The Advocate of Passion, tempting the Soul, speaks:

"Is it nothing - that Nothing which delivers us from everything?" (Paul Claudel, *Le Soulier de Satin*)

"From the Christian point of view everything, absolutely everything should serve for edification." That from the Christian point of view, according to Kierkegaard, absolutely everything should serve for edification is a sign of the nihilism of the present moment. Kierkegaard defines nihilism as "leveling," as "a situation in which 'qualitative distinctions are weakened by a gnawing reflection.'" "Everything" is a philosophical situation that exemplifies the gnawing of *all*distinctionsin a supreme act of leveling. When everything replaces 'something' or a 'particular thing', then qualitative distinction or ethical hierarchy is replaced by a nihilistic leveling. Therefore, by Kierkegaard's own logic, only 'some things' must be edifying, and not everything. When Kierkegaard argues that in Christianity everything must be edifying, and hence through the force of negation surrounding any act of overemphasis, he is in the danger of giving into the temptation of the nihilist. But such an error on his part is an impossibility as his whole life-project is to save man from spiritual annihilation. So, how does Kierkegaard avert the gnawing of all qualitative distinctions at the hands of such an absolute positing of religiosity? Reading carefully, we discover that he does interject a qualitative distinction of sorts, that between the Christian and the unchristian, the engaged and the indifferent. "The sort of learning which is not in the last resort edifying is precisely for that reason unchristian ... This relation of Christian teaching to life (in contrast with a scientific aloofness from life), or this ethical side of Christianity, is essentially the edifying, and the form in which it is presented, however strict it may be, is altogether different, qualitatively different, from that sort of learning which is 'indifferent', the lofty heroism of which is from a Christian point of view so far from being heroism that from a Christian point of view it is an inhuman sort of curiosity." Kierkegaard, hence, rescues himself, and man's imperilled conscience, through faith and commitment. Faith is both the means and the end of a religious life. Faith is the sole and omnipotent antidote of all negations. It is illustrated by the parable of Abraham wherein the latter by sacrificing that (Isaac) which is most precious to him, regains it in a double measure (as a gift of faith from God). Qualitative distinctions are negated through both faith and nihilism, but the two, nevertheless, are antithetical to each other. Faith is the antithesis of nihilism and the qualitative distinctions lost to the former are recovered through the latter. This recovery occurs in the realm of the miraculous or the absolute, as it is only in and through the latter that the contradiction of weakened distinctions can be reconciled. "God tempted Abraham, and he endured temptation, kept the faith, and a second time received again a son contrary to expectation." Faith makes good all negations and is the antithesis of the negations of nihilism. The negations of nihilism obliterate qualitative distinctions, which faith restores. Faith is the state of "the pious simplicity of child" in which experience is represented in the child's imagination as united and unfragmented, a representation made possible by its direct and unmediated relation to God, a relation that has been severed with the temporal experience of the world. "For life had separated what was united in the pious simplicity of child." "The older he became, the more frequently his mind reverted to that story." As the child became older, his mind "reverted" to that story more and more. It was always, and nevertheless, a reversion. The dictionary meaning of revert is stated as "to go back to a former practice, condition, belief etc." Faith is the former condition of the modern adult; former both in terms of a childhood of "intimations of immortality" and of a religious pre-modernity of faith. The modern adult can only revert to this unbroken condition, but cannot inhabit it as her present. The present moment and the mature consciousness are marked by an inner division. "When the child became older ... life had separated what was united in the pious simplicity of child." "His enthusiasm became greater and greater, and yet he was less and less able to understand the story." There is an unbridgable epistemic gulf between the modern adult and the story of Abraham. His enthusiasm for the story is in contradiction to her incapacity to understand it. Nothing appears more miraculous to the modern adult than the possibility of faith in a world where nothingness appears inevitable and, indeed, as the sole metaphysical possibility. Relentlessly tortured by the spectre of nihilism, his fascination with belief is infinitely multiplied. His relation with faith is paradoxical as he craves belief at the same moment as he repudiates it. "The older he became, the more frequently his mind reverted to that story." In the face of the awful nothingness confronting his alienated self man seeks to be united again to the faith of his ancestors and of his people; the faith of his childhood. The state of faith is, in the last instant, prelapsarian, characterising the realm of nostos. In the postlapsarian world, faith is, before all else, marked by longing: the longing for a union with the Godhead, for merging with the infinite. It is in such a scenario that the story of Abraham is magical not just in its content but also in its promise. This promise is the key to the fascination in which it holds the agnostic imagination of the modern man. Agnosticism, after all, is the doctrine or attitude affirming the uncertainty of all claims to ultimate knowledge. But man is a creature that can be agnostic only through intellectual honesty, and instinctively gropes for certitude in a world whose uncertainty constantly and threateningly encroaches upon the very ground beneath his feet. And the pious theists of the world, besieged by doubt, are also in constant need of a reinforcement of their vacillating belief. Man's felt necessity for God is the origin of his fascination with the story of Abraham. But the ratiocinative faculty of reflection has incapacitated him from understanding the parable of Abraham in its depths of conviction. The human condition resembles that of Trishaku(1) left hanging among the three worlds; rendered spiritually inert by a balance of forces wherein man's desire for spirit is counteracted and reined in by the inert materiality of the world, his faith static and contradicted by the evidence of his senses. For faith, of necessity, resides in movement.

But Kierkegaard, in "Fear and Trembling", is talking about a unique man; a man who "forgot everything else; his soul had only one wish, to see Abraham, one longing, to have been witness to that event", the event of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. In his forgetting, he began to grow towards a purity of heart, which is to will one thing, and one thing only. His desire was an apostolic desire and not the ingenuity of the genius. "Not to behold the beautiful countries of the Orient, or the earthly glory of the Promised Land, or that god-fearing couple whose old age God had blessed, or the venerable figure of the aged patriarch, or the vigorous young manhood of Isaac whom God had bestowed upon Abraham" he desired, "for what his mind was intent upon was not the ingenious web of imagination but the shudder of thought." This intent forms the distinction between the genius and the apostle; between the religious on the one hand, and the ethical and the aesthetic on the other. Being resides in that shudder of that; it is the living thought of imagination; the rest is idle fancy and speculation, emptied of all true content. The genius stops at the ethical, but the apostle, the truly religious, begins with faith. He does not dwell in the realm of the intellect but lives in the immediacy of faith. "That man was not a thinker ... but would easily have understood the story of Abraham." Pascal was the one who understood best the difference between the genius and the apostle; between philosophy and faith: The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not, after all, the God of the philosophers.

The God of Abraham is "the living God", the God whose "own image and likeness" is man, who is in history and not outside it, who sympathises with man's pain, and is the cause of his joy; "who spoke with Moses 'face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend' (Exod. 33:11). He is the living God who is profoundly 'touched with the feeling of our infirmities'". The God of the philosophers is more than anything else incomprehensible. His incomprehensibility renders him uncomprehending of the sorrows of the human psyche. The timeless, eternal God of the philosophers cannot comprehend and participate in salving the historical pains of humanity. "Take God's aseity, for example; or his necessariness; his immateriality; his 'simplicity' or superiority to the kind of inner variety or succession that we find in finite beings, his invisibility, and lack of the inner distinctions of being and activity, substance and accident, potentiality and actuality, and the rest; his repudiation of inclusion in a genus; his actualized infinity; ... his self-sufficiency, self-love, and absolute felicity in himself: candidly speaking, how do such qualities as these make any definite connexion with *our*(emphasis added) life? And if they severally call for no distinctive adaptations of our conduct, what vital difference can it possibly make to a man's religion whether they be true or false?"

The ordinary man's subconscious is deeply beset by the question: how does it all make any definite connexion with my life? "The doctrines of infinite and finite substance furnish a gallery of metaphysical grotesques." We do not and cannot positively or adequately understand the nature of infinite creative will. What good to us is such an infinite will? What have we really got to do with infinity? The finite mind can only be so out of proportion and relation with the decrees and choices of the infinite mind. William James has this to answer to this infinite God of the natural theologians: "What is their deduction of these metaphysical attributes but a shuffling and matching of pedantic dictionary-adjectives, aloof from morals,, aloof from human needs ... Instead of bread we have a stone; instead of a fish, a serpent."

The finite mind cannot conceive the infinite and what is unknowable cannot be loved. (Only the philosopher can love the inconcievable and the ineffable.) So, how can the infinite succour the individual in his moments of need? "To know things as they are would be simultaneously to live over, as though from within and by a miracle of sympathy, the biographies of an infinite number of distinct monads." The afflicted soul cannot profit by such theoretical knowledge of the infinite God. The suffering soul requires above all things the immediacy and sublime simplicity of faith.

God demanded from Abraham the sacrifice of that which was the most immediate in him - his love for Isaac. The immediate is the very substance, the clay, of consciousness, and tempting the immediate can stake the conscience of man. "And god tempted Abraham and said unto him, Take Isaac, Mine only son,whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon the mountain which I will show thee." In the various wondering variants of the event of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac that Kierkegaard's believing man conjures up in his heart, rages the battle between despair and hope, belief and unbelief.

"He stood still, he laid his hands upon the head of Isaac in benediction, and Isaac bowed to recieve the blessing. And Abraham's face was fatherliness, his look was mild, his speech encouraging." Abraham does not design to conceal from Isaac whither the course leads. "But Isaac was unable to understand him, his soul could not be exalted." The existentialism of Kierkegaard is not in the failure of faith; but it has its beginning in it. An unbelieving man is naked and bare existence, his being hollow and nullified for lack of faith in a first principle, whether theological or strictly metaphysical. He is pure, reduced existence, devoid of not just a higher but any meaning. God or the transcendental is the ontological ground of meaning; the meaning hidden in a "shudder of thought" which harbours ontological truth, the thought which is the dwelling of being and the birth of meaning. Logos is the uncreated and discourse its created; the present author does not believe in the notion of God as a linguistic aberration but language as flowing out of God. All speech has being implicit in it and without this implicit being speech would be an impossibility. Language would be a logical impossibility for lack of a referent, as all referents are endowed with ontological meaning by Being - the transcendental absolute. The concept of an ontological language is an oxymoron. So much for language and ontology. Also, it is a question for another time and space.

The burden of the whole argument revolves around the plight of the unbelieving man, because Isaac could not understand. Notwithstanding how much Abraham comforted and exhorted him, the boy could not believe in his father any longer. Isaac could not believe in Abraham, but he believed in the God of Abraham. With a parallel and simultaneous movement of thought, Isaac regained the faith he had lost. Even as he received Abraham's blessing, Isaac could not understand him? Did he not understand Abraham's intention? No, the parable of Abraham and Isaac is constituted of subtler depths. What Isaac did not understand was Abraham's faith. Or, he rather doubted it, but for a moment only. But the mere instant is critical in Kierkegaardian thought, as the instant is also eternity.

Abraham and Isaac had set out for Mount Moriah to sacrifice to God the burnt-offering of a lamb. Isaac understood him not when Abraham raised his hand upon him in benediction. But the next instant when Abraham's form full of horror had its hand raised again  upon the lad, with a murderous intent this moment, Isaac understood and prayed to the God in heaven to have compassion upon him. "God of Abraham, have compassion upon me." The simultaneity of the instant that witnessed Abraham's simulated disavowal of Isaac, also witnessed Isaac's surrender to the God of Abraham. "If I have no father upon earth, be Thou my Father! With the selfsame movement of sacrifice Abraham too "a second time received again a son contrary to expectation." "But Abraham in a low voice said to himself,'O Lord in heaven, I thank Thee. After all it is better for him to believe that I am a monster, rather than that he should lose faith in Thee." In the eternal order of God, both the father and the son get to keep their faith. Abraham the father of Isaac was also the father of faith.

The inconsistencies and paradoxes with which Kierkegaard tells and retells the parable of the Binding of Isaac in his prelude to Fear and Trembling, ring with the echoes of the antitheses of faith and nihilism. "If there were no eternal consciousness in a man, if at the foundation of all there lay only a wildly seething power which writhing with obscure passions produced everything that is great and everything that is insignificant, if a bottomless void never satiated lay hidden beneath all - what then would life be but despair?" What would be the meaning of Abraham's love for Isaac? What would be the meaning of this sacrifice? If there is nothing to join Abraham to Isaac in eternity, what significance would their relation in time possess? "If such were the case, if there were no sacred bond which united mankind, if the one generation arose after another like the leafage in the forest, if the one generation replaced the other, like the song of birds in the forest", then what would be the goodness of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac? It would be an act of infinite evil. And even without the sacrifice, Isaac would mean nothing to Abraham. The child would not arrive a blessing to parents. The testament cannot, then, promise Abraham (and through and in him, us) "because thou has done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore, and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in thy seed shall all the of the earth be blessed, because thou hast hearkened My voice." What would such a promise count in the eyes of a man destined for utter extinction? His similarly perishable progeny holds no spiritual consolation for such a man. What matter to him who possess the gates of nations? What is man to man on such an earth?

To him all that lives and dies under the sun is vanity.

"Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher

vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

What does man gain by all the toil

at which he toils under the sun?

A generation goes, and a generation comes,

but the earth remains forever."

"... if the human race passed through the world as the ship goes through the sea, like the wind through the desert, a thoughtless and fruitless activity, if an eternal oblivion were always lurking hungrily for its prey and there was no power strong enough to wrest it from its maw - how empty then and comfortless life would be?"

But Kierkegaard (and dare we say, God?) would not have it thus. Each generation is a blessing to the preceding and His blessing is passed from the father to son. There *is*a sacred bond uniting Abraham to Isaac, one man to another. Humanity exists only in love of God. It is the eternal existing in man through God.

"All things are full of weariness;

a man cannot utter it;

the eye is not satisfied with seeing,

nor the ear filled with hearing.

What has been is what will be,

and what has been done is what will be done,

and there is nothing new under the sun.

Is there a thing of which it is said,

'See, this is new'?

It has been already in the ages before us.

There is no remembrance of former things,

nor will there be any remembrance

of later things yet to be

among those who come after."

"What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence - even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down, again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!'" The greatest weight! This is the shudder of thought that Kierkegaard's searcher after Abraham, the pilgrim to Mount Moriah, was intent upon. The ontological centre of thought resides in this very moment which in the eternal recurrence acquires "the ultimate eternal confirmation and seal." The instant becomes pregnant with being because "what has been is what will be." "As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end." Christ released humanity from the neverending catena of the ages of ages.

What Alan Richardson says about Christ's impact on history interprets just as well for us what God meant to Abraham. "'Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him' (Rom 6:9) ... is the text which changed the outlook of European man upon history ... The European mind was freed by the proclamation of God's saving act in history from the fatalistic theory of cyclical recurrence which had condemned Greek historiography to sterility."  Nothing could be more burdensome, nothing merit the appellation of the burden of burdens more appositely, than this self-same moment, "that has been recurring, and that will continue to recur, in a self-similar form an infinite number of times across infinite time." And, therefore, nothing more liberative of the greatest burden than the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

"But therefore it is not thus, but as God created man and woman, so too He fashioned the hero and the poet or orator." The poet is the genius of recollection (of the hero). The eternally recurring moment itself is the eternity and only the poet can carry the weight of the recollection of eternity.

"Recollection in the history of Being thinks history as the arrival, always remote, of the perdurance of truth's essence. Being occurs primarily in this essence. Recollection helps the remembrance of the truth of Being by allowing the following to come to mind: The essence of truth is at the same time the truth of essence. Being and truth belong to each other just as they belong intertwining to a still concealed rootedness in the origin whose origination opening up remains that which comes." Being resides in this very moment, right now, which is eternally recurring; one does not need to go seeking for it in the distant realms of metaphysics. As the contemporary saying goes, Being is right here, and right now.

But the poet's recollection is only the mirror of the hero's faith. The recollection is replete with the presence of Being because faith is the in-dwelling of Being. Faith denotes the quality of believing and trusting in God. The 'highest being' and 'first principle' of theology is accessible only to faith. Faith is the felt immediacy of the transcendental, and "for Hegel, Being means first, but not exclusively, 'indeterminate immediacy.'" Abraham's faith was unmediated and he believed explicitly in his God. The literalness and monomaniac passion of his faith is the meaning of the biblical episode concerning the sacrifice of Isaac. The Being which had been lost to humanity was thus recovered by the hero, Abraham, the father of faith. Abraham's conquest lies in his conquest over the human desire for mastery over nature, and more consequently, over Spirit.  In wresting theology back from ontotheology.

Man could neither pray nor sacrifice to this new god, the god of philosophy. "The deity enters into philosophy through the perdurance of which we think at first as the approach to the active nature of the difference between Being and beings. The difference constitutes the ground plan in the structure of the essence of metaphysics. The perdurance results in and gives Being as the generative ground. This ground itself needs to be properly accounted for by that for which it accounts, that is, by the causation through the supremely original matter - and that is the cause as *causa sui*. This is the right name for the God of philosophy." But in the distress of their soul, who ever did resort to the *causa sui*? "Before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music or dance before this god." Heidegger is right in affirming that metaphysics must be freed from the influence of ontotheology. But ontotheology must also be overcome for the sake of theology itself.

"The god-less thinking must abandon the god of philosophy, god as *causa sui ..."*  But so must the godly way thinking abandon the god of philosophy too. Ontotheology was overcome much before Heidegger. "... while the ontotheological problem sometimes eventuates in the pronouncement of the death of the moral-metaphysical God, this means little or nothing to the biblical portrait of the God of history who inspires and empowers the community of the faithful." And it meant little to Abraham. The faith of Abraham had no space to accommodate critical reflection. God dwelt in the immediacy of his faith. To play slightly on Heidegger's words, Abraham's uncritical thinking is closer to the divine God and is more open to Him than onto-theo-logic would like to admit.

The one who regaled and edified us with the tale of Abraham is as heroic as Abraham himself. He is to Abraham what Abraham is to God; the poet is to hero what the hero is to God. "The poet cannot do what that other does ... Yet he too is happy, and not less so, for the hero is as it were his better nature." He is the twin of the hero.The poet through striving gains the hero just as the hero gains God. Only Abraham, the hero, can bear the burden of the eternal. "Silently he laid the wood in order, he bound Isaac, in silence he drew the knife - then he saw the ram which God had prepared. Then he offered that and returned home. ... From that time on Abraham became old, he could not forget that God had required this of him. Isaac throve as before, but Abraham's eyes were darkened, and he knew joy no more." The gamble is too great and fearful for another man. But Abraham survived; perhaps with faith too. It weighed heavy on his heart; but this same weight of the eternal would have crushed another's. The same is true of the poet. He wrests the eternal back from its own cunning; because the oblivion of the eternal is eternal too. "If he thus remains true to his love, he strives day and night against the cunning of oblivion which would trick him out of his hero, then he has completed his work, then he is gathered to the hero, who has loved him just as faithfully, for the poet is as it were the hero's better nature, powerless it may be as a memory is, but also transfigured as a memory is." The poet is the hero's better nature as the hero is the poet's. "... but as God created man and woman, so too He fashioned the hero and the poet or orator." And when the hero too remains true to his love ... then he has completed his work, then he too is gathered to his God. Each word concerning the poet's relation to the hero (Abraham) is faithful to the latter's relation to God. One can substitute the word poet with hero and hero with God, and nothing would have changed. But this is not to equate the hero with God or to state the redundancy of the one on account of the other. The treasure entrusted to the poet is the faith of the hero - the recollection of the eternity of the instant. The poet is the hero's amanuensis and the repository of his anamnesis. "Anamnesis or recollection is the recovering of 'what the soul experienced with the body when it recovers these things by itself without the body.'" But the recollection of the poet is the recollection of the body of being. It is the interior solitude in which the soul is alone with God. "Recollection helps the remembrance of the truth of Being." The primacy of the poet is underlined by what Heidegger attests regarding recollection: "At times recollection in history can be the only viable way to what is primal for the mindfulness practiced by the perduring thinking of the history of being." What if there was no recollection of abraham's deed? Abraham wrested fiducity back from the jaws of death and  restored Isaac's and Israel's faith in the Being of beings.