

## QOHELET AND ENOCHISM: A CRITICAL RELATIONSHIP

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When we speak about the relationship between biblical wisdom and Enochism we cannot overlook the book of Qohelet. According to my knowledge, apart from a very interesting study by Liliana Ubigli published in *Enoch* in 1988, few scholars of Qohelet have studied this problem; only the German scholar Diethelm Michel wrote something about Qohelet and apocalyptic tradition, but he was strongly criticised by Franz Backhaus. An article on this subject was written in 1998 by T. Kruger in the Congress Volume of Louvain, *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, related to apocalyptic and not directly to Enochism.<sup>1</sup>

The reasons for this silence are manifold: first of all, the date of the book of Qohelet. If we accept a date between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, as presupposed by the recent commentary of Seow, in the Anchor Bible, it would be impossible to speak about a real and strong relationship between Qohelet and Enochism. However if we assume a date around the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, within the context of Ptolemaic Judea, as I think is quite certain, things change radically.<sup>2</sup>

A second reason is that scholars were too often worried about searching for the sources of Qohelet. Is this a book influenced by the wisdom tradition of the Ancient Middle East, by the Poem of Gilgamesh, or by Egyptian literature? Or is Qohelet a book strongly influenced by Greek culture? I will not offer a complete survey of this very debated problem that one can find in the major commentaries on Qohelet. I only would like to point out that the debate concerning the sources of Qohelet has made us unmindful of the real source of the book: the Bible itself,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. L. Rosso Ubigli, "Qohelet di fronte all'apocalittica", *Enoch* 5 (1986) 209-233; D. Michel, *Untersuchungen zur Eigenart des Buches Qohelet*, BZAW 183, Berlin 1989, 126-137; F. Backhaus, "Denn Zeit und Zufall trifft sie alle". *Studien zur Komposition und zum Gottesbild im Buch Qohelet*, BBB 83, Frankfurt a. M. 1993, 398-411; T. Kruger, "Qohelet und die frühe Apokalyptik. Eine Auslegung von Koh 3,16-21", in A. Schoors (ed.), *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, BETL 136, Peeters, Leuven 1998.

<sup>2</sup> For an earlier date (V-IV cent.) cf. C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, New York 1997, 21-36; see the discussion in R. Gordis, *Kohelet. The man and his world*, New York 1968, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, 109; N. Lohfink, "melek, shallit und môshel bei Kohelet und die Abfassungszeit des Buches", *Bib* 62 (1981), 535-543; Michel, *Untersuchungen*, 126-137; J. Vilchez Lindez, *Ecclesiastés o Qohelet*, Estella 1994, 83; Backhaus, "Zeit und Zufall", 420.

or, better, all the Hebrew tradition before Qohelet. Qohelet is a book which fits perfectly within the Judaism of its time, which is not a monolithic Judaism, as many have thought in the recent past. If we understand this point, we cannot avoid a confrontation with an important aspect of the Judaism of that time: the Enochic tradition.

A third reason is one of the biggest problem of Qohelet: the presence of contradictions inside the book itself. Michael Fox, in his most recent work on this subject, *Time to Tear Down and Time to Build Up. A Rereading of Qohelet*, which is in fact the second edition of the famous *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, claims that we must not try to resolve the contradictions, inside the book of Qohelet.<sup>3</sup> I am strongly persuaded however that the real key to enter inside this book is trying to discover the presence of quotations, or at least of allusions, to texts and themes often taken from the traditional Israelite wisdom.<sup>4</sup>

I am convinced that inside the book we can find a strong attack against Zadokite Judaism, but also a critical and even stronger opposition to the first Enochic tradition. In my presentation I will try to show some examples taken from three texts of Qohelet in which we can find a quotation of Enochic and also apocalyptic themes, together with a strong critical view of them.

The best point where one can find an evident difference between the book of Qohelet and the Enochic tradition has already been shown by Liliana Ubigli, as well as by Paolo Sacchi, and I think it is not necessary to speak about it in detail. In various texts of Qohelet we find a strong denial of the afterlife. In Qoh 3:17-21 the mention of *rūah*, the 'spirit' of human beings which is no different from the 'spirit' of animals, must surely be understood as a polemical reference to the belief in the survival of the soul typical of the Book of Enoch: "who knows if the life-breath of the children of man goes upward and the life-breath of beasts goes earthward?". We cannot explain this text of Qohelet without reading 1Hen 22, where we find one of the first attempts to speak about the destiny of souls. Qohelet is reacting against a new idea that for him is nonsense.

I - "*Nothing new under the sun*" (Qoh 1:9).

I would like to start from a famous statement of the book of Qohelet: "there is nothing new under the sun!" (Qoh 1:9) This verse is a part of the opening poem (1:4-11), where Qohelet makes his first observations about natural phenomena: the

<sup>3</sup> Cf. M. Fox, *Qohelet and his Contradictions*, JStOT Supp. 71. Sheffield 1989. Id., *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up. A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, Grand Rapids (MI) 1999. See also "The inner-Structure of Qohelet's Thought", in Schoors, *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, 225-238.

<sup>4</sup> This is a very debated problem: see R. Gordis, "Quotations in Wisdom Literature", in J.L. Crenshaw (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, New York 1976, 220-244 and R.N. Whybray, "The Identification and Use of Quotations in Ecclesiastes", J.A. Emerton (ed.), *Congress Volume* (Wien 1980), Supp. VT 33 (Leiden 1981) 435-451. See also Michel, *Untersuchungen*, 27-33.

passing of generations on a never changing earth, the sunrise and the sunset, the flowing of water and the blowing of wind; everything is moving, but nothing changes. But the real problem is the impossibility, for human beings, to grasp the meaning of reality: words grow weary, says the difficult verse 8, that is to say, every human speech is limited, is left half done.<sup>5</sup>

For many years, scholars searched for the possible sources of this statement, often quoting Greek authors, which is possible, no doubt: “omnia transeunt et revertuntur: nihil novi video”, as Seneca said.<sup>6</sup> However it is not difficult to understand this statement as a criticism of the prophetic view of history, as reflected in the text of the second and the third part of the book of Isaiah: “See, I am doing something new, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isa 43:19; see also Isa 65:17). Surely the adjective *hadash* used by Qohelet in this verse is not one of his favourite words; on the other hand *hadash* is very common in the cultic and prophetic vocabulary. *Hadash* often has a strong theological meaning, pointing out something done by God that is unexpected and extraordinary.<sup>7</sup>

For Qohelet, nothing is new; in the light of experience, man cannot discover in this world anything new. The difference between this and the prophetic language is very strong, but we must consider their different points of view: Qohelet is speaking in the light of human experience (cf. Qoh 1:13-18); prophets are speaking in the light of a revealed word of God. Qohelet's epistemology knows only a kind of empirical knowledge, as we will see further. In this context, the strong interest in knowledge is an important connecting point between the book of Qohelet and the first Enochic tradition, as shown in the article by Liliana Ubigli quoted above.

In addition to this, the texts of Isa 65:17 and 66:22 reflect a faith in an extraordinary intervention of God that will create a new world; this idea is not far from analogous ideas founded in the early Enochic tradition. A widespread concept of the whole Enochic tradition is the expectation of an eschatological intervention of God which will change the status of this present world radically – a coming judgement that will deal with human sin and righteousness and the angelic rebellions; this point needs no further explanation.

In the book of Qohelet things are totally different. The first part of verse 9 says: “What has happened, will happen again; what has been done, will be done again”. There is no difference, for Qohelet, between past and future. In this sense we can understand better the statement of Qoh 7:10: “Do not say: How is it that former times were better than these? For it is not in wisdom that you ask about this”. Here, there is no difference between past and present. Qohelet does not accept the degenerative view of history typical of the Book of Enoch and of the apocalyptic

<sup>5</sup> I understand the Hebrew *yǝḡē'im* in an active sense, as “grow weary”.

<sup>6</sup> *Epist.* 24. Cf. F. Vattioni, “Niente di nuovo sotto il sole”, *RivB* 7 (1959) 64-67.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. C. Westermann, “ḥadaš, nuovo”, *DTAT* 1, 456.

literature; Qohelet focuses all his attention on present life.

Going back again to the last part of verse 9, "nothing new under the sun", we must pay attention to the future of creation, as shown in the earliest parts of the Book of Enoch. In chapters 17-22 of the Book of the Watchers, the angel shows Enoch the hidden phenomena of the created world that reveal the mystery of the future intervention of God. In the more recent text of Hen 2:1-5:4 Enoch is invited to investigate the various aspects of creation in order to understand how creation itself announces the judgement of God. The works of God do not change; in creation there are laws that anticipate the judgement of God for the chosen ones; the cosmic order guarantees God's order.

To be exact a specific idea of a new creation is lacking in the Book of the Watchers, but one can find it in the Book of Astronomy.<sup>8</sup> This Book was composed perhaps at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, and so it would be contemporary to Qohelet; this would be the period in which a tradition concerning the new creation was developed in Israel, inside the Enochic movement. The Book of Astronomy begins with a strong announcement relating to a new creation which is based on the order of the actual creation:

The Book of the Itinerary of the Luminaries of Heaven: the position of each and every one, in respect to their ranks, in respect to their authorities and in respect to their seasons; each one according to their names and their places of origin and their months, which Uriel, the holy angel who was with me, and who (also) is their guide, showed me - just as he showed me all their treatises and the nature of the years of the world unto eternity, till the new creation which abides forever is created.

The prophetic and apocalyptic theme of the "new things" appears also in writings of Qumran: "For you have shown them what they had never seen, (overcoming) what was there from old and creating new things, demolishing ancient things and erecting what would exist for ever" (1QH V,17).

I would like to point out that in the Enochic tradition the idea of a new creation is another attack against Zadokite Judaism. According to the priestly tradition, God created everything beautiful (so Gen 1). The concept of a new creation means, on the contrary, that there is something wrong with the old creation. This is an idea that Zadokite Judaism could not accept without denying the very roots of its own theology. The above-mentioned beginning of the Book of Astronomy, however, is a clear example of the difference between the way of thinking of Qohelet and the view of the Enochic tradition: according to Qohelet, the observation of natural phenomena does not reveal the existence of a new creation; furthermore, as we will show, he does not even believe in a supernatural guide, an angel who could reveal to him the heavenly mysteries.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. R.A. Argall, *1 Enoch and Sirach. A Comparative Literary and Conceptual Analysis of the Themes of Revelation, Creation and Judgement*, Atlanta (GA) 1995; see also M. Black, "The new Creation in 1 Enoch", in R.W.A. McKinney (ed.), *Creation, Christ and Culture*, Fs. T.F. Torrance, Edinburgh 1976, 13-21.

In reference to Qoh 1:4-11 and, more generally, to the whole book, many scholars think that Qohelet shares with the Book of Enoch a deterministic view of the world and of history,<sup>9</sup> even if the determinism of Qohelet would be more nuanced compared to the view of the Book of Astronomy, where we read that every human action is already written on the “heavenly tablets” (1Hen 82:1). I do not agree that Qohelet has such a deterministic view of the world and of human life; his knowledge, as shown above, is based only on experience and it is limited only to what he can see and observe “under the sun”. Qohelet knows that God made everything beautiful at its appointed time (3:11) and so he understands that there is an order of creation and of history; but for men it is impossible to understand this order fully. As Qoh 3:11 also says, God put in men’s heart an *’ôlam*, that is not ‘eternity’, as many think, but something like a “mystery of time” (see the *scriptio defectiva*, *’ôlam*, which suggests a possible word-play on *’elem*).<sup>10</sup> Denying the possibility of a new creation and recalling the text of Gen 1, Qohelet is paradoxically closer to the priestly tradition than to the Enochic one. Qohelet, however, is convinced that man cannot fully understand God’s action in the world and in history.

In the opening poem, from verse 4 to verse 11, Qohelet tries to demonstrate the first statement of his book: everything is a *hebel*, a puff of air (verse 2), and there is no *yitrôn*, no net gain for human beings (verse 3). The cosmic elements (sun, water, wind) move with a fixed pattern which is, however, meaningless, as human history is also meaningless. But verse 8 again reveals the real problem: human knowledge is limited and no human speech can grasp the sense of reality. This is the reason for which everything is a puff of air. We are facing here an epistemological problem, which is one of the main concerns of Qohelet, a reflection on the limits of human knowledge.

Both Qohelet and early Enochic tradition share the idea of an order of the creation that man can observe from the creation itself; but Qohelet is very far from the Enochic way of thinking. Human beings can only catch a glimpse of the mystery of time, of the order of creation. They cannot see any new creation, any divine judgement. Qohelet does not want to deny divine intervention in nature and in history; he is firmly convinced that God is continually working in this world (cf. Qoh 11:5). Qohelet wants to avoid such dangerous illusions typical of the apocalyptic way of thinking; this is why he stresses the fact that “there is nothing new under the sun”.

## II - God in heaven, you on earth; a matter of dreams and visions (Qoh 4:17-5:6).

Let us look now at another text of Qohelet, from which we can understand

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ubigli, “Qohelet e l’apocalittica”, 217, n. 28.

<sup>10</sup> See my study: L. Mazzinghi, “Il mistero del tempo: sul termine *’ôlam* in Qoh 3,11”, in R. Fabris (ed.), *Initium sapientiae. Scritti in onore di Franco Festorazzi nel suo 70° compleanno*, Bologna 2000; 147-161.

even better the strong opposition that Qohelet manifests against the first Enochic tradition: Qoh 4:17-5:6, a strong attack against the cultic tradition of Israel. Qohelet warns his listeners about a real danger: long prayers, sacrifices and vows are useless if you think that God will hear you because of them.

Two elements are very important for our purpose. The first is the statement of Qoh 5:1: "God is in heaven, and you are on earth"; that is to say, in the context of the whole passage, do not pray too long, do not expect to be heard because of your prayers. I suggest that this statement, which is *per se* traditional for the Israelite faith, has to be understood as a reaction against a typical characteristic not only of the Enochic tradition, but, more generally, of what we can call the apocalyptic tradition. Also according to Qohelet the problem of evil is certainly a central concern. Qohelet strongly refuses the rewarding perspective typical of Deuteronomistic theology (we may take Qoh 7:15-18 as an exemplary text).<sup>11</sup> In so doing, he denies at its root the existence of a covenant theology. According to Qohelet one cannot say that the just ones are rewarded and the wicked ones are punished. On the other hand, Qohelet does not take into consideration a "middle world", that is, angelic or demonic beings to whom one may attribute responsibility for all the evil present in this world, which is the way chosen by the Book of the Watchers. According to Qohelet, evil is an unfathomable mystery and constitutes, together with death, one of the most evident absurdities in life. In Qoh 5:1, within a critical view of the cultic traditions, Qohelet says that "God is in heaven and you are on earth"; one cannot speak about any connection between the heavenly realm and the earth.

We are approaching a second, important, element. Verse 2, together with verse 6, stresses this idea: "For the dream comes with much business, and the fool's voice with much talk"; and again the difficult verse 6 is an attack against dreams, opposed to the fearing of God.<sup>12</sup> Why? We know very well that, during the Persian era, interest in history decreased in Israel and there arose the idea that a true comprehension of cosmic order and of world history can come only from a divine revelation. A favourite way of this kind of revelation, especially for the early Enochic tradition and more generally for the apocalyptic worldview, is represented by dreams and visions. It is not necessary to explain here the importance of dreams and visions in the Book of the Watchers (see chapters 1 and 12) and later on in the whole Enochic and apocalyptic tradition, such as in the Book of Dreams or in the book of Daniel (see chapters 2, 4, 7).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See L. Mazzinghi, "Qohelet tra giudaismo ed ellenismo: un'indagine a partire da Qoh 7,15-18", in G. Bellia - A. Passaro (eds.), *Il libro del Qohelet. Tradizione, redazione, teologia*, Milano 2001, 90-116.

<sup>12</sup> For the difficult verse 6, see a good survey in C.F. Whytley, *Kohelet. His Language and Thought*, BZAW 148, Berlin-New York 1979, 49-50.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. in particular 1Hen 83:1; 85:5; 89:7 and 1Hen 12:8; 14:1; for this last text see also 4QEn<sup>c</sup> 1vi10.

Already the book of Job marks a first reaction of wisdom circles against this kind of knowledge. We may remember the claim of Eliphaz, who wanted to base his knowledge on a direct revelation given to him by a nocturnal dream (Job 4:13). The author of the Book of Job does not know any other way of knowledge than the way of experience (see Job 21 and 24), the same way followed by Qohelet. Only later wisdom books (the Book of Sirach, but especially the Book of Wisdom) will speak about dreams in a more positive way.<sup>14</sup>

The text of Qohelet 5:1-2 has to be understood within this polemical context, in the light of the first Enochic tradition. Both Qohelet and Enochism share the same interest in the problem of evil and in the problem of knowledge and, especially, they agree that neither the Mosaic Law nor the Temple and the cult are able to guarantee salvation to human beings. But, according to Qohelet, the solution is completely different: for him “God is in heaven, and you are on earth”; it is not possible for man to bind these two levels together by speaking, for example, of a sin of angels. In particular, dreams and visions are useless; they are only “many words and many puffs of air” (5:6). The one who wants to fear God has no need of such ways of revelation.

Studying the text of Qoh 4:17-5:6 from the point of view of a possible relationship with Enochism, I would like to add a small remark about a difficult verse, namely verse 5; the Masoretic text reads: “and do not say in front of *hammalak* that this is a *shegagah*”. We know that *shegagah* is a cultic word used to indicate the sin of inadvertence. Concerning the word *malak*, we can note that the ancient translators clearly did not understand it. The Septuagint refers it to God himself; the Targum thinks that *malak* is the angel of the judgement; Jerome, as a Christian author, refers to the guardian angel. Modern scholars, basing themselves on the cultic value of *shegagah* and on the text of Mal 2:7, see it as referring to the priest.<sup>15</sup> Qohelet would be speaking about the Israelite believers who wish to avoid fulfilling their vows and afterward hope to justify themselves, telling to the priest in charge in the Temple: “we sinned only by inadvertence”.

A suggestion by A. Rofé leads me to another possible conclusion, which is interesting for our purpose. Rofé explains the first part of the statement, “Do not say” (*al tomar*) as a typical wisdom warning, followed by an explicative *kî* and introducing an opposite opinion, as for example in Qoh 7:10 (see also Prov 20:22; 2 Sam 13:32; Jer 1:7 and, in a more recent text, Sir 15:11-12). Do not say what?

<sup>14</sup> See E.L. Ehrlich, *Der Traum im Alten Testament*, Berlin 1953, in particular pp. 137-149 (dream as divine revelation) and 155-170 (a critic of dreams in Scriptures). See also A. Resch, *Der Traum im Heilsplan Gottes. Deutung und Bedeutung des Traums im Alten Testament*, Freiburg i.B. 1964; J.M. Husser, *Dreams and dream narrative in the Biblical World*, Sheffield 1999, especially pp. 155-166 (wisdom and dreams). Of great interest is P. Sacchi, “La conoscenza presso gli Ebrei da Amos all’essenismo”, in *L’apocalittica giudaica e la sua storia*, Brescia 1990, 220-258.

<sup>15</sup> For a traditional interpretation in a modern author, see for example Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 196.

Rofé suggests to vocalise the following expression in a different way: therefore not *lipne hammalak*, but *lepanay hammalak*: “do not say: ‘before me there’s an angel!’, because it is a nonsense, a *shegagah*, a mistake”.<sup>16</sup> We must note that in Qoh 10:5 *shegagah* is used without a cultic meaning, as in other texts (see Num 35:11.15; cf. Josh 20:3.9; *Pirqê Abôt* 4:13). The present vocalization would be an attempt of pharisaic scribes to attenuate the anti-angelic tone of Qohelet. If we could prove the validity of the suggestion of A. Rofé, we could strengthen the view that Qoh 4:17-5:6 has a strong critical position against Enochism: no revelations by dreams, no possibility of connecting the world of God with the world of human beings, no angels who can guide men to a superior revelation.

### III - *The end of the world or your end? (Qoh 12:1-8).*

I would like to take a last example from the final poem of the book which shows us the strong relationship between Qohelet and the first Enochic tradition, and, at the same time, the relationship with the apocalyptic worldview as presented in the book of Joel and in both parts of the book of Zechariah.

I will not speak in detail about this magnificent poem, Qoh 11:7-12:8, which is not an allegorical description of old age, as shown by the early rabbinic tradition and as accepted by many modern scholars. The poem is mainly an invitation to enjoy life before the perspective of death. Verse 9 - which is *not* an interpolation as claimed by the majority of the scholars - says that God will judge you: at the end of your short life death will be God’s judgement on you. If you were not able to catch the joy that God offered you during your whole life, you will discover too late that death is such a terrible thing, the end of all your illusions. The third part of the poem (12:1-8), in particular, binds together the invitation to remember your Creator and God (verses 1 and 7) and a very realistic description of your death, which is not allegorical, but rather highly symbolical.

I would like to point out only the first two verses, which are of peculiar interest for our study: “And remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the day of unpleasantness arrives, and the years of which you will say: ‘I take no pleasure in them’. Before the sun and the light grow dark, and the moon and the stars, and the clouds return after the rain...”<sup>17</sup>

Verse two is an interesting recollection of the initial poem (1:4-11): in nature, the sun rises and the sun sets; after light, darkness comes and after darkness, light comes again. For human beings, for you, this does not happen: when darkness comes, light will not come again. The image of darkness as a symbol of human death is not unusual in the Bible (Isa 5:30; 13:10; Amos 5:8; 8:9; Mic 3:6; Job 3:9

<sup>16</sup> See A. Rofé, “‘The Angel’ in Qoh 5,5 in the Light of a Wisdom Dialogue Formula”, *Eretz Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies*. H.L. Ginsberg Volume 14 (Jerusalem 1978) 105-109 (in Hebrew) and, more recently, “La formula sapienziale ‘non dire’ e l’angelo di Qoh 5,5”, in *Il libro del Qohelet* (eds. Bellia - Passaro), 217-226.

<sup>17</sup> Translation of M. Fox.



and in the New Testament, Mark 13:24; Matthew 24:9; Luke 23:45), especially in prophetic texts such as Is 13:10, where with the darkening of the sun and of the moon we find also the stars and, in Ezek 32:7, even the clouds. Two passages of the Book of Joel, dated perhaps between the fourth and the third century BCE,<sup>18</sup> are of major interest: in Joel 2:2 the Day of the Lord is described as a day of darkness, a day in which “the sun and the moon are darkened and the stars withhold their brightness” (so Joel 2:10).

In the second part of the Book of Zechariah, dated probably at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. BCE, we find another interesting text: “There shall be one continuous day, known to the Lord; not day and night, for in the evening time there shall be light” (Zech 14:7); the prophet is rereading the text of Gen 1:2 and he describes the day of salvation as a return to the origins, when God created the light and separated it from darkness; so will the day of the Lord be, a day of light with no more darkness.<sup>19</sup> The idea that darkness will disappear before light in the eschatological times will be found as a common idea both in the apocalyptic writings and in the Qumran texts.<sup>20</sup> In the Book of the Watchers darkness is not only created by God (as in Isa 45:7), but it is also the place of punishment for the rebel angels (1Hen 10:4). Furthermore, in chapter 80 of the Book of Astronomy, within the discussion about calendars, we read that the normal order of the moon, of the sun and of the stars is changed in relation to the sin of human beings; this idea is close to what we can read in chapters 2-5, that are also related to the observation of the cosmic order.

We may conclude that in 12:2 Qohelet uses images taken from apocalyptic language but he applies all these images not to an eschatological Day of the Lord, as both Joel and Zechariah did, and not to a judgement of God on the sinners, caused by the sin of angels, as we read in the Book of Watcher and in the Book of Astronomy. Only in this sense we can accept the observation of M. Fox, “Qohelet is shaping symbolism in a way contrary to its usual direction of signification”.<sup>21</sup> The apocalyptic and eschatological imagery is transferred by Qohelet to the death of a single person - *your* death. The terrible day, the day of darkness, is not the Day of the Lord, the day of eschatological judgement; the darkening of the sun, of the moon, the clouds ... all these images are, according to Qohelet, a powerful symbol of your personal death, from which, as Qoh 3:17-21 illustrates very clearly, there is no escape, no return, no hope. I think that the poem on old age and death must be understood also as an ironical and polemical attack against the eschatological view

<sup>18</sup> Cf. J. Blenkinsopp, *Storia della profezia in Israele*, ed. it. Brescia 1997, 278.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. E.J.C. Tigchelaar, *Prophets of Old and the day of the End. Zechariah, the Book of Watchers and Apocalyptic*, Leiden - New York - Köln 1996, 214-241.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Assumption of Moses*, 10:5; Rev 6:12-13; 8:12 etc. The idea is very common at Qumran; cf. E. Puech, *La croyance des Esséniens en la vie future: immortalité, resurrection, vie éternelle? Histoire d'une croyance dans le judaïsme ancien*, I-II, Etudes Bibliques NS 21-22, Paris 1993, 475-476.

<sup>21</sup> M. Fox, *Contradictions*, 293.

of apocalyptic (see Joel and Zechariah) and of the early Enochic tradition.

*Concluding remarks and open questions*

Now it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions, as well as to point out some open questions that, in my opinion, are of great interest for our study.

An important connecting point between the Book of Qohelet and early Enochism is that both represent, from two different points of view, a strong reaction against Zadokite Judaism. Qohelet and early Enochism both share the same interest in the problem of knowledge and in the problem of the order of the creation and, especially, they try to find a solution to the big problem of evil and salvation. For Qohelet, as well as for early Enochic tradition, the Law and the Temple are not able to grant salvation to human beings.

The answer of the early Enochic tradition to Zadokite Judaism is the fall of angels, the expectation of a coming judgement and a kind of knowledge obtained by revelation, dreams, visions and angels. The answer of Qohelet is completely different: there is no difference between past and future, no judgement, no eschatological hopes, no afterlife, especially no surviving of the soul. Qohelet, in particular, denies any other kind of knowledge except the wisdom that human beings can obtain from experience and, in so doing, he denies at the same time any possibility of dreams, visions, and angels' revelations.

Human life, according to Qohelet, is short and full of sorrow, it is a puff of air, and, in the face of death, it is even absurd. But the brevity and the absurdity of human life are not explained by Qohelet, neither with covenant theology nor with the doctrine of the fall of angels. The main problem, according to Qohelet, is what we should call an epistemological problem, the impossibility, for human knowledge, to understand the action of God in the world and in history. But nonetheless, in a life where everything seems to be a puff of air, human beings can find real joy, if they accept the simple good things that life can offer, as a gift of God; in this sense, Qohelet is a Jewish answer to a Greek question; happiness does exist, but it is a free gift of God. In the book of Qohelet fearing God means that human beings must not try to solve the mystery of existence and must accept life as given by God, bad or good as it can seem to them. Neither the Law nor the cult and the priestly faith in a fixed order of a good creation are able to guarantee salvation. But also the eschatological hope and the expectation of a judgement of God, typical of Enochism and of the apocalyptic worldview are completely useless. Surely Qohelet is, from this point of view, an anti-eschatological and so an anti-Enochic book.

This last statement leads us to the first interesting question. Most of the ideas that Qohelet criticises are typical of the Book of the Watchers and of the Book of Astronomy, such as the attack of Qohelet against a possible surviving of the soul (Qoh 3:17-20), his refusal to see history as a degenerative process with a final

intervention of God (1:9 and 7:10), his denial of dreams and perhaps of angels (5:2.5.6). The attitude of Qohelet against all these ideas suggests that they were highly debated questions at his time, something new that Qohelet does not accept. I think we must accept the thesis of Paolo Sacchi that Qohelet has to be considered the *terminus ad quem* for dating the earliest parts of the Book of Enoch.<sup>22</sup> If we put Qohelet in the first half of 3<sup>rd</sup> century, then we should admit that the earliest parts of the Book of the Watchers and of the Book of Astronomy are at least contemporary to Qohelet or, perhaps, even earlier.

A second question is raised by the study of the relationship between Qohelet and Enochism: "It seems reasonable to say that the revelation of secrets - especially eschatological ones of many varieties - is crucial to apocalyptic thinking".<sup>23</sup> The gap between Qohelet and Enochism and the contrast between Qohelet and the apocalyptic tradition are another clue against the famous thesis of Von Rad that apocalyptic is rooted in the wisdom tradition. Von Rad is certainly right in seeing the idea of knowledge as a common interest shared both by wisdom and apocalyptic. We know that this claim has not been accepted, but in any event "it has contributed to a tendency to refer to the content of apocalyptic revelations as a kind of wisdom".<sup>24</sup> Should we search the roots of Enochism inside the wisdom tradition of Israel?

The wisdom writings composed between the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> and the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. BCE (the latest parts of the book of Proverbs - Prov 1-9, the Book of Job and Qohelet) strongly refuse a kind of knowledge based on revelation, which is the main idea of apocalyptic thinking.<sup>25</sup> Only at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BCE the Book of Wisdom, in the context of the Alexandrian diaspora, showed a kind of wisdom that tries to bind the ancient tradition of an empirical wisdom with the idea of a revealed and heavenly wisdom, as in the Enochic tradition.

The opposition between Qohelet and Enochism makes it difficult to search for the origins of Enochism within the wisdom tradition. J.J. Collins is right when he sees an influence of apocalyptic worldview on the wisdom schools rather than an influence of wisdom on apocalypticism.<sup>26</sup> Can we say the same for the Enochic tradition?

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. P. Sacchi, *Storia del Secondo Tempio. Israele tra VI secolo a.C. e I secolo d.C.*, Torino 1994, 154.

<sup>23</sup> C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study Apocalyptic in Judaism and the Early Christianity*, London - New York 1982, 244.

<sup>24</sup> J.J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, Louisville, KY 1997, 227.

<sup>25</sup> For Ben Sira, see R.A. Argall, *1 Enoch and Sirach: A Comparative Literary and Conceptual Analysis of the Themes of Revelation, Creation and Judgement*, Atlanta GA 1995, 91-98. For an essene rereading of Ben Sira, see E. Puech, "Le livre de Ben Sira et les manuscrits de la Mère Morte", in N. Calduch Benages and J. Vermeylen (eds.), *Treasures of Wisdom. Studies in Ben Sira and the Book of Wisdom*, FS M. Gilbert, BETL 143, Louvain 1999, 411-426.

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 228.