made? If they are God's works, how are they vain? And great is the dispute concerning these things. But hearken, beloved: it is not the works of God which he calls vain; God forbid! The Heaven is not vain, the earth is not vain, — God forbid! — nor the sun, nor the moon and stars, nor our own body. No, all these are "very good." (Gen. 1: 31). But what is vain? Let us hear the Preacher himself, what he says; "I planted me vineyards, I gat me men singers and women singers, I made me pools of water, I had great possession of herds and flocks, I gathered me also silver and gold, and I saw that these are vanity." (Eccl. 2: 4- 8). And again, "Vanity of vanities, all things are vanity." (Eccl. xii. 8). Hear also what the Prophet says, "He heaps up riches, and knows not who shall gather them." (Ps. xxxix. 6). Such is "vanity of vanities," your splendid buildings, your vast and overflowing riches, the herds of slaves that bustle along the public square, your pomp and vainglory, your high thoughts, and your ostentation. For all these are vain; they came not from the hand of God, but are of our own creating. But why then are they vain? Because they have no useful end. Riches are vain when they are spent upon luxury; but they cease to be vain when they are "dispersed and given to the needy." (Ps. cxii 9). But when you haste spent them upon luxury, let us look at the end of them, what it is; — grossness of body, flatulence, pantings, fullness of belly, heaviness of head, softness of flesh, feverishness, enervation; for as a man who shall draw into a leaking vessel labors in vain, so also does the one who lives in luxury and self-indulgence draw into a leaking vessel. But again, that is called "vain," which is expected indeed to contain something, but contains it not; — that which men call empty, as when they speak of "empty hopes." And generally that is called "vain," which is bare and purposeless, which is of no use. Let us see then whether all human things are not of this sort. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." (1 Cor. xv. 32). What then, tell me, is the end? Corruption. Let us put on clothing and raiment. And what is the result? Nothing. Such are the lives of the Greeks. They philosophized, but in vain. They made a show of a life of hardship, but of mere hardship, not looking to any beneficial end, but to vainglory, and to honor from the many. But what is the honor of the many? It is nothing, for if they themselves which render the honor perish, much more does the honor. He that renders honor to another, ought first to render it to himself; for if he gain not honor for himself, how can he ever render it to another? Whereas now we seek even honors from vile and despicable characters, themselves dishonorable, and objects of reproach. What kind of honor then is this? You perceive, how that all things are "vanity of vanities"? Therefore, he says, "in the vanity of their mind."<sup>4</sup>

St. John Chrysostom

God created the world for our sakes, and not us for its sake. In other words we must it and leave us to use us, as its own slaves.

2. If a person looks at life merely in terms of earthly values, there is no discernible advantage to struggle and toil [3]. The writer does not exhort us to despair, but not to be absorbed in the temporal things even in our worship. In other words life in all its aspects is meaningless, useless, hollow and vain if it is not rightly related to God. Only when based on God and His Word is life worthwhile.

+ Why then are you held back by the love of things temporal? Why follow you after the last things, as though the first, which is vanity and a lie? For you would have them abide with you, which all pass away, as does a shadow<sup>5</sup>.

St. Augustine

+ "Vanities, all is vanity." Let us go to the tombs; show me your father; show me your wife. Where is he that was clad in raiment of gold? he that rode in the chariot? he that had armies, that had the girdle, that had the heralds? he that was slaying these, and casting those into prison? he that put to death whom he would and set free whom he was minded? I see nothing but boned, and a worm, and a spider's web; all those things are earth, all those a fable, all a dream, and a shadow, and a bare relation and a picture, or rather not so much as a picture<sup>6</sup>.

St. John Chrysostom

+ He calls "vanity" everything we see and strive after in visible reality. What is vain lacks substance, and what lacks substance does not have power<sup>7</sup>.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

3. All creatures cannot satisfy our inner life that is formed in the image of God. The Creator and the Savior alone can satisfy our hearts and souls.

+ "All things are vanity! as Ecclesiastes said, all things which are in this world. Accordingly, let the man who wishes to be saved ascend above the world, let him seek the Word who is with God let him flee from this world and depart from the earth. For a man cannot comprehend that which exists and exists always, unless he has first fled from here. On this account also, the Lord, wishing to approach God the Father, said to the Apostles, "Arise, let us go from here"<sup>8</sup>.

St. Ambrose

+ Vanity not simply but superlatively. Let us believe him, and lay hold on that in which there is no vanity, in which there is truth; and what is based upon a solid rock, where there is no old age, nor decline, but all things bloom and flourish, without decay, or waxing old, or approaching dissolution. Let us, I beseech you, love God with genuine affection, not from fear of hell, but from desire of the kingdom. For what is comparable to seeing Christ? Surely nothing! What to the enjoyment of those good things? Surely nothing! Well may there be nothing; for "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love Him." (1 Cor. 2:9)<sup>9</sup>.

St. John Chrysostom

+ I am your father, brother, bridegroom, house, clothing, root, foundation. I am everything you wish; you stand in need of nothing. I shall be your servant, for I came to serve, not to be served. I am your friend, your member, your head, your brother, your sister, your mother, and all things. Only be my friend...

What more do you desire? Why do you turn away Him who loves you? Why do you labor for this world? Why do you draw water in a leaky jar-for that is what toiling for the present life is? Why do you comb wool into the fire? Why do you beat the air? Why do you run in vain? Does not each art have its purpose? This is clear to all. But you do not have a purpose. Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity [2]<sup>10</sup>.

St. John Chrysostom

4. If this world, in its present state is vanity, it will not be worth for man to be absorbed in it, but to search for the eternal and heavenly life, and to transfer our hearts, thoughts, hopes and even our possessions unto it.

+ Therefore the true life must be laid hold upon, our riches must be removed to the place of the true life, that we may find there what we give here. he make this exchange of our goods who also change ourselves<sup>11</sup>.

St. Augustine

*"What profit has a man of all his labor which he takes under the sun?"* [3].

Verses 3-11 is a poem, its subject is: "Nature's Cycle is Pointless." All human business is pointless - at least so far as can be observed under the sun.

It is said concerning the profit of the soul and the life that is to come. For all man gets by his labor will not supply the wants of the soul, will not atone for its sin, nor cures its diseases.

"Under the sun." There is a world under the sun and other above it. Here we suffer the heat of the sun (Matt. 20:12); but there we will be not in need of the sun. God Himself is its Sun and Light.

+ The righteousness of man is as nothing accounted. The work of men, what is it? His labor is altogether vanity. Of You, O Lord, of Your grace it is that in our nature we should become good. Of You is righteousness, that we from men should become righteous. Of You is the mercy and favor, that we from the dust should become Your image. Give power to our will, that we be not sunk in sin!<sup>12</sup>

St. Ephram the Syrian

+ By labor here it refers to the life of the body which does not seek its advantage in any good deed. And it says: What has a man- that is, What does the soul get out of all the toil of life in those men who live only for the superficial<sup>13</sup>.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

a. The shortness of human life [4].

*One generation passes away, and another generation comes: but the earth abides for ever*"[4].

Solomon here shows the time of our enjoyment of these things is very short. It is said: "Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day" Job 14:6. "For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away" Jam. 4:14. We continue in the world but for one generation, which is continually passing away to make room for another, and we are passing with it.

The earth, man's workshop, appears permanent, while man ever passes. The earth which is created for man's pleasures will remain until the end of this world.

+ The mortal remains mortal whether he is honored or not. What good does the possessor of many acres gain in the end? Except that the foolish man thinks his own that which never belongs to him, ignorant seemingly in his greed that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof" (Ps. 24:1) for "God is king of all the earth" (Ps. 47:7). It is the passion of having which gives men a false title of lordship over that which can never belong to them. "The earth," says the wise Preacher, "abides for ever," ministering to every generation, first one, then another, that is born upon it; but men, though they are so little even their own masters, that they are brought into life without knowing it by their Maker's will, and before they wish are withdrawn from it, nevertheless in their excessive vanity think that they are her lords; that they, now born, now dying, rule that which remains continually<sup>14</sup>.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

b. The inconstant nature of all the creatures [5-7].

All things in this world are movable and mutable.

*"The sun also arises, and the sun goes down, and hastes to his place where he arose. The wind goes toward the south, and turns about unto the north; it whirls about continually, and the wind retunes again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again" [5-7].*

The earth, its productions and affairs, abide much the same through successive ages, but its inhabitants are continually changing<sup>15</sup>. The sun sets indeed every night, but it rises again in the morning, bright and fresh, while " man lies down, and rises not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep" Job 14:12.

+ In the sun we have a symbol of the rise and setting of our nature. There is one path for all; there is once cycle for all in life's journey. By birth we rise, and then we are drawn back again into our connatural place. And when we come to life's setting, our light too goes below the earth with the sense faculty which perceives light. What is of earth is completely resolves into its element, and so the cycle continues on and on in the same way<sup>15</sup>.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

c. The abundant toil man has about them.

*"All things are full of labor; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing" [8].*

Can we expect rest in a world where all things are thus full of labor?!

All talking, seeing, and hearing is useless toil, for curiosity will never be satisfied; man himself seems to be moving in vain rounds. It is impossible to put into words the futility of it all. It never brings real satisfaction to the eye or the ear of man [8].

At the beginning of this century many phsicologists used to say that many sexual problems occur because of abstinence. Now in North america youth are not in abstinence of any sexual relationship, and they are not satisfied. On ythe contrary many of them are homosexual, not because of their nature, but because the are not satisfied even when the sexual intercources were permitted by the society.

+ We arise each day to eat and drink: yet no one is filled so that he does not hunger and thirst after a short time. Daily we seek profit, and to greed there is set no limit. "The eye will not be satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing. He that loves silver will not be satisfied with silver. There is no limit to toil, and there is no profit in abundance<sup>16</sup>

St. Ambrose

d. Nothing new [9, 10].

*"The thing that has been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and {there is} no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it has been already of old time, which was before us" [9, 10].*

Many things seem to be new simply because the past is easily and quickly forgotten. The old ways reappear in new guises.

We boast of new fashion, new hypotheses, new methods, new expressions, which jostle out the old, and put them down. But this is all mistake. What is there in the kingdom of nature we may say, "This is new?"

Solomon explains the foolishness of men who are rejecting all that is old and are absorbed in all that is new. We hear about the Israelites who despised the manna, saying: "But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes" Num. 11:6. St. Luke also says, "For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing" Acts 17:21.

While men asks for what is new, their hearts and their inner corruptions are still the same; their desires and pursuits, and complaints, still the same. If we would be entertain with new things, we must acquaint ourselves with the things of God, get a new nature, as it is said:

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" 2 Cor. 5:17.

"And he has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord" Ps 40:3.

"And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new" Rev. 21:5.

+ And God being perfect becomes perfect man, and brings to perfection the newest of all new things, the only new thing under the Sun, through which the boundless might of God is manifested<sup>17</sup>  
Fr. John of Damascus

e. Former things are forgotten [11].

*"There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after" [11].*

What profit has a man? He gains nothing, not even a memory of his struggle. The world of nature is futile; human activity is also futile.

The one thing that is thought to have permanence is a family name. People live on in that endless remembering that is so much a part of their religious heritage. Qoheleth denies it<sup>18</sup>.

## **PURSUIT AFTER MAN'S KNOWLEDGE VAIN 1:12-15**

Qoheleth's first attempt to solve the riddle is by human knowledge and wisdom. Those with knowledge and wisdom are the observers, sometimes the natural scientists of their day. Qoheleth sees it all and concludes that it is all made up of crooked lines and leads nowhere - "a chase after the wind." All that work for nothing! He can only reach the opposite conclusion that the sages before him reached: "For in much wisdom there is much sorrow" 1:18. Disillusionment, not contentment, is the fruit of learning<sup>19</sup>.

If knowledge and wisdom are vanity and vexation, all other things in this world, being much inferior to them in dignity and worth, must needs be so too.

*"I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail has God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered" [12-15].*

God gave man the desire and the obligation to investigate all things, the wisdom that man has ought to be the guide.

As he speaks concerning knowledge and wisdom, Solomon declared that he was the king of Israel in Jerusalem [12], for the neighboring nations used to say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" Deut. 4:6. Jerusalem deserved to be called "the eye of the world"<sup>20</sup>.

In Solomon sought knowledge and wisdom more than anyone else did. His court in Jerusalem was a center of learning and rendezvous of learned men.

What did he mean by "*Vexation of spirit*"? Some translate it "striving after wind," or "feeding upon wind," i.e. to make a meal on food as unsubstantial as the wind. It refers to the aimlessness and futility of human activity, for one can never lay hold of real satisfaction. It vexed him to see many that had wisdom not use it, and many that had folly not strive against it. The minds and manners of men are crooked and perverse. Solomon thought with his wisdom and power together thoroughly to reform his kingdom, but he was disappointed. He found no lasting satisfaction, for the world was still full of problems that could not be solved. All the philosophy and politics in the world will not restore the corrupt nature of man. Human wisdom will never be able to change the course of things, since all things are ordained and cannot be different from what they are.

+ This is his stay in his perplexity, and this is your only gain from, life here below, to be guided through the disorder of the things which are seen and shaken, to the things which stand firm and are not moved<sup>21</sup>.

St. Gregory Nazianzen

Eccl 1: 13

+ We are to be like alert and armed soldiers, who immediately execute the orders given to them and perform them without that travail of mind which, according to the preacher, is given to the men of this world 'to be exercised therewith'.

St. Jerome

1. Letter 48:7.

+ We read in Scripture concerning the striving after temporal things, "All is vanity and presumption of spirit;" but presumption of spirit means audacity and pride: usually also the proud are said to have great spirits; and rightly, inasmuch as the wind also is called spirit. And hence it is written, "Fire, hail, snow, ice, spirit of tempest"<sup>22</sup>.

St. Augustine

+ A perverse one will not be able to be ornamented, and the impairment will not be able to be counted (1) ... It can also be understood thus: There is so great a wickedness in this world that it is really changed about and can scarcely return to its pristine state of good, nor can it anymore find it easy to receive again the order and perfection in which it was first created. Otherwise, integrity would be restored to everything through penance and only the devil would persist in his error ... Finally, so great is the number of seducers and of those whom they snatch away out of God's flock that such a computation were simply beyond comprehension<sup>23</sup>.

St. Jerome

## 5. PURSUIT AFTER MAN'S WISDOM VAIN 1:16-18

Qoheleth now seeks to gain greater insight by a study of wisdom's opposites - madness and folly. But this effort turns out to be just as frustrating as "a chase after wind." The greater the devotion to wisdom, the greater also the sense of frustration and defeat. The more we know the more we see of our own ignorance. He who does not care about human wisdom, will be better off.

*"I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this*

*also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow" [16-18].*

Not only does the search for life's meaning prove frustration and its goal unattainable, but it also brings mental and spiritual pain. There does not appear to be any consistent standard for life upon which one may base his conduct.

Humanistic wisdom - wisdom without God - leads to grief and sorrow. It is vain, therefore we should ask for the divine one.

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" James 3:17.

"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory" 2 Cor. 2:7.

+ The more I long for what is not here, do I not so much the more groan for it until it comes? do I not so much the more weep until it comes?...24.

St. Augustine

+ I said, I will be wise, says Solomon, but she (i.e. Wisdom) was far from me beyond what is: and, Verily, he that increase knowledge increase sorrow. For the joy of what we have discovered is no greater than the pain of what escapes us; a pain, I imagine, like that felt by those who are dragged, while yet thirsty, from the water, or are unable to retain what they think they hold, or are suddenly left in the dark by a flash of lightning<sup>25</sup>

St. Gregory Nazianzen

+ And by obtaining this knowledge, he has obtained also sorrow; but sorrow for straying away from the desire of reaching his own proper country, and the Creator of it, his own blessed God<sup>26</sup>.

St. Augustine

We do not hate knowledge but sin that we discover working in us and knowledge has no power to abolish.

+ It is evident, then, that the oldness of the letter, in the absence of the newness of the spirit, instead of freeing us from sin, rather makes us guilty by the knowledge of sin. Whence it is written in another part of Scripture, "He that increases knowledge, increases sorrow," -not that the law is itself evil, but because the commandment has its good in the demonstration of the letter, not in the assistance of the spirit; and if this commandment is kept from the fear of punishment and not from the love of righteousness, it is servilely kept, not freely, and therefore it is not kept at all<sup>27</sup>.

St. Augustine

St. Clement of Alexandria explains the Christian point of view concerning knowledge, human wisdom and philosophy.

+ But all, in my opinion, are illuminated by the dawn of Light. Let all, therefore, both Greeks and barbarians, who have aspired after the truth, \_\_\_ both those who possess not a little, and those who have any portion, \_\_\_ produce whatever they have of the word of truth. . .

And this also is the choice of the spirit, because in abundance of wisdom is abundance of knowledge." He who is conversant with all kinds of wisdom, will be preeminently a gnostic. Now it is written, "Abundance of the knowledge of wisdom will give life to him who is of it." And again, what is said is confirmed more clearly by this saying, "All things are in the sight of those who understand" \_\_\_ all things, both Hellenic and barbarian; but the one or the other is not all. "They are right to those who wish to receive understanding. Choose instruction, and not silver, and knowledge above tested gold, and prefer also sense to pure gold;" for wisdom is better than precious stones, and no precious thing is worth it"<sup>28</sup>.

St. Clement of Alexandria

1. *Henry and Scott: A Commentary upon the Holy bible, Eccl. 1.*
2. *Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 249.]*
3. *Hom. on Ephes., hom 12.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *On Ps. 4.*
6. *Homilies on Matthew, 76:5.*
7. *Commentary on the Song of Songs, hom. 4.*
8. *Flight from the World, 1:4 (Fathers of the Church).*
9. *Hom. on Timothy, hom 15.*
10. *In Matt. hom. 77 (PG58:700 B-D).*
11. *Sermons on New Testament Lessons, 11:11.*
12. *On admonition and Repentance, 7.*
13. *The Commentary on Ecclesiastes, homily 1, PG 44: 624 B - 625 D).*
14. *On Virginity, 4.*
15. *The Commentary on Ecclesiastes, homily 1, PG 44: 624 B - 625 D).*
16. *Death as a Good, 7:28. (Fathers of the Church)*
17. *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, 3:1.*
18. *The Collegeville Bible Commentary, p. 816.*
19. *The Collegeville Bible Commentary, p. 816.*
20. *Henry, Eccles., ch. 1.*
21. *Panegyric on His brother S Caesarius, 19.*
22. *Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, 1:1:3.*
23. *Commentary on Ecclesiastes.*
24. *On Ps. 39.*
25. *In Defense of his Flight to Pontus, 75.*
26. *On the Trinity, 4 Preface.*
27. *On the Spirit and the Letter, 26.*
28. *Stromata 1:13.*

Eccl 2: 1

+ "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity." But if all created things are good, as being the handiwork of a good Creator, how comes it that all things are vanity? If the earth is vanity, are the heavens vanity too? -- and the angels, the thrones, the dominations, the powers, and the rest of the virtues? No; if things which are good in themselves as being the handiwork of a good Creator are called vanity, it is because they are compared with things which are better still. For example, compared with a lamp, a lantern is good for nothing; compared with a star, a lamp does not shine at all; the brightest star pales before the moon; put the moon beside the sun, and it no longer looks bright; compare the sun with Christ, and it is darkness. "I am that I am," God says(Exd. 3:14); and if you compare all created things with Him they have no existence.

St. Jerome

1. Letter 48:14.

2:18-26 is devoted to human toil (see above on 1:3). Everything gained by toil is left behind at death. The only reward for gain is the exhaustion it produces (vs. 18-23). Yet some enjoyment is to be found in devoting attention and energy to what each moment brings. That enjoyment is from the hand of God. God has given the toil, and has given us the ability to see the meaninglessness of it.

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 250.]

Eccl 2

+ For wisdom and folly are widely separated, and they are as different from each other as day is from night. He, therefore, who makes choice of virtue, is like one who sees all things plainly, and looks upward, and who holds his ways in the time of clearest light. But he, on the other hand, who has involved himself in wickedness, is like a man who wanders helplessly about in a moonless night, as one who is blind, and deprived of the sight of things by his darkness. And when I considered the end of each of these models of life, I found there was no profit in the latter; and by setting myself to be the companion of the foolish, I saw that I should receive the wages of folly. For what advantage is there in those thoughts, or what profit is there in the multitude of words, where the streams of foolish speaking are flowing, as it were, from the fountain of folly? Moreover, there is nothing common to the wise man and to the fool, neither as regards the memory of men, nor as regards the recompense of God. And as to all the affairs of men, when they are yet apparently but beginning to be, the end at once surprises them. Yet the wise man is never partaker of the same end with the foolish. Then also did I hate all my life, that had been consumed in vanities, and which I had spent with a mind engrossed in earthly anxieties.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Eccl 2

+ But the good man who gets wisdom from God, gets also heavenly enjoyment; while, on the other hand, the evil man, smitten with ills divinely inflicted, and afflicted with the disease of lust, toils to amass much, and is quick to put him to shame who is honored by God in presence of the lord of all, proffering useless gifts, and making things deceitful and vain the pursuits of his own miserable soul.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

## CHAPTER TWO

### VANITY OF WORLDLY PLEASURES

In chapter one the author explains that even in human knowledge and wisdom there is no satisfaction. Now he declares that he had experienced the delights of senses and did not find true happiness and satisfaction. He also set his heart upon wealth and "it was vanity and vexation of spirit." He feels his heart was in need of freedom from both.

1. Pursuit after pleasure is vain 1-3.
2. Pursuit after riches is vain 4-11.
3. Pursuit after human wisdom is vain 12-19.
4. Pursuit after labor is vain 20-23.
5. Enjoy the ordinary God-given pleasures of life [24-26].

### **PURSUIT AFTER PLEASURE IS VAIN [1-3]**

Qoheleth attempted to find an answer in frantic pleasure. He turned to the carnal delights as a possible source of satisfaction. He examined the worth of the sensual pleasures of the table, symbolized by wine. These brought him pleasures for the moment, but no enduring satisfaction.

*"I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove you with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and behold, this also is vanity. (2) I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What does it?" [1,2].*

Solomon said in his own hearts: "Instead of discussing matters with philosophers and statesmen, try to laugh, eat, drink wine, cast away care and to be happy, as the foolish rich man says, "I will say to my soul, Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry" Luk. 12:19.

Here we notice the following:

1. He said to "laughter": "It is mad," for it cannot change his heart to true happiness. Inner joy is one thing and laughter is another. It is mad to concentrate on the appearance while inside sorrow and grief reign.

2. He calls it mad, for it incites him to be far from God, the true Joy. It is said, "They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ... therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of Your ways" Job 21:12,14.

3. Sin destroys the heart and cast away joy from it; laughter cannot restore heart, therefore the author says, "What does it?"  
In another place he says, "He sings songs to an heavy heart" Prov. 25:20.

4. Finding himself not happy in that which pleased his fancy, he resolved next to try that which would please the plate.

*"I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what {was} that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life". [1-3]*

5. He did not indulge in the use of wine without being concerned with wisdom. He wanted to find out whether such a pleasure provides a satisfying purpose of life. He desired to manage himself wisely in the use of his pleasures, so that he should not become their slave, and they should not do him any prejudice nor misfit him to be a competent judge of them. In fact those who give themselves to wine and at the same time acquaint their hearts with wisdom deceive themselves, for "wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" Prov. 20:1. They look like he who worship God and mammon at the same time.

#### **PURSUIT AFTER RICHES IS VAIN [4-11]**

The author provided himself with luxuries, buildings, slaves, silver, gold and peculiar treasure of kings. It is not the heady flower-children escapism in which the Greeks were tempted to indulge (see Wis. 2:1-9). This is the more substantial Jewish way of displaying power by banquets and sumptuous building projects - in short, becoming a patron of the arts. {1. The Collegeville Bible Commentary, p. 816.]

1. He gave himself much to building, both in the city and the country. We read of Solomon's buildings (1 Kings 9:15-19), and they were all great works.

*"I made me great works; I built me houses" [4].*

He started his reign by building the house of God, and then he built many buildings for himself (1 Kings 9:15-19). He was not like those who dwelt in their ceiled houses, and this house lied waste (Hag. 1:4). He also employed many poor men and needy to their advantages, but he was proud as he said, "I made me great works" [4].

2. He took to love a garden, which is to some as bewitching as building.

*"I planted me vineyards: (5) I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all {kind of} fruits" [4, 5].*

3. He laid out a great deal of money in water-works, ponds, and canals, not for sport and diversion, but for use, as he said, *"I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that brings forth trees" [6].*

4. When he proposed to himself to do great works he must employ many hands, and therefore procured servants and maidens. He says, *"I got {me} servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house" [7].*

5. Like his father he had great cattle, herds and flocks (1 Chron. 27:29, 31). *"also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me" [7].*

6. He grew very rich. *"I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the province" [8].*

It is said, "and the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as the sycamore trees that {are} in the vale, for abundance" 1 Kings 10:27. He was not covetous, but he used to give alms and as he said: "there is that scatters, and yet increases" Prov. 11:24.

7. He had all sorts of melody and music, vocal and instrumental. *"I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts" [8].* It fits the situation of Solomon, who had 300 concubines in addition to 700 wives (1 Kings 11:3).

8. He enjoyed, more than even any man did, a composition of rational and sensitive pleasures at the same time. In the midst of these entertainments his wisdom remained with him [9], yet his judgment and conscience gave no check to his pleasures, nor hindered him from extracting the very quintessence of the delights of sense [10].

*"So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. (10) And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor: and this was my portion of all my labor" [9, 10].*

9. We have, at length, the judgment he liberty gave of all this: " *Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all {was} vanity and vexation of spirit, and {there was} no profit under the sun*" [11].

2:6

+ For the man who has transcended this world with a pious mind is freed of all care and anxieties. There Ecclesiastes says "pools" with reason, for he sees that there is no abundance under the sun, but if anyone wishes to abound, let him abound in Christ.

St. Ambrose

1. Isaac, or the Soul, 4:25. (Fathers of the Church)

The phrase "peculiar treasure" (s"qulla) means basically "property" but is used generally for valuable property. Thus Israel was called God's peculiar people (Exod. 19:5), a people whom God has especially chosen and values.

### **PURSUIT AFTER HUMAN WISDOM IS VAIN [12-19]**

The author returns to the folly of trying to find satisfaction in merely human wisdom [1:16-18]. He makes a comparison between wisdom and folly. He admits that even secular wisdom is better than folly, for it has certain uses in that it keeps one from unnecessary suffering, but in the end it is no value, since the same fate overtakes the wise man and the fool. Both of them die and are forgotten.

*"And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what {can} the man {do} that comes after the king? {even} that which has been already done. (13) Then I saw that wisdom excels folly, as far as light excels darkness. (14) The wise man's eyes {are} in his head; but the fool walks in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happens to them all. (15) Then said I in my heart, As it happens to the fool, so it happens even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also {is} vanity. (16) For {there is} no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now {is} in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dies the wise {man}? as the fool. (17) Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun {is} grievous unto me: for all {is} vanity and vexation of spirit. (18) Yea, I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. (19) And who knows whether he shall be a wise {man} or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labor wherein I have labored, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This {is} also vanity" [12-19].*

"The wise man has his eyes in his head" [14]. Eyes here means understanding. The wise man can at least see and understand what lies ahead of him, and can choose the path that will give him the most happiness.

+ "The wise man has his eyes in his head." In what head? Every man, even the blockhead and the fool, has his bodily eyes in his bodily head. But "the wise man has his eyes" (those of which I have already spoken, which are enlightened by the Lord's commandment) "in his head," in Christ, since "Christ is the head of a man," the apostle says. The thinking faculty is in Christ.

Origen

1. Dialogue with Hraclides, 160-2.

2:13

+ And what is the use of understanding, you wilt say, to the poor man? As might be expected you art ignorant; for neither does the blind man know what is the advantage of light. Listen to Solomon, saying, "As far as light excel darkness, so the wisdom excel folly."

But how shall we instruct him that is in darkness? For the love of money is darkness, permitting nothing that is to appear as it is, but otherwise, For much as one in darkness, though he should see a golden vessel, though a precious stone, though purple garments, supposes them to be nothing, for he sees not their beauty; so also he that is in covetousness, knows not as he ought the beauty of those things that are worthy of our care.

St. John Chrysostom

1. Homilies on Matthew, 83:3.

2:14

+ Moreover, the heart is "on the top", because "the eyes of a wise man are in his head."

St. Ambrose

1. The Prayer of Job and David, 4:7:28. (Fathers of the Church).

2:16

+ Wait for the Lord. You will not be waiting for one who can deceive or be deceived, nor for one who will be unable to find the wherewithal to give. He who has promised is the Almighty, He who has promised is faithful, He who has promised is true. Wait for the Lord, do manfully. Do not yield to exhaustion; do not be among those of whom we are told: Woe to them that have lost patience!

St. Augustine

1. On Ps. 26. (ACW).

Eccl. 2: 16

+ But the real troubles of the wicked ought to be endured for the society of the good. The Scripture says to him: "Woe that have lost patience."

St. Augustine

1. On Ps. 100.

### **PURSUIT AFTER LABOR IS VAIN [20-23]**

He was disgusted not only with life, but also with human toil, for he saw that it is valueless. The obvious fact that the fruits of man's hard work will fall into the lap of another, and that this other may even be fool and careless, or perhaps to one who had done nothing to deserve them. What he saw when he turned caused him to despair of all the labor which he had done, for he felt that the road he had traveled had not been worth the effort and discomfort it required.

*"Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labor which I took under the sun. (21) For there is a man whose labor {is} in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that has not labored therein shall he leave it {for} his portion. This also {is} vanity and a great evil. (22) For what has man of all his labor, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he has labor under the sun? (23) For all his days {are} sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart takes not rest in the night. This is also vanity" [21-23].*

### **PRACTICAL ADVICE: ENJOY THE ORDINARY GOD-GIVEN PLEASURES OF LIFE [24-26]**

The author adjusts his mind to the realities of life and concludes that the best response man can give is to accept the circumstances of existences and to enjoy life while he can, looking to every thing, even eating and drinking as a divine gift, without forgetting to work. This statement is inspired by Ecclesiastes' belief that God Himself has it (life) ordained and planned this way. [1. Nelson: A New Catholic Comm., p. 515.] Only in God does life have meaning and true pleasure. Without Him nothing satisfies, but with Him we find satisfaction and enjoyment. True pleasure comes only when we acknowledge and revere God [12:13].

*"There is nothing better for a man, {than} that he should eat and drink, and {that} he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it {was} from the hand of God. (25) For who can eat, or who else can hasten {hereunto}, more than I? (26) For {God} gives to a man that {is} good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he gives travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to {him that is} good before God. This also {is} vanity and vexation of spirit" [24-26].*

It was not exactly escapism which Qoheleth embraced, but thankfulness. [1. The Collegeville Bible Commentary, p. 816.]

+ For when he says in another book, which is called Ecclesiastes, "There is no good for a man, except that he should eat and drink," what can he be more credibly understood to say, than what belongs to the participation of this table which the Mediator of the New Testament Himself, the Priest after the order of Melchizedek, furnishes with His own body and blood?

St. Augustine

1. City of God 17:20.

Eccl 3: 5

+ Now that out of the hard stones of the Gentiles God has raised up children unto Abraham, they begin to be "holy stones rolling upon the earth." (Zech. ix. 16, LXX)

St. Jerome

1. Letter 22:19.

Eccl 3: 1, 2

+ We brought forth young under the law with Moses, let us die under the Gospel with Christ. We planted in marriage, let us by chastity pluck up that which was planted. "A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing: a time of love, a time to hate: a time for war, and a time for peace." And at the same time he warns us not to prefer the law to the Gospel; nor to think that virgin purity is to be placed on a level with marriage: "Better," he says, "is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof."

St. Jerome

1. Against Jovinianus, 1:29.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A TIME FOR EVERYTHING

The Ecclesiastes having shown the vanity of sensual pleasures, riches, human wisdom and toil he advises us to be cheerfully content ourselves with, and make use of, what God has given us, by showing the following:

1. The mutability of all human affairs 1-10.
2. The immutability of the divine counsels 11-15.
3. The vanity of worldly honor and power 16-22.
  - a. The proud oppressors will be judged [17]
  - b. They are not better than the brutes [18-22].

#### THE MUTABILITY OF ALL HUMAN AFFAIRS 1-10

There is a season and a time for every one of God's purposes to take place, and for us to perform our duties, and prepare for future. By the divine law, all aspects of life, including human activity, is part of a determined cycle. Although man longs for something more, he can do nothing about it. He must be content to get what little happiness he can while engaging in this endless round of events. The history of the world is a cycle of events, ordained by God.

Every thing in nature and in human life is under a set scheme. There is a season, or an appointed period, and a time (a predetermined occurrence) for all that takes place under the sun. Seeming chance events are all part of a huge plan.

*"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" [1].*

+ It is not the continual remembrance of God that I would hinder, but only the talking about God; nor even that as in itself wrong, but only when unreasonable; nor all teaching, but only want of moderation. As of even honey, repletion and satiety, though it be of honey, produce vomiting; and, as Solomon says and I think, there is a time for everything, and that which is good ceases to be good if it be not done in a good way; just as a flower is quite out of season in winter, and just as a man's dress does not become a woman, nor a woman's a man; and as geometry is out of place in mourning, or tears at a carouse all shall we in this instance alone disregard the proper time, in a matter in which most of all due season should be respected? Surely not, my friends and brethren.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

1. The Theological Orations, 1:5.

+ So that it is not the continual remembrance of God that I would hinder, but only the talking about God; nor even that as in itself wrong, but only when unseasonable; nor all teaching, but only want of moderation. As of even honey repletion and satiety, though it be of honey, produce vomiting; and, as Solomon says and i think, there is a time for every thing, and that which is good ceases to be good if it be

not done in a good way; just as a flower is quite out of season in winter, and just as a man's dress does not become a woman, nor a woman's a man; and as geometry is out of place in mourning, or tears at a carousal; shall we in this instance alone disregard the proper time, in a matter in which most of all due season should be respected?

St. Gregory Nazianzen

1. A preliminary course against Eunomians, 5.

+ These are the two causes of my submission and tractability. Nor is it, perchance, unreasonable that my arguments should yield and submit to them both, for there is a time to be conquered, as I also think there is for every purpose, and it is better to be honorably overcome than to win a dangerous and lawless victory.

St. Gregory Nazianzen

1. In Defence of his Flight to Pontus, 103.

+ Such were his surroundings when he approved the wise counsel of Solomon that there is a time to every purpose: so he hid himself for a while, escaping during the time of war, to show himself when the time of peace came, as it did soon afterwards.

St. Gregory Nazianzen

1. On the Great Athanasius, 21.

a. *"A time to be born, and a time to die"* [2].

Although there is a time to die, we must take care even of our body. Our Lord asked His disciples to escape when they are persecuted, not because of fear, but for their own peace. The Arians accused St. Athanasius because of his flight when they attempted to kill him. In his defence he said:

+ Wherefore the Patriarch Isaac said to his son Esau, "Behold, I am old, and I know not the day of my death." Our Lord therefore, although as God, and the Word of the Father, He both knew the time measured out by Him to all, and was conscious of the time for suffering, which He Himself had appointed also to His own body; yet since He was made man for our sakes, He hid Himself when He was sought after before that time came, as we do; when He was persecuted, He fled; and avoiding the designs of His enemies He passed by, and "so went through the midst of them"

St. Athanasius

1. Defence of his Flight, 15.

+ And at the self-same moment ye were both dying and being born; and that Water of salvation was at once your grave and your mother. And what Solomon spoke of others will suit you also; for he said, in that case, There is a time to bear and a time to die; but to you, in the reverse order, there was a time to die and a time to be born; and one and the same time effected both of these, and your birth went hand in hand with your death.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

1. Cat. Lect. 20:4.

b. *"A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted"* [2].

c. *"A time to kill, and a time to heal"* [3].

d. *"A time to break down, and a time to build up"* [3].

e. *"A time to weep, and a time to laugh"* [4].

f. *"A time to mourn, and a time to dance"* [4].

Dancing is put as a general expression for joy and gladness. "You have turned my mourning into dancing" Ps. 30:11.

g. *"A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together"* [5].

To cast away stones and to gather them together has been taken to refer either to the pulling down of an old building and replacing it by a new one, or to ruining fields by scattering stones on them (2 Kings 3:19, 25) and the gathering of stones to make fields fit for cultivation. Perhaps it refers to the rearing of memorials of covenants between parties, and of remarkable events. Such were the pillars erected by Jacob (Gen. 28:18; 31:52). Also the heaps of stones over Achan and Absalom. There is a time when covenants are made, and when they are broken; when trophies of victory are raised and scattered; a time to cast away.

According to the Jewish interpretation this is a metaphor for the marriage act.

h. *"A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing"* [5].

+ How explain the great merit and high honor that faithful and holy virginity has in God's eyes except that in this time to refrain from embracing, when there is a vast crowd from all nations to fill up the number of the saints, the urge to experience base pleasure of the flesh does not demand what is not required for the provision of offspring?

St. Augustine

1. The Literal meaning of Genesis, 7:12. (ACW)

+ The former was the time to embrace, the latter to refrain from embracing.

St. Augustine

1. On Marriage and Concupiscence, 14.

+ For what Christian men of our time being free from the marriage bond, having power to contain from all sexual intercourse, seeing it to be now "a time," as it is written, "not of embracing, but of abstaining from embrace," would not choose rather to keep virginal or widowed continence, than (now that there is no obligation from duty to human society) to endure tribulation of the flesh, without which marriages cannot be (to pass over in silence other things from which the Apostle spares.)

St. Augustine

1. On the good of marriage, 15.

i. *"A time to get, and a time to lose"* [6].

j. *"A time to keep, and a time to cast away"* [6].

Qoheleth refers to the search after riches and honor, such possessions come and go.

k. *"A time to rend, and a time to sew"* [7]

This is a reference to the practice of rending one's clothes as a sign of mourning, as it is said, "And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes" Gen. 37:29; and "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshiped" Job 1:20.

The time to sew is when one's grief has subsided.

+ This I think is the meaning of the saying: there is a time to rend, and a time to sew (Eccles. 3:7), that is, that we should break away from all that we have been evilly attached to and cleave to that which it is good to adhere to.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

1. The Commentary on Ecclesiastes, sermon 7, PG 44: 724B - 732D).

l. *"A time to keep silence, and a time to speak"* [7].

This would be parallel with the first part of the verse and would suggest that a time to keep silence refers to a time of deep emotion as is said, "Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spoke, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace" Lev. 10:3.

+ If, then, we are to give account for an idle word, let us take care that we do not have to give it also for an idle silence. For there is also an active silence, such as Susanne's was, who did more by keeping silence than if she had spoken. For in keeping silence before men she spoke to God, and found no greater proof of her chastity than silence. Her conscience spoke where no word was heard, and she sought no judgment for herself at the hands of men, for she had the witness of the Lord. She therefore desired to be acquitted by Him, Who she knew could not be deceived in any way. Even, the Lord Himself in the Gospel worked out in silence the salvation of men. David rightly therefore enjoined on himself not constant silence, but watchfulness.

St. Ambrose

1. Duties of the Clergy, 1:3:9.

+ Ecclesiastes first mentions the time to keep silence, and after that he allows a time to speak (Eccles.3:7). When, and on what matters, is it better to keep silence? Those who are concerned with morals might say that most often silence is more becoming than speech; and similarly Paul distinguishes the proper times for speech and for silence, sometimes prescribing silence, at other times commanding speech. Let no evil speech proceed from your mouth (Eph.4:29) is his law of silence. But if speech is good, to the edification of the faith, that it may administer grace to the hearers (Eph.4:29), then it is the time to speak. Let women keep silence in the churches (1 Cor.14:34), once again, gives us the time to keep silence. But if they would learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home (1 Cor.14:35), again shows us the proper time for speech. Lie not one to another (Col.3:9) suggests the proper time for silence, and speak ye the truth every man with his neighbor (Eph.4:25) is, once again, permission to speak.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

1. The Commentary on Ecclesiastes, sermon 7, PG 44: 724B - 732D).

+ Thus it is, then, that when reason touches on those things which are beyond it, that is the time to deep silence [7]; rather it keeps the wonder of that ineffable power within the secret of our conscience, fully aware that great men have spoken not of God but rather of his works, saying: Who shall declare the powers of the Lord? (Ps.105:2) and I will relate all thy wonders (Ps.9:2), and Generation and generation shall praise thy works (Ps.144:4).

St. Gregory of Nyssa

1. The Commentary on Ecclesiastes, sermon 7, PG 44: 724B - 732D).

+ Thus in speaking of God, when there is question of His essence, then is the time to keep silence.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

1. The Commentary on Ecclesiastes, sermon 7, PG 44: 724B - 732D).

+ There is, however, a time to speak of those things by which we can in our lives make progress in virtue.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

1. The Commentary on Ecclesiastes, sermon 7, PG 44: 724B - 732D).

m. "A time to love, and a time to hate" [8].

n. "A time of war, and a time of peace" [8].

These events affect not only the relationship between individuals, but also between nations.

" What profit has he that works in that wherein he labors? I have seen the travail, which God has given to the sons of men to be exercised in it" [9-10].

Man is unable to comprehend or change God's order.

## THE IMMUTABILITY OF THE DIVINE COUNCILS 11-15

The tradition of the sages said that there is an appropriate time for all things. Nothing happens haphazardly or outside its time. But we do not know what or why the appropriate time is. [1. The Collegeville Bible Commentary, p. 817.]

*"He has made everything beautiful in his time: also he has set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end" [11].*

He asserts that everything is beautiful in its own time, and that God has made it so. Although the word "beautiful" is generally used in the Old Testament with the sense of physical beauty, it appears that this is an allusion to such a concept as that in Gen. 1:31 regarding the "appropriateness" of all creation. [1. The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Ecc. 3:1-4:16.] It denotes fittingness of arrangement.

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 251.]

Everything is exactly as God wants it. He has ordered all of life's occurrences according to His will. He has also given men minds that look beyond daily occurrences to the total sweep of life. Yet the human mind has been limited, so that no man can find out the work that God makes; he can never solve all the seeming paradoxes of life. God has given man reasoning power, but He has not given him to unravel all mysteries.

This verse is the most controversial sentence in the book. The crucial word "in eternity." Some have tried to defend the King James translation "world." Others have suggested various emendations—for example, "toil," "mystery," "forgetfulness."

According to Volgate God has handed over "the world" (olam) to men, that is to say, the total of all events and of God's works has been placed in man's mind with the result that it is too great a task to grasp. It is possible and attractive to translate "olam" by "eternity," as in Septuagint. In this case the meaning is that man's longing cannot be restricted and continues in unending tension. More recently "olam" has been referred to Ugaritic root "glm" with the meaning of "becoming dark." Although everything has been made good, beautiful, appropriate, man cannot grasp it, since darkness is set in his mind. This last view is most in keeping with Qoheleth's conception. [Nelson: A New Catholic Commentary..., p. 515.]

*"I know that there is no good in them, but for {a man} to rejoice, and to do good in his life. (13) And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, {it} is the gift of God. (14) I know that, whatsoever God does, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God does {it}, that {men} should fear before him. (15) That which has been is now; and that which is to be has already been; and God requires that which is past" [11-15].*

Believers find meaning in life when they cheerfully accept it from the hand of God. They trust God who alone can put things back in their proper place. Qoheleth cannot be accused of any materialistic or hedonistic view of life, since he considers the means of enjoyment and the ability to enjoy as God's gifts.

The thought of an unchanging world [14] is not to be equated with a pessimistic outlook on life, but suggests God's permanence and is intended to lead man to humility and fear of God. [Nelson: A New Catholic Commentary..., p. 516.]

Human wisdom can neither add nor subtract anything from the totality of what God has ordained (verse 14).

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 251.]

Not only are all things determined by God, but all things are recurrent. God restores "what have been driven away", i.e. that which is past.

#### **THE VANITY OF WORLDLY HONOR AND POWER 16-22**

Miscarriage of justice in life should be rectified in some future life

##### **a. The proud oppressors will be judged [16, 17]**

In the courts of law, where one might expect the proper administration of justice, there is, instead, wickedness and iniquity. The solution to this problem is that God will someday right the wrongs which have been committed, for there is a time which He has appointed for all things.

*"And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there. I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for {there is} a time there for every purpose and for every work" [16, 17].*

Corruption prevails at the very center of the judicial administration, but Eccl believes in God's just judgment. The text, however, does not specify whether it is in this life or after death. This belief in God's eventual judgment, however, is not very consoling, for in a way men are similar to beasts.

##### **b. They are not better than the brutes [18-22]**

Not only the wicked will be judged in the future by the Just God, but even in this life they might see that they themselves are beasts. They are alike in the shortness of their life. Both have the same life breath (ruah), but all, men and animals, return to dust (cf. Gen. 3:19). Qoheleth is not thinking here of Sheol, but simply of the common sepulcher.

*"I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. (19) For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; even one thing befalls them: as the one dies, so dies the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man has no preeminence above a beast: for all {is} vanity. (20) All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again" [18-20].*

Breathing is the sign of life, but neither man nor animal have control over their life breath which comes to them from elsewhere. Where does this life-breath go at the moment of death? The life-breath of man goes upward and that of the beast goes downward, some say. "But who knows?" asks Qoheleth. Later (12:7) he affirms that the life-breath returns to its source. Here he wishes only to emphasize the common fate of man and animal: they end in death.

*"Who knows the spirit of man that goes upward, and the spirit of the beast that goes downward to the earth? (22) Wherefore I perceive that {there is} nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that {is} his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?" [18-22].*

Human life is no different from that of the beasts in its meaningless movement toward death (3:18-21). Further, what takes place in it makes death desirable (4:1-3). These observations are contrary both to the earlier Israelite conviction that history consists of moments which reveal the righteousness of God and to the later emphasis on individual rewards and punishments.

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 252.]

The practical conclusion of Eccl's thought: Since man cannot return to life after he has died, let him enjoy to the full all the details of his present life-this is his privilege.

3:18, 17

None therefore of these things does it lay down as always good, but only when any of them are fittingly done and at the right times, so that these very things which at one time, when done at the right moment, turn out well, if they are ventured on at a wrong or unsuitable time, are found to be useless or harmful; only excepting those things which are in their own nature good or bad, and which cannot ever be made the opposite, as e.g. justice, prudence, fortitude, temperance and the rest of the virtues, or on the other hand, those faults, the description of which cannot possibly be altered or fall under the other head.

Abbot Theonas

1. Cassian, Conf., 21:13.

3:22, 23

+ Do not try to understand things that are too difficult for you, that is to say, Do not break the bones of Scripture, for you have no need [to see with your eyes] those things that are hidden.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

1. Life Of Moses, 111.

Eccl 4: 9

+ I who am always forward to seek intimate relations with the good and even to thrust myself upon their affection. "Two," we read, "are better than one .... for if they fall, they one will lift up his fellow.....

St. Jerome

1. Letter 76:1.

Eccl 4: 12

+ Charity is the mother of all virtues, and the apostle's words about faith hope and charity are like that three fold cord which is not quickly broken. We believe, we hope, and through our faith and hope we are joined together in the bond of charity.

St. Jerome

1. Letter 82:11.

4:8

+ But if not even the whole earth is equal in value to the heacens, then he who has given up a few acres leaves as it were nothing; and even if he have given up a house or much gold he ought not to boast nor be low-spirited. Further, we should consider that even if we do not relinquish them for virtue's sake, still afterwards when we die we shall leave them berhind-very often, as the Preacher saith, to those to whom we do not wish. Why then should we not give them up for virtue's sake, that we may inherit even a kingdom?

St. Athanasius

1. Life of Anthony, 17.

Eccl. 4: 9

+ Therefore, since most embrace virginity while still young and unformed in understanding, this before anything else should be their employment, to search out a fitting guide and master of this way, lest, in their present ignorance, they should wander from the direct route, and strike out new pass of their own in trackless wilds. "Two are better than one," says the Preacher; but a single one is easily vanquished by the foe who infests the pass which leads to God; and verily "woe to him that is alone when he falls, for he has not another to help him up."

St. Gregory of Nyssa

1. On Virginity, 23.

ccl 4

+ And it became clear to me also how great is the envy which follows a man from his neighbors, like a sting of a wicked spirit; and I saw that he who receives it, and takes it as it were into his breast, has nothing else but to eat his own heart, and tear it, and consume both soul and body; finding inconsolable vexation in the good fortune of others.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Eccl 4

+ He who is left entirely alone, having neither brother nor son, but prospered with large possessions, lives on in the spirit of insatiable avarice, and refuses to give himself in any way whatever to goodness.

And the greatest of all calamities to a man in evil fortune is the want of a friend to help and cheer him. And those who live together both double the good fortune that befalls them, and lessen the pressure of the storm of disagreeable events; so that in the day they are distinguished for their rank confidence in each other, and in the night they appear notable for their cheerfulness. But who leads a solitary life passes a species of existence full of terror to himself; not perceiving that if one should fall upon men welded closely together, he adopts a rash and perilous course, and that it is not easy to snap the threefold cord.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

eccl 4

+ But in exercising the preacher's office, keep ""thou""this before your eyes, that your own life be rightly directed, and that ""you"" pray in behalf of the foolish, that they may get understanding, and know how to shun the doings of the wicked.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### OPPRESSION AND FRIENDSHIP

Qoheleth or Solomon touched on this theme "Oppression" in chapter 3 verse 13. He states that to find life futility is sad enough, but to taste its cruelty is bitter beyond words. He had a large soul (1 Kings 4:29), therefore in dealing the topic of "oppression," especially that occurred by those who are rich and have power, he was very tender concern the miserable and the afflicted.

1. Man's inhumanity to man 1-3.
2. Foolishness of searching after rest 4-6.
3. Foolishness of the unjust 7-8.
4. The remedy: mutual assistance 9-12.
5. Foolishness of searching after worldly glory 13-16.

#### MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN [1-3]

Qoheleth states that oppression characterizes all human activity [1]. The oppressed are helpless and their woes pierce his very heart. Reacting to this scene of injustice and inhumanity Eccl declares the one alive less fortunate than the one dead and praises the lot of him who has never been.

*"So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of {such as were} oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors {there was} power; but they had no comforter. (2) Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. (3) Yea, better {is he} than both they, which has not yet been, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun" [1-3].*

+ And elsewhere the same Ecclesiastes affirmed that the child born dead was better off than the man of great age, because he did not see the evils that take place in this world, did not come into this darkness, nor walk in the vanity of the world, and so he who did not come into this life will have rest rather than he who came into it. Really, what good is there for a man in this life? He lives in darkness and cannot be satisfied in his desires. And if he is sated with riches, he loses the enjoyment of his rest, because he is forced to guard the possessions he has acquired through his wretched greed. Thus he possesses them in greater wretchedness, seeing that they can do him no good. For what is more wretched than to be tormented with guarding them and derive no advantage from their abundance?

St. Ambrose

1. Death as a Good, 2:4. (Fathers of the Church)  
4:2

+ Who could more justifiably be praised for his death than he who of his own free choice chooses to die for the sake of religion?

Origen

1. Exhortation to Martyrdom, 22.

## FOOLISHNESS OF SEEKING REST

Because of injustice some prefer to be lazy and enjoy rest. Qoheleth asks believers to be moderate, and not to go to extremes. He declares that although competition which is the motive of every endeavor and toil is vain and futility, man is compelled to work, for idleness proves the ruin of one's welfare and health.

*"Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbor. This {is} also vanity and vexation of spirit" [4].*

Labor and all achievements are vain unless done with God's blessing.

*"The fool folds his hands together, and eats his own flesh" [5].*

"The foolish... eats his own flesh" [5]. This is a metaphorical expression implying starvation (cf. Amos 4:6). The person who does not work uses up all his substance until he has nothing left but his own person upon which to feed.

*Better {is} an handful {with} quietness, than both the hands full {with} travail and vexation of spirit" [6].*

A man should not go to extremes. Work brings some reward [2:10, 24], but too much work, can destroy this good. It is better to have a handful of earnings when they are gained with a restful mind, than to procure large gains by worry and vexing toil.

St. Paul says the last word on this subject. "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, {therewith} to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me" Phil. 4:11-13.

4:6

+ And therefore it is better for us with unbroken continuance to aim at this very slender profit in the desert, from which no secular cares, no worldly distractions, no pride of vainglory and vanity can detract, and which the pressure of no daily wants can lessen (for "a small thing that the righteous has is better than great riches of the ungodly" rather than to pursue those larger profits which even if they are procured by the most valuable conversion of many, are yet absorbed by the claims of secular life and the daily leakage of distractions. For, as Solomon says, "better is a single handful with rest than both hands full with labor and vexation of mind." Hag 1:6.

Abbot Abraham

1. Cassian, Conf. 24:13

## FOOLISHNESS OF THE UNJUST

Loving wealth often makes a man a miser, so that he withdraws from the company of others, sacrificing all to accumulate wealth. This then deprives him of one of the few joys that life can offer.

*"Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. (8) There is one {alone}, and {there is} not a second; yea, he has neither child nor brother: yet {is there} no end of all his labor; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither {says he}, For whom do I labor, and bereave my soul of good? This {is} also vanity, yea, it {is} a sore travail" [7-8].*

## THE REMEDY: MUTUAL ASSISTANCE

In contrast with the short-comings and dangers of a self-centered life, Qoheleth praises the comfort and security of companionship and friendship.

*"Two {are} better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. (10) For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him {that is} alone when he falls; for {he has} not another to help him up" [9, 10].*

A Jewish proverb from the Talmud declares, "Either companionship or death." [1. Talmud: Tannith 23a.]

*"Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm {alone}? (12) And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken" [11-12].*

The reference is probably to two travelers who sleep together for mutual warmth and comfort, especially in the winter season. Some apply this saying to the poor who have only one mantle which is also their only covering at night (cf. Exod. 22:26ff.)

The threefold cord refers to the advantage of companionship, and means that if fellowship with two is good, then fellowship with three is better still. A cord with three strands will stand greater strain than one with only two.

Qohelet is citing a popular saying that teamwork is better than working alone [9]. He continues in verse 11 that marriage is better than being single. Then he laughs it to scorn by saying that there is nothing more in it than that a team makes more money and that a married partner is a good bed-warmer. [1. The Collegeville Bible Commentary, p. 817.]

## **FOOLISHNESS OF SEEKING WORLDLY GLORY**

Those who seek popularity as their chief goal will find that it brings no real satisfaction, for it is dependent on the fickleness of the people, and thus is insecure.

*"Better {is} a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished. (14) For out of prison he comes to reign; whereas also {he that is} born in his kingdom becomes poor. (15) I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead. (16) {There is} no end of all the people, {even} of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also {is} vanity and vexation of spirit" [13-16].*

Advancement without God is another example of the futile of secularism. The king who himself was once poor, who arose out of prison to the throne, who caused the downfall of another, did not learn the chief lesson of his struggle - popular favor is uncertain and unpredictable. The prison here is probably his mother's womb, from which the king issues without possessions (cf. 5:14).

4:14

+ "From the house of the prisoners he will go forth to be a king." Thus I am persuaded to die for the truth, this I readily despise what is called death. Bring wild beasts, bring crosses, bring fire, bring tortures. I know that as soon as I die, I come forth from the body, I come forth from the body, I rest with Christ.

Origen

1. Dialogue with Hraclides, 166.

5:7

+ Because of this vice there is "not a just man upon earth that do good and sin not;" because of this vice, "in God's sight shall no man living be justified." On account of this vice, "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." On account of this also, whatever progress we may have made, we must, "Forgive us our debts," although all debts in word, deed, and thought were washed away in baptism. He, then, who sees aright, sees whence, and when, and where he must hope for that perfection to which nothing can be added.

St. Augustine

1. Letter 167:15.

5:1-7 indicates that the author takes the Israelite worshipping community for granted. However, he holds that what religion provides deserves no more enthusiasm or confidence than anything else under the sun. Religion is the means by which human beings acknowledge the reality of the God of eternity. But its word here under the sun is not more final than the word describing the vanity of life.

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 252.]

Four pieces of advice are given:

(1) Because God is so far above the human sphere, religion should not be attended by the busy activity that takes it too seriously (verse 1).

(2) Because there is no possibility of direct correspondence between our words and the reality of God, not too many words should be uttered in prayer (verses 2-3).

(3) Because of the realism the author always values, one must not be rash in making sacred vows (verses 4-5).

(4) In no event should one put oneself in the position of having to make excuses before God's representative (verses 6-7). Messenger probably refers to a priest.

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 253.]

5:10-6:12. Maxims on the Possibility of Enjoying Life. The first half of the book ends with a series of proverbs on paths to enjoyment. Some are brief, some more extended. The first four of these (5:10,11,12,13-17) have to do with wealth and goods. They are negative.

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 253.]

5:18-20 is positive. The author insists that the only enjoyment there is must be found in taking life honestly as it comes—not asking for more and not investing a given time with more significance than it has. The ability to do this is the gift of God (verse 19). Again, the author does not advocate a sheer hedonism. The point is that enjoyment of life comes, not by what one can attain, but by a power over which one has no control.

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 253.]

Eccl. 3: 1

+ "To everything there is its season, and a time for everything under heaven," a time to gather the goodly pearls, and a time after their gathering to find the one precious pearl, when it is fitting for a man to go away and sell all that he has in order that he may buy that pearl. For as every man who is going to be wise in the words of truth must first be taught the rudiments, and further pass through the elementary instruction, and appreciate it highly but not abide in it, as one who, having honoured it at the beginning but passed over towards perfection, is grateful for the introduction because it was useful at the first; so the perfect apprehension of the law and the prophets is an elementary discipline for the perfect apprehension of the Gospel, and all the meaning in the words and deeds of Christ.

Origen

1. Comm. on St. Matthew, book 2, 10.

Eccl. 5: 5

+ He shows, I think, by the relation of these elements to each other, or rather by their distance, how far the divine nature is above the speculations of human reason. For that nature which transcends all intelligence is

as high above earthly calculation as the stars are above the touch of our fingers; or rather, many times more than that.

Knowing, then, how widely the Divine nature differs from our own, let us quietly remain within our proper limits. For it is both safer and more reverent to believe the majesty of God to be greater than we can understand, than, after circumscribing His glory by our misconceptions, to suppose there is nothing beyond our conception of it.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

1. Answer to Eunomius' second Book.

Eccl 5

+ For as the multitude of dreams is vain, so also the multitude of words. But the fear of God is man's salvation, though it is rarely found.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

+ And it is a great matter also not to be engrossed by such anxieties: for the poor man, even should he be a slave, and unable to fill his belly plentifully, enjoys at least the kind refreshment of sleep; but the lust of riches is attended by sleepless nights and anxieties of mind. and what could there be then more absurd, than with much anxiety and trouble to amass wealth, and keep it with jealous care, if all the while one is but maintaining the occasion of countless evils to himself?

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Eccl 5

+ For it is the gift of God, that a man should be able to reap with gladness of mind the fruits of his labors, receiving thus possessions bestowed by God, and not acquired by force. For neither is such a man afflicted with troubles, nor is he for the most part the slave of evil thoughts; but he measures out his life by good deeds, being of good heart in all things, and rejoicing in the gift of God.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FEAR OF GOD

#### AND

### THE VANITY OF RICHES

In the previous chapter Qoheleth speaks concerning oppression, asking men to be care of advancing spiritual and kindly friendship instead of the inhuman and futile behavior. To attain this we have to know how we worship God in awe and to acknowledge the vanity of riches, for hypocrisy in worship and covetousness are the source of inhuman behavior.

1. Worship and fear of God 1-7.
2. Riches are vain 8-17.
3. Moderate enjoyment of life 18-20.

### WORSHIP AND FEAR OF GOD [1-7]

Here are various words of advice on proper worship. Qoheleth recommends caution and brevity in one's prayers [1-3], and alacrity in the payment of vows [4-6].

#### a. Prayers:

*"Keep your foot when you go to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil" [1].*

This is one of references to temple worship. It is respectful of God and scornful of the hypocrisy that Qoheleth observed. {The Collegeville Bible Commentary, p. 817.]

*"Keep your foot."* Make sure you know what you are doing when you go to the house of God.

In the phrase *be more ready to hear*, the author is not speaking of coming to the Temple to listen to the exposition of the Law, but rather he is cautioning against approaching the worship of God in the wrong way. The word "hear" often has the sense of "obey" in the Old Testament. The contrast is between those who come to God in obedience, that is, out of a background of ethical and moral conduct (cf. Ps. 119: 101), and those who are **fools**, that is, those who worship with unrepentant hearts. Obedience is better than offering sacrifices (2 Sam. 15:22). The sacrifice of fools is here declared worthless, since they go through the motions of religious observance while rejecting interior submission to God's commandments.

*"Be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven, and you upon earth: therefore let your words be few. (3) For a dream comes through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words" [2-3].*

*"Be not rash with your mouth."* The emphasis is on conscientiousness in prayers. The "vain repetitions" (Matt. 6: 7) of many do not accomplish as much as the few words of those who are sincere.

+ Listen to the counsel of Ecclesiastes: Do not utter a word before God. For God, he says, is in heaven, and thou upon earth [1]. And he shows, I think, especially by the distance that separates heaven and earth, despite their mutual affinity, how far the divine nature surpasses the compass of man's thought. For as much as the stars are beyond the grasp of the fingers, so much and many times more does that nature which is above all human minds transcend our earthly thoughts.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

1. Against Eunomius, lib. 12, PG 45:940A - 941D.

*"A dream comes through the multitude of business" [3].* The author quotes a proverb in support of his previous point. Just as a night of dreams is the result of too much preoccupation with one's business, so nonsensical speech is the result of too many words at worship.

#### b. Vows

*"When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for {he has} no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. (5) Better {is it} that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay. (6) Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it {was} an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God" [4-7].*

In Scripture the fool is not one who cannot learn, but one who refuses to learn, as is said, "Wisdom cries without; she utters her voice in the streets: She cries in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she utters her words, saying, How long, you simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?" Prov. 1:20-22.

Whosoever does not fulfill his vow, not only acts sinfully but foolishly as Ananias and Sapphira did (Acts 5:4).

+ Prayers are those by which we offer or vow something to God, what the Greeks call i.e., a vow. God where we read in Greek, in Latin we read: "I will pay my vows the lord; where according to the exact force of the words it may be thus represented: "I will pay my prayers unto the lord." And this which we find in Ecclesiastes: "If thou vow a vow unto the lord do not delay to pay it," is written in Greek likewise: "If thou pray a prayer unto the lord, do not delay to pay it, which will be fulfilled in this way by each one of us. We pray, when we renounce this world and promise that being dead to all worldly actions and the life of this world we will serve the lord with full purpose of heart .

Abbot Isaac

1. Cassian, Conf., 9:12.

*"To cause your flesh to sin" [6].* The word "flesh" is used here as a metonym for one's whole self or person; the idea is not to let one's mouth get one's self into trouble with God. The angel or "messenger" is not the angel of judgment sent by God, but rather the priest whose duty it was to collect what had been vowed (cf. Mal. 2: 7).

*"For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God"* [7].

This difficult proverb is probably an allusion to verse 3, and the author is summing up his point. Just as too much concern over business brings dreams, so too many words spoken at worship bring rash promises and punishment by God.

The idea seems to be that the more dreams one dreams, the less sense they make, and the more words one utters, the less meaning they contain.

Qoheleth exhorts to fear God, i.e. to observe His will, especially by being circumspect in one's prayers, promises, vows and general speech.

### **RICHES ARE VAIN [8-20]**

Here riches are viewed from three angles. Though God may give a man a certain power to enjoy wealth, yet

- (1) riches are the cause of much greed and injustice among government officials [8, 9];
- (2) the gaining of wealth never brings satisfaction, for the more one gets, the more one wants [10-12]; and
- (3) riches are an insecure possession, for a man acquires wealth only to pass it on to the others [13-17].

So in verses 18-20 the author gives his oft repeated counsel: enjoy life while you can.

With realism Qoheleth describes the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice in his days: the realm seems to be an organization where each official strives to acquire wealth and where each from the top to the bottom oppresses the one below him. [Nelson: A New Catholic Commentary..., p. 516.]

*"If you see the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regards; and {there be} higher than they. (9) Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king {himself} is served by the field" [8, 9].*

*"For he that is higher than the highest regards."* This is not a statement to the effect that God watches all earthly rulers, and will eventually punish them, but rather it refers to the system of government in those days. Each official watched the one beneath him in order to obtain part of the spoils of taxation and graft. Because of this system one should not "marvel" at the oppression and lack of justice.

*"The profit of the earth is for all."* It appears best to read this "the profit of the land is among all of them; a cultivated field has a king." In other words, not only do all the officials get a share of the extortion, but there is no cultivated area which does not fall under taxation.

Qoheleth declares that wealth does not give lasting satisfaction. The increase of wealth does not bring greater satisfaction, but increases only the number of one's retainers. The rich man's only advantage is to look at his riches.

*"He that loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this {is} also vanity. (11) When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good {is there} to the owners thereof, saving the beholding {of them} with their eyes?" [10, 11].*

The labourer, in order to make his living, works hard, grows tired and sleeps well. But the abundance of riches causes cares and anxieties which prevent slumber.

*"The sleep of a labouring man {is} sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep" [12].*

+ Just so, Ecclesiastes sees that riches are kept for ill by him who possesses them, for their loss causes a very great anxiety and disquiet. Indeed they are lost, for they are left here and can be of no advantage to one who is dead.

St. Ambrose

1. The Prayer of Job and David, 2:4:12. (Fathers of the Church).

At the expense of anxiety and sleeplessness wealth has to be protected.

*"There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, {namely}, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. (14) But those riches {perish} by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and {there is} nothing in his hand" [13, 14].*

*"Riches were kept by their owner to his hurt" [13]. This refers to the loss the man sustains by **evil travail** (v. 14), that is, in a bad business speculation. The vanity of wealth lies in the fact that a man may accumulate a great deal, only to lose it in an unfortunate business enterprise, and thus have nothing to leave his son.*

When the rich man dies, he cannot take his wealth with him. But what is worse, he does not even know whether he will keep his wealth to the end of his life.

*"As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. (16) And this also {is} a sore evil, {that} in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit has he that has laboured for the wind?" [15, 16]*

These words resemble Job 1:21 "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away."

The wicked rich man is covetous, he economizes on the cost of light. Though he has amassed riches, he does not enjoy them.

*"All his days also he eats in darkness, and he has much sorrow and wrath with his sickness" [17].*

#### **MODERATE ENJOYMENT OF THE PRESENT LIFE [18-20]**

It is possible for man to find a relative happiness in his work and in the enjoyment of food and drink. This moderate enjoyment of the present life is commanded by God.

*"Behold {that} which I have seen: {it is} good and comely {for one} to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it {is} his portion" [18]*

Riches are illusory as goals of human life. But if man accepts the material gifts which God offers and tries to be content, he will be truly happy. And he will not brood over his life's brevity, for the joys of life, though temporary, keep him from dwelling on the ills which afflict humanity.

*"Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this {is} the gift of God. (20) For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth {him} in the joy of his heart" [19-20].*

*"God answers him in the joy of his heart" [20].* Some translate it, *"God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart."* There are not many enjoyments in life, but such as there are should be sought for the pleasure they will provide. This will then cause life to pass pleasantly for God will allow a man to be absorbed by these things, and forget about the difficulties of life.

eccl 6

+ The fool is proved above all things by his finding no satisfaction in any lust. But the discreet man is not held captive by these passions.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Eccl. 6: 24- 32

+ Let the fettered therefore cry out, as long as they are in the chains of the disciples of God, in which the martyrs have been tried: the fetters shall be loosed, and they shall fly away, and these very fetters shall afterwards be turned into an ornament. This has happened with the martyrs.

St. Augustine

1. On Ps. 102.

## CHAPTER SIX

### RICHES

In this chapter Qoheleth goes on further to show the meaninglessness of worldly wealth.

1. Wealth that cannot be enjoyed 1-9.

2. Fixity of Fate 10-12.

#### WEALTH THAT CANNOT BE ENJOYED [1-9]

6:1-9 develops the above from the negative side. This leads to the sixth proverb in the series in verse 9. the author meditates on the mystery of why some people do not have the gift spoken of in 5:18-20. He comes to the conclusion that those who do not have it, though they have no burial (never die), would have done better to have been born dead. The concluding proverb holds that satisfaction is better than perpetual longing.

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 253.]

One of life's greatest misfortunes is that a man may have riches and not be able to enjoy them, either because of an early death or perhaps because of a spirit of avarice which will not let him be satisfied.

*"There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God has given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wants nothing for his soul of all that he desires, yet God gives him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease" [1-2].*

*"God gives him not power to eat thereof."* This verse, as well as the phrase, *"a stranger eats it,"* shows that the picture is of a man who dies early in life before he has had a chance to enjoy his wealth. No son becomes his heir, but rather some stranger benefits by it all.

*"If a man beget an hundred {children}, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also {that} he have no burial; I say, {that} an untimely birth {is} better than he. (4) For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. (5) Moreover he has not seen the sun, nor known {any thing}: this has more rest than the other. (6) Yea, though he live a thousand years twice {told}, yet has he seen no good: do not all go to one place? (7) All the labour of man {is} for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. (8) For what has the wise more than the fool? what has the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?" [1-8].*

*"If a man beget an hundred children."* This is the opposite of the previous case. Even if a man has long life and many children, this is no guarantee of the enjoyment of life. He may be so bound up with avarice or worry that he lacks the capacity to feel satisfied. To make the contrast even greater, the author

adds, "*and also that he have no burial.*" That is, if he were to live forever, and still not be able to enjoy life, it would have been better if he had never lived at all.

6:3

+ Therefore the miscarriage of worldly things is better than their birth. Indeed, in regard to the man who has come into this life and has endured the vanity and darkness of this world over an extended longevity, Ecclesiastes declared that "the miscarriage is better than he."

For the one enjoys rest rather than the other, because the former has not experienced the inconstancy of life, wherein even a man who lived a thousand years could not have seen the good. It is more of a grace to have avoided such things, then, than to have suffered them.

St. Ambrose

1. The Prayer of Job and David, 2:4:15. (Fathers of the Church).

*"Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit"* [9].

Satisfaction in the things that life affords is better than "*the wandering of the desire*," that is, better than a life that can never find fulfillment in its longings.

#### **FIXITY OF FATE [10-12]**

6:10-12 concludes by repeating the themes of 1:3-11 and 3:1-8. Life is endless repetition (verse 10). No word uttered, even by the wise, can give it meaning (verse 11). The meaning of the totality of life is beyond the ken of human beings, who die so soon (verse 12).

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 254.]

*"That which has been is named already, and it is known that it {is} man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he. (11) Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what {is} man the better? (12) For who knoweth what {is} good for man in {this} life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?"* [10-12].

It is ultimately useless to try to change things, and to wish for more than one has. Submission to the fixed order is best, since God has determined things the way they are. man is powerless even to argue the issue.

Eccl 7: 12

+ For, as the preacher says, "wisdom is a defense and money is a defense" also. We must not hastily conclude that this statement conflicts with that of the Lord: "verity I say unto you that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven; and again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven." Were it so, the salvation of Zacchaeus the publican, described in scripture as a man of great wealth, would contradict the Lord's declaration.

St. Jerome

1. Letter 79:3.

Eccl 7: 16

+ He has ended his discussion of wedlock and virginity, and has carefully steered between the two precepts without turning to the right hand or to the left. He has followed the royal road and fulfilled the command not to be righteous over much.

St. Jerome

1. Against Jovinianus, 1:14.

Eccl 7: 16

+ Do you expect me to explain the purposes and plans of God? The Book of Wisdom gives an answer to your foolish question: "Look not into things above you, and search not things too mighty for you." And elsewhere, "Make not yourself overwise, and argue not more than is fitting." And in the same place, "In wisdom and simplicity of heart seek God." You will perhaps deny the authority of this book; listen then to the Apostle blowing the Gospel trumpet: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? or who has been His counselor?"

St. Jerome

1. Against the Pelagians 1:32.

Eccl 7: 16

+ "The apostle, in concluding his discussion of marriage and of virginity, is careful to observe a mean course in discriminating between them, and, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, he keeps to the King's highway, and thus fulfills the injunction, 'Be not righteous overmuch.'

St. Jerome

1. Letter 48:8.

Eccl 7: 28, 29

+ He says that he had found man upright. Consider the force of the words. The word *man* comprehends both male and female. "But a woman," he says, "among all these have I not found." Let us read the beginning of Genesis, and we shall find Adam, that is *man*, called both male and female. Having then been created by God good and upright, by our own fault we have fallen to a worse condition; and that which is Paradise had been upright, when we left paradise we corrupt. If you object that before they sinned there was a distinction in sex between male and female, and that they could without sin have come together, it is uncertain what might have what might have happened.

St. Jerome

1. Against Jovinianus, 1:29.

7:26

+ For although a perfect apprehension of the truth is at present far removed from us by reason of the infirmity of the flesh, yet it is possible, as the Preacher himself has said, to perceive the madness of the impious, and having found it, to say that 'more bitter than death.'

St. Athanasius

1. Letter 52:2.

7:29

+ For she is made to see God, and to be enlightened by Him; but of her own accord in God's stead she has sought corruptible things and darkness, as the Prophet says somewhere in writing, "God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions." Thus it has been then that men from the first discovered

and contrived and imagined evil for themselves (as was said in the former treatise), received the condemnation of death with which they had been threatened; and from thenceforth no longer remained as they were made, but were being corrupted according to their devices, over them as king.

St. Athanasius

1. Against the Heathen, 7.

### **ADVICE BASED ON REALITY (7:1-9:16)**

The book is loosely organized, and the outline used here is arbitrary. However, chapter 7 does seem to mark a turn from the author's presentation of his philosophy to more practical advice on the basis of that philosophy. Again a major subdivision begins with poetry.

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 254.]

7:1-14. Six Poetic Pieces of Advice. The author may very well here be employing proverbs from wisdom circles, not his own compositions. His opening chapters, however, put them in a new framework. They make it clear that the good to which traditional wisdom directs people is really only relative good. Thus the author is rooted in his background, but is critical of it.

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 254.]

7:1a praises the value of a good reputation. There is a play on the Hebrew words for name (shem) and ointment (shemen). Verse 7b fits with what the author has said in chapters 1-6.

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 254.]

7:2-4 holds that wisdom lies in acting in accord with the tragic nature of life as outlined in chapters 1-6 (see above on 3:9-15).

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 254.]

7:5-7 speaks for wisdom instead of foolish pleasure. Foolish laughter is likened to the crackling of a fire of thorns that generates no heat. But, characteristic of the author's realism, the conclusion is that even wisdom can be bought. Oppression in verse 7 probably denotes ill-gotten gain.

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 254.]

7:8-10 is based on 1:3-11 and 3:1-8. The point is that each event should be accepted for what it is. Heated comparison with previous events is foolish.

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 254.]

7:11-12 acknowledges the practical, proximate value of both wisdom and wealth as defenses against life's difficulty and perplexity.

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 254.]

7:13-14 concludes this series on the not so often struck by the author: No one can change what God has ordained. Take the good for what it is when it comes. When evil comes, accept the fact that our limited perspective does not permit us to see how it fits into the totality of things (cf. 39-15).

[1. Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 255.]

7:23

+ Thus Solomon, who was the wisest of all men, whether before him or in his own time, to whom God gave bread of heart, and a flood of contemplation, more abundant than the sand, even he, the more he entered into the depth, the more dizzy he became, and declared the fourth point of wisdom to be the discovery of how very far off he was from him.

St. Gregory Nazianzen

1. The Second Theological Oration, 21.

7:16

+ And accordingly, when a righteous man is reproved, he is reproved of sin, and not of righteousness. Since in that divine utterance also, where we read, "Be not made righteous over-much," there

is notice taken, not of the righteousness of the wise man, but of the pride of the presumptuous. The man, therefore, that becomes "righteous over-much," by that very excess becomes unrighteous. For he makes himself righteous over-much who says that he is made righteous, not by the grace of God, but by the sufficiency of his own will: nor is he righteous through living righteously, but is rather selfinflated with the imagination of being what he is not.

St. Augustine

1. On the Gospel of St. John, tr. 95:2.

7:30

+ God made man good; so runs the scripture, "God made man upright; and men themselves found out many cogitations." Run from these "many" to One, gather up your scattered things into one : flow on together, fence yourself in, abide with One; go not to many things. There is blessedness. But we flowed away, have gone on to perdition: we were all born with sin, and to that sin wherein we were born have we too added by our evil living, and the whole world has become evil. But Christ came, and he chose that which He made, not what He found; for he found all evil, and by His grace. He made them good. And so was made another "world;" and the "world" now persecutes the "world."

St. Augustine

1. Sermons on New Testament Lessons, 46:6.

7:29

We were created good by The Good; for "God made man upright," but by our own free will, we became evil. We had power from being good to come evil, and we shall have power from being evil to become good. But it is He who is ever Good, who make the good out of the evil; for man by his own will had no power to heal himself. You do not look out for a physician to wound yourself; but when you has wound yourself, you look out for one to cure you.

St. Augustine

1. Sermons on New Testament Lessons, 11:2.

Eccl 7

+ And yet it is far more to receive blame from one wise man, than to become a hearer of a whole chorus of worthless and miserable men in their songs. For the laughter of fools is like the cracking of many thorns burning in a fierce fire.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Eccl 7

+ For the life of man has its excellence not in the acquisition of perishable riches, but in wisdom. It is the greatest of all good to take hold of God, and by abiding to him to sin in nothing.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

eccl 7

+ Wisdom avails more in the way of help than a band of the most power men in a city, and it often also pardons righteously those who fail in duty.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

7:21

+ And Ecclesiastes also declares that this cannot be done without fault by any of the saints, and says: 'For there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doe good and sin not.' For who, even if he be the chief of all righteous and holy men, can we ever think could, while bound in the chains of this life, so acquire this chief good, as never to cease from Him Who alone is good?

Abbot Theonas

1. Conference 23:5.

7:21

+ And therefore with daily sighs all the saints grieve over this weakness of their nature and while they search into their shifting thoughts and the secrets and inmost recesses of their conscience, cry out in entreaty: "Enter not into judgment with Your sight shall no man living be justified;" and this: "Who will boast that he has a chaste heart? or who will have confidence that he is pure from sin?" and again: "There is not a righteous man upon earth that do good and sin not;" and this also: "Who know his faults?"

Abbot Theonas

1. Conference 23:17.

7:21

+ Wherefore also that most wise Ecclesiastes reviewing in his mind all the actions and purposes of men declares without any exception: "that there is not a righteous man upon earth, that do good and sin not," i.e., no one ever could or ever will be found on this earth so holy, so diligent, so earns: as to be able continually to cling to that true and unique good, and not day after day to feel that he is drawn aside from it and fails. But still though he maintains that he cannot be free from wrong doing, yet none the less we must not deny that he is righteous.

Abbot Theonas

1. Conference 23:18.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### WISDOM

The author has questioned, in questioned, in 6: 12, the possibility of determining ultimate good. Here he admits that there are certain ways of living which are "better" than others. And so he gives his advice about how to find these.

1. Honor is better than luxury 1.
2. Sobriety is better than levity 2-7.
3. Cautiousness is better than rashness 8-10.
4. Wisdom with wealth is better than wisdom alone 11-12.
5. Resignation is better than indignation 13-14.
6. Moderation is better than intemperance 15-22.
7. Men are better than women 23-29.

1. Honor is better than luxury:

*"A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth"*

[1].

To have a good name, that is, a good reputation (cf. Prov. 3:4; 22: 1), is better than having the luxury of much fine perfume. An honourable life makes a man's day of death better than his day of birth, for at the end he knows he has made something out of life.

2. Sobriety is better than levity:

"It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that {is} the end of all men; and the living will lay {it} to his heart. (3) Sorrow {is} better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. (4) The heart of the wise {is} in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools {is} in the house of mirth. (5) {It is} better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. (6) For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so {is} the laughter of the fool: this also {is} vanity. (7) Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart" [2-7].

Sympathetic understanding of sorrow and death gives one a proper appreciation of life. When one visits the house of mourning [4], he is reminded of the brevity of life and therefore of the need for wise living. The phrase, "*by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better*" [3], implies a thoughtful serious mind concerned about the problems of life.

On this account, he who had gone over every kind of luxury said, "It is better to go into the house of mourning than into the house of mirth." (Eccl.vii.2.) And so "here" you wilt show forth great wisdom, and "there" wilt hear those words which are worth ten you sand blessings.

St. John Chrysostom

1. Homilies on John, 60:5

7:2

"It is better to go into the house of mourning than into the house of rejoicing." From the one is gained the merit of a good work, from the other a lapse into sin. Lastly, in the one case you still hope for the reward, in the other you have already received it. Feel with those who are afflicted as if also afflicted with them.

St. Ambrose

1. Letter 63:106.

7:2

+ By the latter the soul is inflamed. For if we can imitate the luxury, then we are encouraged to self-indulgence, and if we can not, we are grieved. In the house of mourning there is nothing of this kind. If we can not afford to be luxurious, then we are not in any pain; and if we can, then we are restrained. Monasteries are indeed houses of mourning. There is sackcloth and ashes, there is solitude, there is no laughter, no pressure of worldly business. There is fasting, and lying upon the ground; there is no impure savor of rich food, no blood shed, no tumult, no disturbance, or crowding.

St. John Chrysostom

1. Hom. on 1 Tim., 14.

7:3

And so, if anyone wants to ascend, let him seek, not the joys of the world or the pleasant things or the delights, but whatever is filled with pain and weeping; for it is better to go into a house of sorrow than into a house of rejoicing. Indeed, Adam would not have come down from paradise unless he had been beguiled by pleasure.

St. Ambrose

1. Flight from the World, 1:3 (Fathers of the Church).

3. Cautiousness is better than rashness:

"Better {is} the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: {and} the patient in spirit {is} better than the proud in spirit. (9) Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools. (10) Say not thou, What is {the cause} that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this" [8-10].

It is best to take a quiet second look at the past and present before saying that "*the former days were better than these*" [10]. The years have probably obscured difficulties in the past similar to those of the present. It is best to be slow to *anger* [9], and not to make a rash statement for which one will be sorry. The phrase, *better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof* [8], suggests the wisdom of cautious speech, since only after one has spoken is he able to determine the full effects of his words.

7:10

Nor can we become partakers of wisdom, even though we are considered wise by universal consent, for "anger rests in the bosom of fools."

St. John Cassian

1. The institutes, 8:1.

4. Wisdom with wealth is better than wisdom alone:

*"Wisdom {is} good with an inheritance: and {by it there is} profit to them that see the sun. (12) For wisdom {is} a defence, {and} money {is} a defence: but the excellency of knowledge {is, that} wisdom giveth life to them that have it" [11-12].*

The author is quick to acknowledge that wealth can provide a man with good things (cf. Prov 13: 8), and when this wealth is combined with wisdom, the man has double means for finding life's few pleasures.

5. Resignation is better than indignation:

*"Consider the work of God: for who can make {that} straight, which he has made crooked? (14) In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also has set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him" [13-14].*

This is a summation of much of the author's philosophy of life. Since our lives are in the iron grip of God, both the *day of prosperity* [14], and the *day of adversity* have been determined by him. Therefore, let a man make the best whatever life may bring.

6. Moderation is better than intemperance:

*"All {things} have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just {man} that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked {man} that prolongeth {his life} in his wickedness. (16) Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? (17) Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time? (18) {It is} good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all. (19) Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty {men} which are in the city. (20) For {there is} not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. (21) Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: (22) For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others [15-22].*

Experience has shown that the righteous do not necessarily live longer and happier lives than the wicked (cf. Ps. 1:3,4). Therefore the best way to live is moderately. *Be not righteous over much* [16], for this will not guarantee happiness; and *be not over much wicked* [17], for evil may bring a premature death. Therefore moderation is the answer, for *why should you destroy yourself?* That is, Why should you alienate yourself by extreme conduct from the few good things that life can provide?

(7:15, 9:9)

+ Ask those who lived in days gone by, learn from former generations; consider, during the days of your empty existence, where are the wise? Where are the philosophers and rhetoricians who gained a reputation for their consummate skills of speech? Where are the kings with their crowns? Or the men with a reputation for strength and might? Ask the earth and it will show you; ask Sheol and it will reveal to you how no realm endures- not even those who grow rich and wealthy.

Fr. Babai

1.1. Letter to Cyracus, 5.

7. Men are better than women:

*All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it {was} far from me. (24) That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out? (25) I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason {of things}, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness {and} madness: (26) And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart {is} snares and nets, {and} her hands {as} bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her. (27) Behold, this have I found, says the preacher, {counting} one by one, to find out the account: (28) Which yet*

*my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found. (29) Lo, this only have I found, that God has made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions*" [23-29].

A good example of the *wickedness of folly* [25] is an evil *woman* [26] who lures men into sin. It is difficult enough to find a good man, but a (good) *woman* is almost impossible to discover [28]. Although *God has made man upright*, men have deviated from this condition in going after *inventions*, that is purposes or devices (perhaps here, devices of women) which have brought corruption and evil into the world [29].

7:23, 24

+ Thus Solomon, who was the wisest of all men, whether before him or in his own time, to whom God gave breadth of heart, and a flood of contemplation more abundant than the sand, even he, the more he entered into the depth, the more dizzy he became, and declared the further point of wisdom to be the discovery of how very far off she was from him.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

1. The Theological Orations, 2:21.

7:25,26

+ "My heart took a circuit to know the joy of the impious man and to examine carefully and to seek wisdom and a mode of calculating and to know joy through the impious man and trouble and disquietude, and I find that it is bitterer than death-not because death is bitter, but because it is bitter for the impious one. And yet life is bitterer than death. For it is a greater burden to live for sin than to die in sin, because the impious man increases his sin as long as he lives, but if he dies, he ceases to sin.

St. Ambrose

1. Death as a Good, 7:28. (Fathers of the Church)

7:26

+ And Solomon seems to me very wise in bestowing upon an indecent woman the face of every heresy, and then saying about her that it is necessary to repudiate and to flee such a woman, "who is a hunter's snare, and her heart is a net, and in her hands are bonds. "The good man before the face of God will be rescued from her and the sinner will be ensnared by her.

St. Cyril of Alexandria

1. Letter 31:3.

7:29

We were created good by the good; for "god made man upright," but by our own free will, we became evil. we had power from being good to become evil, and we shall have power from being evil to become good.

St. Augustine

1. Sermons on New-Testaments Lessons, 11:2.

7:29 Lxx

+ God made man good; so runs the scripture, "god made man upright; and men themselves found out many cogitations." Run from these "many" to one, gather up thy scattered things into one: flow on together, fence thyself in, abide with one; go not to many things.

St. Augustine

1. Sermons on New-Testaments Lessons, 46:6.

7:29

+ Accordingly God, as it is written, made man upright, and consequently with a good will. For if he had not had a good will, he could not have been upright. The good will, then, is the work of God; for God created him with it. But the first evil will which preceded all man's evil acts, was rather a kind of falling away from the work of God to its own works than any positive work.

St. Augustine

1. City of God, 14:11.

7:29

We ought not then to ascribe this wandering inclination of our heart either to human nature or to God its Creator. For it is a true statement of Scripture, that "God made man upright; but they themselves found out many thoughts" The character of these then depends on us ourselves, for it says "a good thought comes near to those that know it, but a prudent man will find it." For where anything is subject to our prudence and industry so that it can be found out, there if it is not found out, we ought certainly to set it down to our own laziness or carelessness and not to the fault of our nature.

Abbot Serenus

1. Cassian, Conf., 7:4.

7:29

+ Moreover as the wisest Solomon says: "God made man upright," i.e., always to enjoy the knowledge of good only, "but they have sought out many imaginations," for they came, as has been said, to know good and evil.

Abbot Chaeremon

1. Cassian, Conf., 13:12.

7:29

+ For that we sin of our own free will the Prophet says plainly in a certain place: Yet I planted you a fruitful vine, wholly true: how are You turned to bitterness,(and become) the strange vine? The planting was good, the fruit coming from the will is evil; and therefore the planter is blameless, but the vine shall be burnt with fire since it was planted for good, and bore fruit unto evil of its own will.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

1. Cat. Lect. 2:1.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### WISDOM [2]

#### SUBJECTION TO AUTHORITY IN GOD

Qoheleth, in this chapter, comes to recommend wisdom to us as the most powerful antidote

1. The benefit of wisdom 1.
2. Wisdom and subjection to authority 2-3.
3. To be ready for sudden evils and death 6-8.
4. Wisdom and oppressive government 9-10.
5. Wisdom and the prosperity of the evildoers 11-14.
6. Using God's gifts cheerfully 15-17.

#### THE BENEFIT OF WISDOM [1]

*"Who is as the wise man? and who knows the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom makes his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed" [1].*

Here is an encomium of wisdom, that is, of true piety, guided in all its exercises by prudence and discretion.

1. It advances him above his neighbors, and makes him more excellent than they: Who is as the wise man? Heavenly wisdom will make an incomparable man. No man without grace, though he be learned, or noble, or rich, is to be compared with a man that has true grace and is therefore accepted of God.

2. It makes him useful among his neighbors and very serviceable to them: Who but the wise man knows the interpretation of a thing, that is, understands the times and the events of them, and their critical junctures.

3. It beautifies a man in the eyes of his friends: It makes his face to shine, as Moses's did when he came down from the mount; it puts honor upon a man and a luster on his whole conversation, makes him to be regarded and taken notice of, and gains him respect. It makes him lovely and amiable, and the darling and blessing of his country. The strength of his face, the softness and severity of his countenance (so some understand the last clause), shall be changed by it into that which is sweet and obliging.

+ Moreover, wisdom, when it is found in a man, shows itself also in its possessor's face, and makes his countenance to shine; as, on the other hand, effrontery convicts the man in whom it has taken up its abode, so soon as he is seen, as one worthy of hatred.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

+ For if the wisdom of a man illuminates his countenance, much more does the virtue of a woman illuminate her face; and if you considers this to be a great ornament, tell me what well be the advantage of the pearls in that day?

St. John Chrysostom

1. Instruction to Catechumens, 2:4.

4. It emboldens a man against his adversaries, their attempts and their scorn: The boldness of his face shall be doubled by wisdom; it will add very much to his courage in maintaining his integrity when he not only has an honest cause to plead, but by his wisdom knows how to manage it and where to find the interpretation of a thing.

### **WISDOM AND OBEDIENCE TO THE KING [2-3]**

A particular instance of wisdom pressed upon us, and that is subjection to authority, and a dutiful and peaceable perseverance in our allegiance to the government which providence has set over us .

*"I counsel thee} to keep the king's commandment, and {that} in regard of the oath of God. (3) Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he does whatsoever pleases him" [2-3].*

1. We must be observant of the laws. Some understand verse 2 as a limitation of this obedience: Keep the king's commandment, yet so as to have a regard to the oath of God, that is, so as to keep a good conscience and not to violate your obligations to God, which are prior and superior to your obligations to the king .

2. We must not be forward to find fault with the public administration, or quarrel with every thing that is not just according to our mind, nor quit our post of service under the government, and throw it up, upon every discontent [3].

3. We must not persist in a fault when it is shown us.

4. We must prudently accommodate ourselves to our opportunities, both for our own relief, if we think ourselves wronged, and for the redress of public grievances:

In Rom. 13:1 St. Paul asks us to be subject to the authority:

1. For conscience's sake, and that is the most powerful principle of subjection. It is called the oath of God because he is a witness to it and will avenge the violation of it.

2. For wrath's sake, because of the sword which the prince bears and the power he is entrusted with, which make him very formidable.

3. For the sake of our own comfort: Whose keeps the commandment, and lives a quiet and peaceable life, shall feel no evil thing, to which that of the apostle answers (Rom. 13:3).

*"Where the word of a king {is, there is} power: and who may say unto him, What do thou?" [4]*

*Whoso keeps the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment" [5].*

He that does no ill shall feel no ill and needs fear none. Solomon had said that a wise man's heart discerns time and judgment, that is, a man's wisdom will go a great way, by the blessing of God, in moral prognostications; but here he shows that few have that wisdom, and that even the wisest may yet be surprised by a calamity which they had not any foresight of.

+ It is clear, even with a moderate insight into the nature of things, that there is nothing by which we can measure the divine and blessed Life. It is not in time, but time flows from it; whereas the creation, starting from a manifest beginning, journeys onward to its proper end through spaces of time; so that it is possible, as Solomon somewhere says, to detect in it a beginning, an end, and a middle; and mark the sequence of its history by divisions of time. But the supreme and blessed life has no time-extension accompanying its course, and therefore no span nor measure.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

1. Against Eunomius, Book 1.

#### **TO BE READY FOR SUDDEN EVILS AND DEATH [6-8]**

*Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him. For he knows not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be? [6].*

1. All the events concerning us, with the exact time of them, are determined and appointed in the counsel and foreknowledge of God, and all in wisdom.

2. We are very much in the dark concerning future events and the time and season of them.

3. It is our great unhappiness and misery that, because we cannot foresee an evil, we know not how to avoid it, or guard against it, and, because we are not aware of the proper successful season of actions, therefore we lose our opportunities and miss our way:

*"There is no man that has power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither {has he} power in the day of death: and {there is} no discharge in {that} war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it" [6-8].*

There is no man that has power over his own spirit, to retain it, when it is summoned to return to God who gave it. It cannot fly any where out of the jurisdiction of death, nor find any place where its writs do not run. A man has no power to adjourn the day of his death, nor can he by prayers or bribes obtain a reprieve; no bail will be taken, no (excuse), protection, or imparlance (conference), allowed.

We have not power over the spirit of a friend, to retain that; the prince, with all his authority, cannot prolong the life of the most valuable of his subjects, nor the physician with his medicines and methods, nor the soldier with his force, nor the orator with his eloquence, nor the best saint with his intercessions.

Death is an enemy that we must all enter the lists with, sooner or later:

Men's wickedness, by which they often evade or outface the justice of the prince, cannot secure them for the arrest of death, nor can the most obstinate sinner harden his heart against those terrors.

#### **WISDOM AND OPPRESSIVE GOVERNMENTS [9-10]**

Here, in these verses, he encourages us, in reference to the mischief of tyrannical and oppressive rulers, such as he had complained of before (ch.3:16; 4:1).

1. He had observed many tyrannical rulers who hurt the ruled [9]. It is sad with a people when those that should protect their religion and rights aim at the destruction of both. They also hurt themselves. He had observed them to prosper and flourish in the abuse of their power [10]. They are proud of their wealth, and power, and honor, because they sit in the place of the holy; but all this cannot secure,

*"All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: {there is} a time wherein one man rules over another to his own hurt [9].*

*"And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this {is} also vanity" [10].*

Their bodies from being buried in the dust; I saw them laid in the grave; and their pomp, though it attended them thither, could not descend after them, The psalmist says, "For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him" Ps. 49:17. Their names from being buried in oblivion; for they were forgotten, as if they had never been.

#### **WISDOM AND THE PROSPERITY OF THE EVILDOERS [11-14]**

*"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" [11].*

He had observed that their prosperity hardened them in their wickedness [11].

Observe,

1. Sentence is passed against evil works and evil workers by the righteous Judge of heaven and earth, even against the evil works of princes and great men, as well as of inferior persons.

2. The execution of this sentence is often delayed a great while, and the sinner goes on, not only unpunished, but prosperous and successful.

3. Impunity hardens sinners in impiety, and the patience of God is shamefully abused by many who, instead of being led by it to repentance, are confirmed by it in their impenitency. (4.) Sinners herein deceive themselves, for, though the sentence be not executed speedily, it will be executed the more severely at last .

8:11

+It follows then that no one can be deceived by the devil but one who has chosen to yield to him the consent of his own will: as Ecclesiastes clearly puts it in these words: For since there is no gainsay by those who do evil speedily, therefore of the children of men is filled within them to do evil." It is therefore clear that each man goes wrong from this; viz., that when devil thoughts assault him he does not immediately meet them with refusal and contradiction, for it says: "resist him, and he will flee from you."

Abbot Serenus

1. Cassian, Conf., 7:8.

*"Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his {days} be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: (13) But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong {his} days, {which are} as a shadow; because he fears not before God" [12, 13].*

God's people are certainly a happy people, though they be oppressed: It is the character of God's people that they fear God [12]. It is the happiness of all that fear God, that in the worst of times it shall be well with them; their happiness in God's favor cannot be prejudiced, nor their communion with God interrupted, by their troubles; they are in a good case, for they are kept in a good frame under their troubles, and in the end they shall have a blessed deliverance from and an abundant recompense for their troubles.

Wicked people are certainly a miserable people [13]; though they prosper, and prevail, for a time, the curse is as sure to them as the blessing is to the righteous. It is said, "Say you to the righteous, that {it shall be} well {with him}: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! {it shall be} ill {with him}: for the reward of his hands shall be given him" Isa. 3:10, 11.

The wicked man's days are as a shadow, not only uncertain and declining, as all men's days are, but altogether unprofitable. These days shall not be prolonged to what he promised himself; he shall not live out half his days, Ps. lv.23. Though they may be prolonged [12] beyond what others expected, yet his day shall come to fall .

God's great quarrel with wicked people for their not fearing before him; that is at the bottom of their wickedness, and cuts them off from all happiness.

*"There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just {men}, unto whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked {men}, to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also {is} vanity" [14].*

He would not have us to be surprised at it, as though some strange thing happened, for he himself saw it in his days. He saw wicked men to whom it happened according to the work of the righteous, who prospered as remarkably as if they had been rewarded for some good deed, and that from themselves, from God, from men. He would have us to take occasion hence, not to charge God with inequity, but to charge the world with vanity.

#### **USING GOD'S GIFTS CHEERFULLY [15-17]**

He would have us not to fret and perplex ourselves about it, or make ourselves uneasy, but cheerfully to enjoy what God has given us in the world, to be content with it and make the best of it, though it be much better with others, and such as we think very unworthy:

*"Then I commended mirth, because a man has no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God gives him under the sun. (16) When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also {there is that} neither day nor night sees sleep with his eyes:) (17) Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek {it} out, yet he shall not find {it}; yea further; though a wise {man} think to know {it}, yet shall he not be able to find {it}" [15-17].*

Since God's Ultimate purpose are unknowable (8: 15- 17), and since the length of life is uncertain (9: 11- 16), the wise course of action is to enjoy oneself here and now.

In the service of a King who is often arbitrary and **does whatsoever pleases him** (v. 3 b), the wise action is not to demand one's way in every matter. When the king commands some unpleasant thing, **be not hasty to go out of his sight** (v. 3 a). That is, do not impulsively turn your back on what he wants. There is time and a place for everything (v. 6).

He would not have us undertake to give a reason for that which God does, for his way is in the sea and his path in the great waters, past finding out, and therefore we must be contentedly and piously ignorant of the meaning of God's proceedings in the government of the world, v. 16, 17.

Others had likewise set themselves to make this enquiry with so close an application that they could not find time for sleep, either day or night, nor find in their hearts to sleep, so full of anxiety were they about these thing.

When we look upon all the works of God and his providence, and compare one part with another, we cannot find that there is any such certain method by which the work that is done under the sun is directed.

Eccl 9: 8

+ He who has not a wedding garment, and has not kept that command, "Let your garments be always white," is bound hand and foot that he may not recline at the banquet, or sit on a throne, or stand at the right hand of God; his is sent to Gehenna, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. "The hairs of your head are numbered."

1. To Pammachius against John of Jerusalem, 33.

Eccl 9: 8

+ Oftentimes have I praised virgins and widows and married women who have kept their garments always white and who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes.

St. Jerome

1. Letter 77:12.

Eccl 9: 8

+ We are told that the bridegroom feeds among the lilies, that is among those who have not defiled their garments, for they have remained virgins and have hearkened to the precept of the Preacher: "let your garments be always white."

St. Jerome

1. Letter 130:7.

Eccl 9: 2

+ Alas for the frailty and perishableness of human nature ! Except that our belief in Christ raises us up to heaven and promises eternity to our souls, the physical conditions of life are the same for us as for the brutes.

St. Jerome

1. Letter 108:28.

9:11

+ However much you may run, however much you may wrestle, yet you need one to give the crown. Except the Lord build the house, they laboured in vain that built it: Except the Lord keep the city, in vain they watched that keep it. I know, He says, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor the victory to the fighters, not the harbours to the good sailors; but to God it belongs both to work victory, and to bring the barque safe to port.

St. Gregory Nazianzen

1. On the works of the Gospel, 13.

9:1

+ For he thought it much better to be generous even to the undeserving for the sake of the deserving, than from fear of the undeserving to deprive those who were deserving. And this seems to be the duty of casting our bread upon the waters, since it will not be swept away or perish in the eyes of the just Investigator but will arrive yonder where all that is ours is laid up, and will meet with us in due time, even though we think it not.

St. Gregory Nazianzen

9:7,8

Therefore Solomon also, hinting at this at this grace, says in Ecclesiastes, Come hither, eat your bread with joy (that is, the spiritual bread; Come hither, he calls with the call to salvation and blessing), and drink your wine with a merry heart (that is, the spiritual wine); and let oil be poured out upon your head (you see he alludes even to the mystic Chrism); and let your garments be always white, for the Lord is well pleased with your works; for before you came to Baptism, your works were vanity of vanities. But now, having put off your old garments, and put on those which are spiritually white, you must be continually robed in white: of course we mean not this, that you are always to wear white raiment; but you must be clad in the garments that are truly white and shining and spiritual, that you may say with the blessed Isaiah, My soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with a garment of salvation, and put a robe of gladness around me.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

1. Catech. Lect., 22:8.

ccl 9

+ And they assert largely, that he who is dead has perished utterly, and that the living is to be preferred to the dead, even though he may lie in darkness, and pass his life-journey after the fashion of a dog, which is better at least than a dead lion. For the living know this at any rate, that they are to die; but the dead know not anything, and there is no reward proposed to them after they have completed their necessary course. Also hatred and love with the dead have their end; For their envy has perished, and their life also is extinguished. And he has a portion in nothing who has once gone hence.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Eccl 9

+ For wisdom is also stronger than iron; while the folly of one individual works danger for many, even though he be an object of contempt to many.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

**+ 9: 1. No man knows either love or hatred.**

+ This difficult phrase is best taken as referring to God. No man knows whether or not his righteous deeds will gain the love or the hatred of God (cf. Mal 1: 1- 3; Rom 9: 13).

**5. Neither have they any more a reward.**

+ The man who is alive can gain a **reward**, that is, some profit on earth from his labour, and at least is somebody, while the dead person is not even a **memory**.

**10. In sheol** (*AV, in the grave*).

+ The Hebrews of ancient times thought Sheol was a pit deep under the earth where the dead abode (cf. Deut 32: 22). It is uniformly depicted as the place to which both righteous and unrighteous went after death, and where there were no punishments or rewards (cf. Eccl 3: 19, 20; 6: 6). It was a "land of forgetfulness" (Ps. 88: 12) and darkness (Job 38: 17), where man existed as shadowy replicas of their former selves (cf. Isa 14: 9, 10). Here (Eccl 9: 10) is one of the strongest statements in the Old Testament about the nothingness of Sheol.

**VIII. Words of Advice (C). 9: 17 - 12: 8.**

**A. Some Lessons on Wisdom and Folly. 9: 17 - 10: 15. The author here adds a few groups of maxims about the wise use of words (9: 17, 18; 10: 12- 14), about wise conduct (10: 2- 4, 8- 11), and about wisdom in general as compared with folly (10: 1, 5- 7, 15).**

17. The words of wise men are heard in quiet.

+ **The quiet speech of a wise man is heeded more reality than the clamorous chatterings of a loudmouth. This proverb seems to have been added to suggest that what was said in verse 16 is not always true.**

**9:11**

**And from this it is clearly gathered by those who, led not by chattering words but by experience, measure the magnitude of grace, and the paltry limits of man's will, that "the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, nor food to the wise, nor riches to the prudent, nor grace to the learned," but that "all these works that one and the self same spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will."**

Abbot Chaeremon

1. Cassian, Conf. 13:18.

[9:1]

+ This have I taken to heart, that I might consider all things: that the just and wise, with their works, are in the hand of the Lord. Man recognizes neither love nor hatred: all is before them (2) ... The meaning is this: I have given my heart to reflection, desiring to know whom God would love and whom He would hate. And I found indeed that the works of the just are in the hand of God, but whether they be loved by God or not they cannot know and they waver in uncertainty.

St. Jerome

# 1. Commentary on Ecclesiastes.

(Ecclesiastes 9)

(1) For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, {are} in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred {by} all {that is} before them. (2) All {things come} alike to all: {there is} one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as {is} the good, so {is} the sinner; {and} he that sweareth, as {he} that feareth an oath. (3) This {is} an evil among all {things} that are done under the sun, that {there is} one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness {is} in their heart while they live, and after that {they go} to the dead. (4) For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. (5) For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. (6) Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any {thing} that is done under the sun. (7) Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. (8) Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. (9) Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he has given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that {is} thy portion in {this} life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. (10) Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do {it} with thy might; for {there is} no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. (11) I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race {is} not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. (12) For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so {are} the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them. (13) This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it {seemed} great unto me: (14) {There was} a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: (15) Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. (16) Then said I, Wisdom {is} better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom {is} despised, and his words are not heard. (17) The words of wise {men are} heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. (18) Wisdom {is} better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.

g we see and strive after in visible reality. What is vain lacks substance, and what lacks substance does not have power<sup>7</sup>.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

3. All creatures cannot satisfy our inner life that is formed in the image of God. The Creator and the Savior alone can satisfy our hearts and souls.

+ "All things are vanity! as Ecclesiastes said, all things which are in this world. Accordingly, let the man who wishes to be saved ascend above the world, let him seek the Word who is with God let him flee from this world and depart from the earth. For a man cannot comprehend that which exists and exists always, unless he has first fled from here. On this account also, the Lord, wishing to approach God the Father, said to the Apostles, "Arise, let us go from here"<sup>8</sup>.

St. Ambrose

+ Vanity not simply but superlatively. Let us believe him, and lay hold on that in which there is no vanity, in which there is truth; and what is based upon a solid rock, where there is no old age, nor decline, but all things bloom and flourish, without decay, or waxing old, or approaching dissolution. Let us, I beseech you, love God with genuine affection, not from fear of hell, but from desire of the kingdom. For what is comparable to seeing Christ? Surely nothing! What to the enjoyment of those good things? Surely nothing! Well may there be nothing; for "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love Him." (1 Cor. 2:9)<sup>9</sup>.

St. John Chrysostom

+ I am your father, brother, bridegroom, house, clothing, root, foundation. I am everything you wish; you stand in need of nothing. I shall be your servant, for I came to serve, not to be served. I am your friend, your member, your head, your brother, your sister, your mother, and all things. Only be my friend...

What more do you desire? Why do you turn away Him who loves you? Why do you labor for this world? Why do you draw water in a leaky jar-for that is what toiling for the present life is? Why do you comb wool into the fire? Why do you beat the air? Why do you run in vain? Does not each art have its purpose? This is clear to all. But you do not have a purpose. Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity [2]<sup>10</sup>.

St. John Chrysostom

4. If this world, in its present state is vanity, it will not be worth for man to be absorbed in it, but to search for the eternal and heavenly life, and to transfer our hearts, thoughts, hopes and even our possessions unto it.

+ Therefore the true life must be laid hold upon, our riches must be removed to the place of the true life, that we may find there what we give here. We make this exchange of our goods who also change ourselves<sup>11</sup>.

St. Augustine

*"What profit has a man of all his labor which he takes under the sun?" [3].*

Verses 3-11 is a poem, its subject is: "Nature's Cycle is Pointless." All human business is pointless - at least so far as can be observed under the sun.

It is said concerning the profit of the soul and the life that is to come. For all man gets by his labor will not supply the wants of the soul, will not atone for its sin, nor cures its diseases.

"Under the sun." There is a world under the sun and other above it. Here we suffer the heat of the sun (Matt. 20:12); but there we will be not in need of the sun. God Himself is its Sun and Light.

+ The righteousness of man is as nothing accounted. The work of men, what is it? His labor is altogether vanity. Of You, O Lord, of Your grace it is that in our nature we should become good. Of You is righteousness, that we from men should become righteous. Of You is the mercy and favor, that we from the dust should become Your image. Give power to our will, that we be not sunk in sin<sup>12</sup>!

St. Ephram the Syrian

+ By labor here it refers to the life of the body which does not seek its advantage in any good deed. And it says: What has a man- that is, What does the soul get out of all the toil of life in those men who live only for the superficial<sup>13</sup>.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

a. The shortness of human life [4].

*One generation passes away, and another generation comes: but the earth abides for ever*"[4].

Solomon here shows the time of our enjoyment of these things is very short. It is said: "Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day" Job 14:6. "For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away" Jam. 4:14. We continue in the world but for one generation, which is continually passing away to make room for another, and we are passing with it.

The earth, man's workshop, appears permanent, while man ever passes. The earth which is created for man's pleasures will remain until the end of this world.

+ The mortal remains mortal whether he is honored or not. What good does the possessor of many acres gain in the end? Except that the foolish man thinks his own that which never belongs to him, ignorant seemingly in his greed that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof" (Ps. 24:1) for "God is king of all the earth" (Ps. 47:7). It is the passion of having which gives men a false title of lordship over that which can never belong to them. "The earth," says the wise Preacher, "abides for ever," ministering to every generation, first one, then another, that is born upon it; but men, though they are so little even their own masters, that they are brought into life without knowing it by their Maker's will, and before they wish are withdrawn from it, nevertheless in their excessive vanity think that they are her lords; that they, now born, now dying, rule that which remains continually<sup>14</sup>.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

b. The inconstant nature of all the creatures [5-7].

All things in this world are movable and mutable.

*"The sun also arises, and the sun goes down, and hastes to his place where he arose. The wind goes toward the south, and turns about unto the north; it whirls about continually, and the wind retunes again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again"* [5-7].

The earth, its productions and affairs, abide much the same through successive ages, but its inhabitants are continually changing<sup>15</sup>. The sun sets indeed every night, but it rises again in the morning, bright and fresh, while "man lies down, and rises not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep" Job 14:12.

+ In the sun we have a symbol of the rise and setting of our nature. There is one path for all; there is once cycle for all in life's journey. By birth we rise, and then we are drawn back again into our connatural place. And when we come to life's setting, our light too goes below the earth with the sense faculty which perceives light. What is of earth is completely resolves into its element, and so the cycle continues on and on in the same way<sup>15</sup>.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

c. The abundant toil man has about them.

*"All things are full of labor; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing"* [8].

Can we expect rest in a world where all things are thus full of labor?!

All talking, seeing, and hearing is useless toil, for curiosity will never be satisfied; man himself seems to be moving in vain rounds. It is impossible to put into words the futility of it all. It never brings real satisfaction to the eye or the ear of man [8].

At the beginning of this century many phsicologists used to say that many sexual problems occur becaause of abstinence. Now in North america youth are not in abstinence of any sexual relationship, and they are not satisfied. On ythe contrary many of them are homosexual, not because of their nature, but because the are not satisfied even when the sexual intercourses were permitted by the society.

+ We arise each day to eat and drink: yet no one is filled so that he does not hunger and thirst after a short time. Daily we seek profit, and to greed there is set no limit. "The eye will not be satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing. He that loves silver will not be satisfied with silver. There is no limit to toil, and there is no profit in abundance<sup>16</sup>

St. Ambrose

d. Nothing new [9, 10].

*"The thing that has been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and {there is} no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it has been already of old time, which was before us" [9, 10].*

Many things seem to be new simply because the past is easily and quickly forgotten. The old ways reappear in new guises.

We boast of new fashion, new hypotheses, new methods, new expressions, which jostle out the old, and put them down. But this is all mistake. What is there in the kingdom of nature we may say, "This is new?"

Solomon explains the foolishness of men who are rejecting all that is old and are absorbed in all that is new. We hear about the Israelites who despised the manna, saying: "But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes" Num. 11:6. St. Luke also says, "For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing" Acts 17:21.

While men asks for what is new, their hearts and their inner corruptions are still the same; their desires and pursuits, and complaints, still the same. If we would be entertain with new things, we must acquaint ourselves with the things of God, get a new nature, as it is said:

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" 2 Cor. 5:17.

"And he has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord" Ps 40:3.

"And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new" Rev. 21:5.

+ And God being perfect becomes perfect man, and brings to perfection the newest of all new things, the only new thing under the Sun, through which the boundless might of God is manifested<sup>17</sup>  
Fr. John of Damascus

e. Former things are forgotten [11].

*"There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after" [11].*

What profit has a man? He gains nothing, not even a memory of his struggle. The world of nature is futile; human activity is also futile.

The one thing that is thought to have permanence is a family name. People live on in that endless remembering that is so much a part of their religious heritage. Qoheleth denies it<sup>18</sup>.

## **PURSUIT AFTER MAN'S KNOWLEDGE VAIN 1:12-15**

Qoheleth's first attempt to solve the riddle is by human knowledge and wisdom. Those with knowledge and wisdom are the observers, sometimes the natural scientists of their day. Qoheleth sees it all and concludes that it is all made up of crooked lines and leads nowhere - "a chase after the wind." All that work for nothing! He can only reach the opposite conclusion that the sages before him reached: "For in much wisdom there is much sorrow" 1:18. Disillusionment, not contentment, is the fruit of learning<sup>19</sup>.

If knowledge and wisdom are vanity and vexation, all other things in this world, being much inferior to them in dignity and worth, must needs be so too.

*"I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail has God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered" [12-15].*

God gave man the desire and the obligation to investigate all things, the wisdom that man has ought to be the guide.

As he speaks concerning knowledge and wisdom, Solomon declared that he was the king of Israel in Jerusalem [12], for the neighboring nations used to say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" Deut. 4:6. Jerusalem deserved to be called "the eye of the world"<sup>20</sup>.

In Solomon sought knowledge and wisdom more than anyone else did. His court in Jerusalem was a center of learning and rendezvous of learned men.

What did he mean by "*Vexation of spirit*"? Some translate it "striving after wind," or "feeding upon wind," i.e. to make a meal on food as unsubstantial as the wind. It refers to the aimlessness and futility of human activity, for one can never lay hold of real satisfaction. It vexed him to see many that had wisdom not use it, and many that had folly not strive against it. The minds and manners of men are crooked and perverse. Solomon thought with his wisdom and power together thoroughly to reform his kingdom, but he was disappointed. He found no lasting satisfaction, for the world was still full of problems that could not be solved. All the philosophy and politics in the world will not restore the corrupt nature of man. Human wisdom will never be able to change the course of things, since all things are ordained and cannot be different from what they are.

+ This is his stay in his perplexity, and this is your only gain from, life here below, to be guided through the disorder of the things which are seen and shaken, to the things which stand firm and are not moved<sup>21</sup>.

St. Gregory Nazianzen

Eccl 1: 13

+ We are to be like alert and armed soldiers, who immediately execute the orders given to them and perform them without that travail of mind which, according to the preacher, is given to the men of this world 'to be exercised therewith'.

St. Jerome

1. Letter 48:7.

+ We read in Scripture concerning the striving after temporal things, "All is vanity and presumption of spirit;" but presumption of spirit means audacity and pride: usually also the proud are said to have great spirits; and rightly, inasmuch as the wind also is called spirit. And hence it is written, "Fire, hail, snow, ice, spirit of tempest"<sup>22</sup>.

St. Augustine

+ A perverse one will not be able to be ornamented, and the impairment will not be able to be counted (1) ... It can also be understood thus: There is so great a wickedness in this world that it is really changed about and can scarcely return to its pristine state of good, nor can it anymore find it easy to receive again the order and perfection in which it was first created. Otherwise, integrity would be restored to everything through penance and only the devil would persist in his error ... Finally, so great is the number of seducers and of those whom they snatch away out of God's flock that such a computation were simply beyond comprehension<sup>23</sup>.

St. Jerome

## 5. PURSUIT AFTER MAN'S WISDOM VAIN 1:16-18

Qoheleth now seeks to gain greater insight by a study of wisdom's opposites - madness and folly. But this effort turns out to be just as frustrating as "a chase after wind." The greater the devotion to wisdom, the greater also the sense of frustration and defeat. The more we know the more we see of our own ignorance. He who does not care about human wisdom, will be better off.

*"I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I*

*perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow" [16-18].*

Not only does the search for life's meaning prove frustration and its goal unattainable, but it also brings mental and spiritual pain. There does not appear to be any consistent standard for life upon which one may base his conduct.

Humanistic wisdom - wisdom without God - leads to grief and sorrow. It is vain, therefore we should ask for the divine one.

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" James 3:17.

"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory" 2 Cor. 2:7.

+ The more I long for what is not here, do I not so much the more groan for it until it comes? do I not so much the more weep until it comes?..<sup>24</sup>.

St. Augustine

+ I said, I will be wise, says Solomon, but she (i.e. Wisdom) was far from me beyond what is: and, Verily, he that increase knowledge increase sorrow. For the joy of what we have discovered is no greater than the pain of what escapes us; a pain, I imagine, like that felt by those who are dragged, while yet thirsty, from the water, or are unable to retain what they think they hold, or are suddenly left in the dark by a flash of lightning<sup>25</sup>

St. Gregory Nazianzen

+ And by obtaining this knowledge, he has obtained also sorrow; but sorrow for straying away from the desire of reaching his own proper country, and the Creator of it, his own blessed God<sup>26</sup>.

St. Augustine

We do not hate knowledge but sin that we discover working in us and knowledge has no power to abolish.

+ It is evident, then, that the oldness of the letter, in the absence of the newness of the spirit, instead of freeing us from sin, rather makes us guilty by the knowledge of sin. Whence it is written in another part of Scripture, "He that increases knowledge, increases sorrow," -not that the law is itself evil, but because the commandment has its good in the demonstration of the letter, not in the assistance of the spirit; and if this commandment is kept from the fear of punishment and not from the love of righteousness, it is servilely kept, not freely, and therefore it is not kept at all<sup>27</sup>.

St. Augustine

St. Clement of Alexandria explains the Christian point of view concerning knowledge, human wisdom and philosophy.

+ But all, in my opinion, are illuminated by the dawn of Light. Let all, therefore, both Greeks and barbarians, who have aspired after the truth, — both those who possess not a little, and those who have any portion, — produce whatever they have of the word of truth. . .

And this also is the choice of the spirit, because in abundance of wisdom is abundance of knowledge." He who is conversant with all kinds of wisdom, will be preeminently a gnostic. Now it is written, "Abundance of the knowledge of wisdom will give life to him who is of it." And again, what is said is confirmed more clearly by this saying, "All things are in the sight of those who understand" — all things, both Hellenic and barbarian; but the one or the other is not all. "They are right to those who wish to receive understanding. Choose instruction, and not silver, and knowledge above tested gold, and prefer also sense to pure gold;" for wisdom is better than precious stones, and no precious thing is worth it<sup>28</sup>.

St. Clement of Alexandria

1. *Henry and Scott: A Commentary upon the Holy bible, Eccl. 1.*
2. *Interpreter's Concise Commentary, The Book of Ecclesiastes, Harvey H. Guthrie, p. 249.]*
3. *Hom. on Ephes., hom 12.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *On Ps. 4.*
6. *Homilies on Matthew, 76:5.*
7. *Commentary on the Song of Songs, hom. 4.*
8. *Flight from the World, 1:4 (Fathers of the Church).*
9. *Hom. on Timothy, hom 15.*
10. *In Matt. hom. 77 (PG58:700 B-D).*
11. *Sermons on New Testament Lessons, 11:11.*
12. *On admonition and Repentance, 7.*
13. *The Commentary on Ecclesiastes, homily 1, PG 44: 624 B - 625 D).*
14. *On Virginity, 4.*
15. *The Commentary on Ecclesiastes, homily 1, PG 44: 624 B - 625 D).*
16. *Death as a Good, 7:28. (Fathers of the Church)*
17. *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, 3:1.*
18. *The Collegeville Bible Commentary, p. 816.*
19. *The Collegeville Bible Commentary, p. 816.*
20. *Henry, Eccles., ch. 1.*
21. *Panegyric on His brother S Caesarius, 19.*
22. *Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, 1:1:3.*
23. *Commentary on Ecclesiastes.*
24. *On Ps. 39.*
25. *In Defense of his Flight to Pontus, 75.*

*enment from them, then he puts the world behind his back and forgets everything in it, and he blots out of his soul all memories that form images embodying the world. Often he does not even remember the employment of the habitual thoughts which visit human nature, and his soul remains in ecstasy by reason of those new encounters that arise from the sea of the Scripture's mysteries.*

*St. Isaac the Syrian*

1. *The Ascetic Homilies, 1:18.*

*+ Wait for the Lord. You will not be waiting for one who can deceive or be deceived, nor for one who will be unable to find the wherewithal to give. He who has promised is the Almighty, He who has promised is faithful, He who has promised is true. Wait for the Lord, do manfully. Do not yield to exhaustion; do not be among those of whom we are told: Woe to them that have lost patience!*

+ For wisdom and folly are widely separated, and they are as different from each other as day is from night. He, therefore, who makes choice of virtue, is like one who sees all things plainly, and looks upward, and who holds his ways in the time of clearest light. But he, on the other hand, who has involved himself in wickedness, is like a man who wanders helplessly about in a moonless night, as one who is blind, and deprived of the sight of things by his darkness. And when I considered the end of each of these models of life, I found there was no profit in the latter; and by setting myself to be the companion of the foolish, I saw that I should receive the wages of folly. For what advantage is there in those thoughts, or what profit is there in the multitude of words, where the streams of foolish speaking are flowing, as it were, from the fountain of folly? Moreover, there is nothing common to the wise man and to the fool, neither as regards the memory of men, nor as regards the recompense of God. And as to all the affairs y agree with his word, whether we see it or not." Our ignorance of the work of God he shows, in two instances:-(1.) We know not what is the way of the Spirit, of the wind (so some), we know not whence it comes, or whither it goes, or when it will turn.

(2.) We know not how the bones are fashioned in the womb of her that is with child. We cannot describe the manner either of the formation of the body or of its information with a soul; both, we know, are the work of God, and we acquiesce in his work, but cannot, in either, trace the process of the operation. We doubt not of the birth of the child that is conceived, though we know not how it is formed; nor need we doubt of the performance of the promise, though we perceive not how things work towards it.

In the morning of youth lay out thyself to do good; give out of the little thou hast to begin the world with; and in the evening of old age yield not to the common temptation old people are in to be penurious; even then withhold not thy hand, and think not to excuse thyself from charitable works by purposing to make a charitable will, but do good to the last, for thou knowest not which work of charity and piety shall prosper, both as to others and as to thyself, this or that, but hast reason to hope that both shall be alike good.

Here is an admonition both to old people and to young people, to think of dying, and get ready for it.

I. He applies himself to the aged, writes to them as fathers, to awaken them to think of death, v. 7,8. Here is, 1. A rational concession of the sweetness of life, which old people find by experience.

*Life is put for life, Job iii. 20, 23. It cannot be denied that life is sweet. It is sweet to bad men because they have their portion in this life; it is sweet to good men because they have this life as the time of their preparation for a better life.*

*Note,[1.] There are days of darkness coming, the days of our lying in the grave; there the body will lie in the dark; there the eyes see not, the sun shines not. The darkness of death is opposed to the light of life; the grave is a land of darkness, Job x. 21. [2.] Those days of darkness will be many.*

*They are many, but they are not infinite; many as they are, they will be numbered and finished when the heavens are no more, Job xiv. 12.*

*[3.] It is good for us often to remember those days of darkness, that we may not be lifted up with pride, nor lulled asleep in carnal security, nor even transported into indecencies by vain mirth.*

*1. An ironical concession to the vanities and pleasure of youth.*

*Solomon speaks thus ironically to the young man to intimate, (1.) That this is that which he would do, and which he would fain have leave to do, in which he places his happiness and on which he sets his heart.*

*Note, (1.) There is a judgment to come. (2.) We must every one of us be brought into judgment, however we may now put far from us that evil day. (3.) We shall be reckoned with for all our carnal mirth and sensual pleasures in that day. (4.) It is good for all, but especially for young people, to know and consider this, that they may not, by the indulgence of their youthful lusts, treasure up unto themselves wrath against that day of wrath, the wrath of the Lamb.*

*3. A word of caution and exhortation inferred from all this, v.10. Let young people look at themselves and manage well both their souls and their bodies, their heart and their flesh.*

*2. It is the royal physician's antidote against the particular diseases of youth, the love of mirth, and the indulgence of sensual pleasures, the vanity which childhood and youth are subject to; to prevent and cure this, remember thy Creator.*

*(2.) The proper reason for this duty in the days of thy youth, the days of thy choice (so some), thy choice days, thy choosing days.*

*Call him to mind when thou art young, and keep him in mind throughout all the days of thy youth, and never forget him.*

*1. Do it quickly, (1.) "Before sickness and death come.*

*The days of sickness and death are the days of evil, terrible to nature, evil days indeed to those that have forgotten their Creator.*

*(2.) Before old age comes, which, if death prevent not, will come, and they will be years of which we shall say, We have no pleasure in them, when we shall not relish the delights of sense, as Barzillai (2Sam. xix. 35),-when we shall be loaded infirmities, old and blind, or old and lame,-when we shall be taken off from our usefulness, and our strength shall be labour and sorrow.*

*How we can expect God should help us when we are old, if we will not serve him when we are young? See Ps. lxxi. 17,18.*

*[1.] The decays and infirmities of old age are here elegantly described in figurative expressions, which have some difficulty in them to us now, who are not acquainted with the common phrases and metaphors used in Solomon's age and language; but the general scope is plain-to show how uncomfortable, generally, the days of old age are.*

*(1) They look dim to old people, in consequence of the decay of their sight; their countenance is clouded, and the beauty and lustre of it are eclipsed; their intellectual powers and faculties, which are as lights in the soul, are weakened; their understanding and memory fail them, and their apprehension is not so quick nor their fancy so lively as it has been.*

*When the weather is disposed to wet, no sooner has one cloud blown over than another succeeds it, so it is with old people, when they have got free from one pain or ailment, they are seized with another, so that their distempers are like a continual dropping in a very rainy day.*

*Thirdly, Then the keepers of the house tremble. The head, which is as the watch-tower, shakes, and the arms and hands, which are ready for the preservation of the body, shake too, and grow feeble, upon every sudden approach and attack of danger.*

*Fourthly, Then the strong men shall bow themselves; the legs and thighs, which used to support the body, and bear its weight, bend, and cannot serve for travelling as they done, but are soon tired. Old men that have been in their time strong men become weak and stoop for age, Zech. viii. 4. God takes no pleasure in the legs of a man (Ps. cxlvii. 10), for their strength will soon fail; but in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength; he has everlasting arms. Fifthly, Then the grinders cease because they are few; the teeth, with which we grind our meat and prepare it for concoction, cease to do their part, because they are few.*

*Sixthly, Those that look out of the windows are darkened; the eyes wax dim, as Isaac's (Gen. xxvii. 1), and Ahijah's, 1 Kings xiv. 4.*

*Seventhly, The doors are shut in the streets. Old people keep within doors, and care not for going abroad to entertainments. The lips, the doors of the mouth, are shut in eating, because the teeth are gone and the sound of the grinding with them is low, so that they have not that command of their meat in their mouths which they used to have.*

*They have no sound sleep as young people have, but a little thing disturbs them, even the chirping of a bird.*

*Old people grow hard of hearing, and unapt to distinguish sounds and voices. Tenthly, They are afraid of that which is high, afraid to go to the top of any high place, either because, for want of breath, they cannot reach it, or, their heads being giddy or their legs failing them, they dare not venture to it, or they frighten themselves with fancying that that which is high will fall upon them.*

*The old man's hair has grown white, so that his head looks like an almond tree in the blossom.*

*Old men can bear nothing; the lightest thing sits heavily upon them, both on their bodies and on their minds, a little thing sinks and breaks them. Perhaps the grasshopper was some food that was looked upon to be very light of digestion (John Baptist's meat was locusts), but even that lies heavily upon an old man's stomach.*

*[2.] It is probable that Solomon wrote this when he was himself old, and could speak feelingly of the infirmities of age, which perhaps grew the faster upon him for the indulgence he had given himself in sensual pleasures.*

*He has gone to his house of eternity, not only to his house whence he shall never return to this world, but to the house where he must be for ever. This should make us willing to die, that, at death, we must go home; and why should we not long to go to our Father's house?*

*[3.] Death will dissolve the frame of nature and take down the earthly house of this tabernacle, which is elegantly described, v. 6. Then shall the silver cord, by which soul and body were wonderfully fastened together, be loosed, that sacred knot untied, and those old friends be forced to part; then shall the golden bowl, which held the waters of life for us, be broken; then shall the pitcher with which we used to fetch up water, for the constant support of life and the repair of its decays, be broken, even at the fountain, so that it can fetch up no more; and the wheel shall be broken, and disabled to do their office any more. The body shall become like a watch when the spring is broken, the motion of all the wheels is stopped and they all stand still; the machine is taken to pieces; the heart beats no more, nor does the blood circulate. Some apply this to the ornaments and utensils of life; rich people must, at death, leave behind them their clothing and furniture of silver and gold, and poor people their earthen pitchers, and the drawers of water will have their wheel broken.*

*This makes death terrible to the wicked, whose souls go to God as an avenger, and comfortable to the godly, whose souls go to God as a Father, into whose hands they cheerfully commit them.*

*Seek for that satisfaction in God only and in their duty to him which they can never find in the creature*

*I. He repeats his text (v. 8).*

*The words of this book are faithful, and well worthy our acceptance, for,*

*1. They are the words of one that was a convert, a penitent, that could speak by dear bought experience of the vanity of the world and the folly of expecting great things from it. He was Coheleth, one gathered in from his wanderings and gathered home to that God from whom he had revolted.*

*2. They are the words of one that was wise, wiser than any, endued with extraordinary measures of wisdom, famous for it among his neighbours, who all sought unto him to hear his wisdom, and therefore a competent judge of this matter, not only wise as a prince, but wise as a preacher-and preachers have need of wisdom to win souls.*

*3. He was one that made it his business to do good, and to use wisdom aright.*

*Let not the people, the common people, be despised, no, not by the wisest and greatest, as either unworthy or incapable of good knowledge: even those that are well taught have need to be still taught, that they may grow in knowledge.*

*4. He took a great deal of pains and care to do good, designing to teach the people knowledge.*

*(1.) He chose the most profitable way of preaching, by proverbs or short sentences, which would be more easily apprehended and remembered than long and laboured periods.*

*(2.) He did not content himself with a few parables, or wise saying, and repeat them again and again, but he furnished himself with many proverbs.*

*(3.) He sought out such as were surprising and uncommon; he dug into the mines of knowledge, and did not merely pick up what lay on the surface.*

*(4.) He did not deliver his heads and observations at random, as they came to mind, but methodised them, and set them in order that they might appear in more strength and lustre.*

*(5.) He put what he had to say in such a dress as he thought would be most pleasing*

*(6.) That which he wrote for our instruction is of unquestionable certainty, and what we may rely upon.*

*(7.) That which he had other holy men wrote will be of great use and advantage to us, especially being inculcated upon us by the exposition of it, v. 11.*

*They are of use,[1.] To excite us to our duty.*

*[2.] To engage us to persevere in our duty.*

*9. The sacred inspired writings, if we will but make use of them, are sufficient to guide us in the way to true happiness, and we need not, in the pursuit of that, to fatigue ourselves with the search of other writings (v.12).*

*He does not say, Do you hear it, but, Let us hear it; for preachers must themselves be hearers of that word which they preach to others, must hear it as from God; those are teachers by the halves who teach others and not themselves, Rom. ii. 21.*

*1. The root of religion is the fear of God reigning in the heart, a reverence of his majesty, deference to his authority, and a dread of his wrath.*

*Wherever the fear of God is uppermost in the heart, there will be a respect to all his commandments and care to keep them.*

*Note 1. There is a judgment to come, in which every man's eternal state will be finally determined. 2. God himself will be the Judge, God-man will, not only because he has a right to judge, but because he is perfectly fit for it, infinitely wise and just. 3. Every work will then be brought into judgment, will be enquired into and called over again.*

*4. Even secret things, both good and evil, will be brought to light, and brought to account, in the judgment of the great day (Rom. ii. 16); there is no good work, no bad work, hid, but shall then be made manifest.*

Eccl 11: 4

+ Let not much wisdom become a stumbling-block to your soul and a snare before you; but trusting in God, manfully make a beginning upon the way that is filled with blood, lest always you be found wanting and naked of the knowledge of God. For he who is fearful or watches the winds, sows not.

St. Isaac the Syrian

1. The Ascetic Homilies, 6.

Eccl 7: 2

+ Blessed is the man who remembers his departure from this life and severs his ties with this world's delights, for many times over he will receive blessedness at his departure and this blessedness will he not lack. This is the man who is born of God and whose Nurse is the Holy Spirit; he suckles the life-giving nourishment from the Spirit's breast and delights in the odour of His fragrance. But the man who is enchained by worldly affairs, and by the world, and by its consolations, and who loves its intercourse, is bereft of life and I know not what to say concerning him, except to weep with inconsolable cries of lamentation, the sound of which breaks the hearts of those who hear it.

St. Isaac the Syrian

1. The Ascetic Homilies, 15.

Eccl 11: 7

+ Come forth from the passions of the world so that the Light that originates from the Father may come forth to meet you and command the ministers of His mysteries to loose you from your bonds, that you may walk in His footsteps toward the Father.

St. Isaac the Syrian

1. The Ascetic Homilies, 15.

Eccl 11: 7

+ Faith in Christ is living, noetic light.

St. Isaac the Syrian

1. The Book of Grace, 1:1.

Eccl 11: 8

+ Joy that is in God is stronger than this present life. Whoever has found this will not only make no scrutiny of the passions, but will not even give a thought to his own life, nor will he have awareness of anything else, if in truth he has been accounted worthy of this joy.

St. Isaac the Syrian

1. The Ascetic Homilies, 62.

Eccl 11: 7

+ The country of the man who is pure in soul is within him. The sun that shines within him is the light of the Holy Trinity.

St. Isaac the Syrian

1. The Ascetic Homilies, 15.

Eccl 11: 9

+ A man cannot behold the beauty that lies within himself until he dishonours and detests every beautiful thing that is outside of him, and he cannot genuinely set his gaze upon God until he has utterly renounced the world.

St. Isaac the Syrian

1. The Ascetic Homilies, 15.

Eccl 11: 2

+ The ark had its rooms: the Church has many mansions. Eight souls were saved in Noah's ark. And Ecclesiastes bids us "give a portion to seven, yes, even to eight," that is to believe both Testaments.

St. Jerome

1. The dialogue against the Luciferians, 22.

Eccl 11: 19

+ This is said by Christ in the person of humanity.

St. Jerome

1. Against the Pelagians, 2.

11:2

+ In Ecclesiastes it is said, with allusion to the two covenants, "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight"

St. Augustine

1. Letter 105:23.

Eccl. 11: 10

+ Put sorrow far from your flesh, and sadness from your thoughts; save only that for your sin you shouldst be constant in sadness.

St. Ephram the Syrian

1. On admonition and Repentance, 15.

11:2

+ Thus the veneration paid to the number Seven gave rise also to the veneration of Pentecost. For seven being multiplied by seven generates fifty all but one day, which we borrow from the world to come, at once the Eighth and the first, or rather one and indestructible. For the present sabbatism of our souls can find its cessation there, that a portion may be given to seven and also to eight (so some of our predecessors have interpreted this passage of Solomon).

St. Gregory Nazianzen

1. On Pentecost, 2.

11:28

+ For if, as it seems to me as well as to Solomon, we must "judge none blessed before his death," and it is uncertain "what a day may bring forth," since our life here below has many turnings, and the body of our humiliation is ever rising, falling and changing; surely he, who without fault has almost drained the cup of life, and nearly reached the haven of the common sea of existence is more secure, and therefore more enviable, than one who has yet a long voyage before him.

St. Gregory Nazianzen

1. On his Father's Silence, 3.

11:9

This coming of the Lord, and the end of the world, were known to the Preacher; who says, Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and the rest;

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

1. Catech. Lect., 15:20.

Eccl 11

+ .Also give liberally, and give a portion of your means to many; for though who knows not what the coming day does. The clouds, again, do not keep back their plenteous rains, but discharge their showers

upon the earth. Nor does a tree stand for ever; but even though men may spare it shall be overturned by the wind at any rate.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

C. Some Lessons on Overcautiousness. 11: 1- 8.

+ Since the future is always unpredictable, even "the best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft a-gley [go oft astray]." Therefore a man must be willing to take risks if he is to achieve any sort of success. The person who waits until he is certain will wait forever.

### 1. Cast your bread upon the waters.

+ There is no certain explanation of this proverb. Traditionally, it has been seen as an exhortation to liberality or charity, which one is to **cast** (lit., *send forth*) before others without any immediate realization of gain, but which will return someday to reward its giver (cf. Lk 16: 9). But perhaps the verse is to be read, "Cast your bread upon the waters (strange though this may seem), yet you may find it after many days." Read thus, it refers to the uncertainty of this life, in which even an apparently unwise action may yield reward.

### 2. Give a portion to seven.

+ Here is another emphasis on the uncertainty of life's outcomes even when wisdom is used. Translate, "Give a portion to seven, or even to eight (that is, be wise in your investments); yet you do not know what evil may happen on earth."

### 3. If the clouds be full of rain.

+ This is at the heart of the author's argument, and seems to be part of verses 4-6. It is an argument against overcautiousness, in the light of nature's unpredictability and man's inability to change it.

### 4. He that observes the wind.

+ The ideal time for action is always uncertain, but one must act sometime if work is to be accomplished. If one worries about storms before he sows or reaps, no crops will be grown or gathered.

D. Some Lessons on Enjoying Life. 11: 9 - 12: 8.

+ Make the most of youthful days, when the pleasures of life can still be enjoyed, instead of waiting until old age, when vitality is gone. Yet God's way, not debauchery, must be the guide to pleasure.

### 9. God will bring you into judgment.

+ The author recommends intelligent pleasure. Satisfy your heart's desires, he says, but remember that God has certain requirements for living, and that he punishes excess and abuse of his will. This thought is continued in verse 10 in the words **remove sorrow** and **put away evil**.

11:2

In accordance with that saying of Ecclesiastes, which, although it has another and a mystical sense, is not misapplied to this, by which we are charged to give to both days-that is, to the seventh and eighth equally- the same share of the service, as it says: "Give a portion to these seven and also to these eight."

St. John Cassian

1. The institutes, 3:9.

11:2

+ It is aptly said of them, "Give a portion to those seven and also to those eight," because men who have been nurtured in the law and crowned through grace may obtain a share in grace through either number. They are seven as in the days of the week, eight as in the Gospel, with the devout mother added for the increase in suffering, for in such sons she brought to birth and bore an unblemished model of holiness.

St. Ambrose

1. Jacob and the Happy Life, 11:2. (Fathers of the Church)

11:1

"Cast your bread on the face of the water." For the bread of heaven is there, where the water of grace is; it is right that those from whose belly rivers of living water flow (John 7:88) should receive the support of the Word and a nurture of a mystical kind. Likewise, also, this living bread is there (John 6:51), where the water of tears and the weeping of repentance are. For thus it is written, "They set out in weeping, and I will bring them back in consolation" Jer. 31:9. Therefore, blessed are they whose bread is tears, for they have deserved to laugh, because "you who weep are blessed" Luke 6:21

St. Ambrose

1. The Prayer of Job and David, 4:2:7. (Fathers of the Church).

(Ecclesiastes 11)

(1) Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. (2) Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. (3) If the clouds be full of rain, they empty {themselves} upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. (4) He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. (5) As thou knowest not what {is} the way of the spirit, {nor} how the bones {do grow} in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. (6) In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both {shall be} alike good. (7) Truly the light {is} sweet, and a pleasant {thing it is} for the eyes to behold the sun: (8) But if a man live many years, {and} rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh {is} vanity. (9) Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these {things} God will bring thee into judgment. (10) Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.

Eccl 12: 7

+ Be at peace, dear Blaesilla, in full assurance that your garments are always white. For yours is the purity of an everlasting virginity.

St. Jerome

1. Letter 39:1.

Eccl 12: 13

+ In his sight the vile person is condemned, but he honors them that fear the Lord: (Ps. xv. 4) the fear of the Lord excels every thing; fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole of man: (Eccl 12: 13); you be not envious of evil men; (Ps. 49: 16) all flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass;" (Isa. 40: 7).

St. John Chrysostom

1. In 1 Cor. Hom. 29:9

Eccl. 12: 11

+ For also, according to the Preacher, all the Scriptures are "words of the wise like goads, and as nails firmly fixed which were given by agreement from one shepherd;" and there is nothing superfluous in them. But the Word is the one Shepherd of things rational which may have an appearance of discord to those who have not ears to hear, but are truly at perfect concord.

Origen

1. Comm. on St. Matthew, book 2.

And likewise it is a pleasant thing to endeavor to understand and exhibit the fact of the concord of the two covenants,\_\_\_ of the one before the bodily advent of the Savior and of the new covenant; for among those things in which the two covenants are at concord so that there is no discord between them would be found prayers, to the effect that about anything whatever they shall ask it shall be done to them from the Father in heaven. And if also you desire the third that unites the two, do not hesitate to say that it is the Holy Spirit, since "the words of the wise," whether they be of those before the advent, or at the time of the advent, or after it, "are as goads, and as nails firmly fixed, which were given by agreement from one shepherd."

Origen

1. Comm. on St. Matthew, book 2:14:4.

Eccl 12

+ Moreover, it is right that you should fear God while you are yet young, before you give yourself over to evil things, and before the great and terrible day of God come, when the sun shall no longer shine, neither the moon, nor the rest of the stars, but when in that storm and commotion of all things, the powers above shall be moved, that is, the angels who guard the world; so that the mighty men shall fail, and the women shall cease their labors, and shall flee into the dark places of their dwellings, and shall have all the doors shut.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

+ And the good man shall depart with rejoicing to his own everlasting habitation; but the vile shall fill all their places with wailing, and neither silver laid up in store, nor proved gold, shall be of use any more.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

+ And I know that the mind is no less quickened and stimulated by the precepts of the wise, than the body is wont to be when the goad is applied, or a nail is fastened in it. And some will render again those wise lessons which they have received from one good pastor and teacher, as if all with one mouth and in mutual concord set forth in larger detail the truths committed to them. But in many words there is no profit.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

1. A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

12: 1. Remember now you Creator.

+ Perhaps better translated, *Remember then your Creator*, for the author seems to be summing up what he has just said.

2. While the sun.

+ The imagery in this and the following verses has led to a variety of interpretations, but the majority of commentators take the passage as an extension of the author's advice to his readers to enjoy their youth. These verses are probably, then, an allegory on the decay of old age and the approach of death. The figures of the sun, the light, the moon, the stars, and the clouds depict old age as a storm that gathers and obscures the light and the heavenly bodies, so that there is no warmth or brightness, that is, no enjoyment of life.

3. keepers of the house.

+ Here the writer likens man's body to a house. The keepers are the hands and arms, the strong men are the legs that become weak, the grinders are the few teeth that have not fallen out, and those that look out of the windows are the eyes that have grown dim.

4. The doors shall be shut.

+ The form of the word doors, in the Hebrew, is dual, suggesting therefore "two doors" or "double doors" probably referring to the ears that have grown deaf. The sound of the grinding refers to the toothless chewing. An old man's inability to sleep is illustrated by the fact that he rises up at the voice of the bird. The daughters of music are probably musical notes which are heard with difficulty because of the man's impaired hearing.

5. That which is high.

+ This is probably a reference to the shortness of breath which makes any ascent difficult. The man has fears . . . in the way because he cannot trust his frail legs when he must wend his way through the narrow, crowded streets. The almond tree is perhaps a picture of grey hair. For although the blossoms of the almond are actually pinkish, when seen from some distance a tree in full blossom has a snowy white appearance. The grasshopper shall be a burden is better translated, *shall drag itself along*, a picture of the wizened old man who can scarcely move his stiff limbs and bent back. The phrase desire shall fail is literally, *the caper berry shall fail*; this berry was an aphrodisiac which stimulated sexual or physical appetite.

6. The silver cord.

+ The figure represents an expensive gold and silver lamp hung from the ceiling. Its chain is snapped so that it comes crashing to the ground. The oil spills out of the broken bowl, and the light is gone. Light is the symbol of life. The pitcher and the wheel continue the same idea, but from the symbolism of the drawing of water. The pitcher is broken, and so it can contain no more water, that is, life; the wheel is broken, so that water can no longer be drawn.

7. Then shall the dust return to the earth.

+ Here sketched in bold relief is the common thought of what happens after death: the body returns to that from which it was made (cf. 3: 20; Gen 2: 7); and the spirit, that is, the breath of life, returns to its source (cf. Gen 2: 7; Job 34: 14, 15; Ps. 104: 29). Man ceases to exist as man.

IX. Epilogue. 12: 9- 14.

A. The Aim of the Preacher. 12: 9, 10.

+ The purpose of his wisdom, says the author, has been to communicate it to others. He has attempted to do this effectively and frankly.

10. To find out acceptable words.

+ Better read with the RSV, *pleasing words*. The author sought to make his teaching interesting so as to gain the attention of his hearers, but he never sacrificed frankness or truth in order to keep his audience.

B. A Commendation of His Teachings. 12: 11, 12.

+ Claiming to have received his teachings by direct revelation from God, the author states that therefore his hearers do not need to go elsewhere for truth.

11. As nails fastened.

+ These teachings are truths to which one can affix his life securely. The masters of assemblies. The school of wise men. By the words one shepherd the author seems to indicate not some teacher, such as Solomon, but rather God, who is often called by such a title (cf. Ps. 23: 1). He implies, thereby, that his teachings are God-given.

12. Of Making many Books there is no end.

+ Speaking to the general reader as my son, the author warns against useless reading and studying. They reader should concentrate on the author's teachings, for they are divinely inspired.

C. The Conclusion of the Matter. 12: 13, 14.

+ Taking everything into consideration-the experiences and the mental turmoil through which the author which the author has gone-the highest good in life is a proper reverence of God in all of life.

13. Fear God.

+ The foundation of life is fear of God, that is, reverence toward him, a proper acknowledgment of who he is, and what he demands of men in everyday life (cf. Prov 15: 33; Isa 11: 3).

14. Every work into judgment.

+ Both man's work and his secret thing, that is, his thoughts, will be judged by God. The heart attitude is important in God's sight, as well as one's public actions.

In reality the author says nothing more in these last verses than he has been saying throughout the book-enjoy life while you can be accomplished only by fearing God; for God is in control, and he can be expected to reward righteousness and punish evil.

The author of Ecclesiastes has often been called a pessimist, but this is not necessarily so. He longed to know more of the answers to the puzzles of life than he had thus far learned, but God in His providence did not choose to disclose them. Yet the author had discovered that life apart from God is futile. A man attains to the 'good life' by reverencing God. That this writer's 'highest good' was primarily physical happiness should not cloud the issue. He lived on the plane of the Physical and sensuous; he did not know the higher things. But he never gave up his faith in God. The preacher learned to live with life's paradoxes, having discovered, as did Job, that life will not wait upon the solution of all its problems.

12:13, 14

+ "Fear God," he says, "and keep His commandments: for this is every man." For whosoever has real existence, is this, is a keeper of God's commandments; and he who is not this, is nothing. For so long as

he remains in the likeness of vanity, he is not renewed in the image of the truth. "For God shall bring into judgment every work," "whether it be good or whether it be evil, with every despised person,"-that is, with every man who here seems despicable, and is therefore not considered; for God sees even him, and does not despise him nor pass him over in His judgment.

St. Augustine

1. City of God 20:3.

12:13

+ "Fear," said he, "the Lord, and keep His commandments. For if you keep the commandments of God, you will be powerful in every action, and every one of your actions will be incomparable. For, fearing the Lord, you will do all things well. This is the fear which you ought to have, that you may be saved. But fear not the devil; for, fearing the Lord, you will have dominion over the devil, for there is no power in him.

Hermas

1. The Shepherd, 2, Comm. 7.

12:7

+ Just as the body, therefore, does not return to the human beings by whom it was made but to the earth from which it was formed for the first man, so the spirit does not return to the parents by whom it has been transmitted but to God by whom it was given to the first human body.

The text cited above, then, clearly teaches us that God made from nothing the soul which He gave to the first man, and did not form it from some creature already made, as in the case of the body made from the earth. Hence, when the soul returns, it can only return to the Author of its being who gave it, not to some creature from which it was made, as the body to the earth. For there is no creature from which it was made, because it was made from nothing; and hence, in returning it returns to its Maker, by whom it was made from nothing. Not all indeed return, since there are those of whom it is said, a wind that goes and returns not. (Ps.77:39)

St. Augustine

1. The Literal meaning of Genesis, 9:15, 16. (ACW)

(Ecclesiastes 12)

(1) Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; (2) While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: (3) In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, (4) And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low; (5) Also {when} they shall be afraid of {that which is} high, and fears {shall be} in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: (6) Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. (7) Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. (8) Vanity of vanities, says the preacher; all {is} vanity. (9) And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, {and} set in order many proverbs. (10) The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and {that which was} written {was} upright, {even} words of truth. (11) The words of the wise {are} as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, {which} are given from one shepherd. (12) And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books {there is} no end; and much study {is} a weariness of the flesh. (13) Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this {is} the whole {duty} of man. (14) For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether {it be} good or whether {it be} evil.