

YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL

QOHELET: A JOURNEY TO JOY OR A
PATH TO PESSIMISM?

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The book of Ecclesiastes remains an enigma. Many different interpretations have been argued by scholars, among them the opposing views of Qohelet as a preacher of joy¹ on the one hand and as “rigorously hope-less”² on the other. In this paper I will discuss each of these views and argue that whilst perhaps we can see both of these facets in the book, the words of Qohelet lean more toward the pessimistic than the optimistic and that in fact the book is more about challenge than either of the above. I will assume during this paper that the voice of Qohelet is a single one, rather than a dialogue between several as has been argued by Perry³. While the arguments for multiple authorship are compelling due to the many faceted views and particularly the contradictions found in Qohelet, it is my view that these are not otherwise inexplicable problems but rather that they are essential authorial intentions, and are used as literary devices, particularly in regard to the character of Qohelet and his struggle with life. I will also assume that the book’s structure comprises a “frame” (1:1 and 12:9-14), that this “frame” is written by the author of the book, and that Qohelet (as argued by most modern scholars) is not Solomon but rather a Teacher.

Qohelet tells us seven times in the book of Ecclesiastes to “enjoy” life. For Whybray these statements of enjoyment present a problem for those who view the book as purely pessimistic.⁴ They “punctuate the whole book, forming a kind of Leitmotiv” and increase in emphasis each time they appear (the first is “plainly stated”, the next two contain an “assertive prefix”, the fourth and fifth are more “solemn” and the final two are stated in the “imperative”). For this reason, says Whybray, we cannot simply dismiss them.⁵ This is a strong argument – the calls to enjoyment are clearly present throughout the book, though they seem to me to become more desperate rather than emphatic as they proceed. Had there been only one such verse it would

¹ R.N. Whybray, “Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy”. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 23 (1982) 87-98

² Francis Watson, “Praxis and Hope” in *Text, Church and World* (Grand Rapids: W B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994) 283.

³ T.A. Perry, *Dialogues with Kohelet: The Book of Ecclesiastes* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993)

⁴ Whybray, 87

⁵ Whybray, 88

perhaps have been easier to dismiss as an anomaly; however since the theme recurs it is impossible to ignore and dismiss it. We must somehow deal with these verses which seem inconsistent with the rest of the sentiments in the book.

Whybray begins his explanation by noting the reasons given by Qohelet for his advice: firstly, enjoyment of life is God's gift; secondly, we only have a brief life; and thirdly, we are completely ignorant of the future. "These apparently depressing considerations are turned by Qoheleth into positive incentives to enjoy all the more what God gives in the present", argues Whybray.⁶ This argument would be compelling if it were not for the other views expressed in the book of Qohelet and the tone of the advice which, though tone is always difficult to ascertain, seems to my reading more like a resigned sigh than a "positive incentive".

The first of the passages recommending enjoyment (2:24-26) follows a section dealing with toil, which Qohelet has just told us is pointless. Qohelet's point here, argues Whybray, is that we must give up striving because we cannot attain anything in our own strength, we must rely on God to give us enjoyment. We cannot achieve this ourselves, "however hard we may try".⁷ This seems to be a weak argument, given the tone of the preceding passage. Qohelet clearly states that he "hates life" (as Whybray admits) and that toil is pointless. Even enjoyment can only be found if God allows it, and God may very well not allow it for the God of Qohelet is distant at best and arbitrary at worst, allowing the wise to die just like fools (2:16) and the fruit of one's toil go to a fool (2:18, 21). In contrast to Whybray, Fox notes that:

the advice here is coincidental to the complaint, and Qohelet's praise of pleasure as God's gift easily slides back into this complaint, now formulated theologically: God's inexplicable will (rather than human effort) determines whether one will have the possibility of enjoying life.⁸

⁶ Whybray, 88

⁷ Whybray, 89

⁸ Michael V Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up. A Re-reading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999) 186

This is a stronger argument. How can humankind choose to enjoy life if *we* cannot attain it but have to rely upon God to give it to us? The call to enjoyment here seems ironic and certainly has more of an air of complaint than celebration. Appearing at the end of a passage where the speaker claims to “hate life”, it is difficult to see that this is a serious call to us to enjoy it. There seems rather to be something hopeless about the call, as if we cannot really enjoy life since it is actually meaningless.

The second call to enjoyment (3:12-13) forms part of a passage dealing with humankind’s ignorance of the future. We cannot know what will happen in the future so we should accept what God gives and enjoy it. This “advice is quite positive” says Whybray.⁹ This argument is stronger in the light of this passage, however the sense of Qohelet’s discomfort remains. He tells us that God has put a sense of the past and the future into our minds but then confounds us by not letting us find out God’s purposes (3:11). Qohelet’s sense of struggle against the God who has put into the hearts of human beings a desire for the world to make sense, a desire for justice and for coherence only to thwart them at every turn, abounds in this book. Here it pours cold water on the advice to enjoy life – particularly if life at this point is a struggle and, according to Qohelet, we have no hope of a better future.

The third call to joy (3:22) occurs in a passage about injustice. Whybray believes Qohelet is telling us that precisely because we will all die, just like animals, and we do not know either when God will judge the just and the unjust, we should be positive and enjoy life.¹⁰ Fox agrees with this analysis, arguing that since this comment appears in a passage regarding our lack of knowledge of the future that this is a “reason to seize the moment”.¹¹ The idea of *carpe diem* in relation to the book of Qohelet is interesting. There is certainly a sense in which Qohelet does seem to be telling us to do this; however the tone of this passage in particular is not one of an

⁹ Whybray, 90

¹⁰ Whybray, 90

¹¹ Fox, 217

energetic seizing of the day, but rather of desperation. Wickedness takes place where justice and righteousness should be (16) and in Qohelet's view we are impotent to change this. God may judge, but here are no comforting words about the just being judged favourably and unjust unfavourably – simply that God will judge (17) – we don't know what the judgement will bring. Can we trust Qohelet's arbitrary God to judge the way we wish God to? Qohelet seems here to be challenging the traditional wisdom that God will make everything right. The call to enjoyment in this passage seems heavily ironic in my reading – how can we enjoy life when there is injustice everywhere and we know that we will die without any certainty that all will be set right? Immediately following his recommendation to enjoy life, Qohelet tells us about the oppressed and states that it is better to be dead or stillborn than to be alive because of all the injustice and oppression in this world. This is not a positive passage and the call to enjoyment here does little to relieve the pessimism.

The fourth call to enjoyment (5:18-20) appears at the end of another passage about toil and wealth. Here Whybray argues that once again Qohelet is showing us the pointlessness of toiling to obtain wealth. The end of this is simply worry and anxiety. Rather we should just enjoy what we have “because this is God's gift”. Qohelet sums this up, says Whybray, “in a quotation from an older saying: “Better is a handful of quiet than two fistfuls with toil” ”.¹² There is something compelling in Whybray's argument here, for it is clear that in the preceding passage Qohelet does seem to show that love of wealth breeds only misery and anxiety – and we cannot know that we will be able to keep the wealth anyway, no matter what we do (13-14). Additionally, we will all leave the earth with nothing, just as we entered it (15). Finding enjoyment in what we have, though it be little, would therefore be a better route and bring us greater contentment. Certainly Fox agrees, overall, with this idea. For Fox Qohelet “builds up” in these calls to enjoyment, after “tearing down” in the other parts of the book¹³. Fox compares Qohelet to Daniel's world of

¹² Whybray, 89

¹³ Fox, 140

visions, noting “the same sense of helplessness, the same tone of resignation but without the faith in impending deliverance and universal justice”. He argues that Qohelet’s view of God is that of a “hard”, “mostly indifferent but not hostile” ruler.¹⁴ Fox’s reading is that for Qohelet God still has ultimate power and because of this, God not only *could* but *should* choose to right the wrongs *now*. This is why life is so unfair for Qohelet and it is this with which he struggles: life should not be random and unfair, and death should not be the ultimate arbiter because God “determines lifespans and could even conquer death”.¹⁵

In spite of all this, Fox argues, Qohelet does manage to rebuild, to find some “little meanings” *in* this life, not apart from it.¹⁶ These little shards of light in the darkness come in the form of enjoying whatever good we are given in this world, no matter how fleeting it may be and how absurd the world is. Something is “good” to Qohelet because it is better than the alternative: “it does not redeem the world from absurdity or constitute a profit but it is at least *possible*.”¹⁷ This argument has some strengths: certainly the moments where Qohelet calls us to enjoy life and toil punctuate the pessimism to some extent, like a light in the darkness. But they do not, in my reading, create the meaning Fox outlines. His argument that Qohelet leans more towards construction as the book progresses¹⁸ does not bear up in the light of the misery and brokenness we clearly see in 12:1-8. True the book ends on a note of hope, which we will discuss later, but the final words of Qohelet are far from hopeful. The calls to enjoyment in the midst of the pessimism seem more like hopeless sighs of ‘enjoy what you can while you can because there is nothing else for human beings on this earth or afterwards’ than joyful calls to find meaning amidst the confusion and randomness of life.

¹⁴ Fox 137

¹⁵ Fox,139

¹⁶ Fox,140

¹⁷ Fox,140

¹⁸ Fox,140

The fifth call to enjoyment in 8:15 appears in another passage about the execution of justice. Whybray argues that Qohelet is here giving the answer to the problem he raises in verse 11: that because judgement of the wicked is slow to appear, people continue to do evil. The answer he proposes is that God will judge in God's time and we should avoid evil and instead enjoy the life that God has given us. Again the verses surrounding this call to enjoyment seem to nullify its effect and make Whybray's argument here less than persuasive. The passage clearly states that the wicked are praised both when they are alive and after they die, and that the just are treated as though they are wicked. The verse about God's judgement in this passage therefore seems ironic – although it may also be that Qohelet is a fractured soul and does hold both views in some form, one fighting the other in his mind. Even if this is the case, the call to enjoyment is again a resigned one – there is nothing else we can do in the scheme of things: life is unjust and if God is going to bring some justice we have no idea when that will be. This seems to be a hopeless statement rather than a call to contented enjoyment.

Whybray makes a similar argument about the call to enjoyment in 9:7-10 but once more it is difficult to see anything terribly positive or joyful about these verses. The context is again one of hopelessness – no matter what we do on this earth we will all die, the just and the unjust, the clean and the unclean, the sinner and the saint (2). All die just the same. Granted it is better to be alive than to be dead (4-6) but that is all – we can only make the most of life while we are here because there will be nothing but black darkness where we are going (10). This does not seem to be a joyful celebration of life but a pessimistic acknowledgement that trying to enjoy what we have while we have it is all we can possibly hope for – and that only if God allows it. The pessimism of the rest of the passage prohibits, at least in my reading, any sense of this being a call to joyful celebration of life.

The final recommendation of joy in 12:7-10 appears in a passage that deals with youth, old age and death. Whybray argues that while Qohelet wants us to face reality nonetheless his tone

remains positive, calling us to enjoy life all the more because of its brevity, and to do God's will¹⁹. Fox disagrees with this view, remarking that the emphasis is more on the negative limitations of humankind's power than on positive enjoyment of life. He also believes that these verses call us to think of death rather than Whybray's idea that they call us to do God's will²⁰. The idea of *memento mori*, that contemplating death produces an urgency and sense of celebration in life, is also found in the Heretic Harpers' Songs²¹. There is some sense of this here which make Fox's argument compelling, however I feel Whybray goes too far in his view that it is entirely positive and calls us to do God's will. The verses preceding and following this call to joy have far more to do with the finality of death and the limitations and miseries of old age than to do with enjoyment and pleasure. Even youth is tainted with the foreboding of ageing and death. Again, enjoying what we have while we have it is all we can do. All of the calls to enjoyment seem to be heavily resigned and somewhat unhappy with an air of sadness about some and of grudging resignation about others. Qohelet seems unable to enjoy anything about life – having proclaimed early on, as we have seen, that he hates life (2:17). While Whybray argues that this is an earlier thought, not of Qohelet but of Solomon and that he changes his mind as he becomes wiser²² (also supposed many times in Thaumaturgus' Metaphrase²³) I see no evidence to support this in the book. To many readers this verse, along with the repeated phrase "vanity, vanity all is vanity", encapsulates the sense of hopelessness that infuses everything Qohelet says, even his seemingly positive comments, and it is to this argument that we now turn.

Many scholars have seen Qohelet as a pessimistic book. Crenshaw believes the opening statement of the book is entirely hopeless and that its message is about the emptiness of life and

¹⁹ Whybray, 91

²⁰ Fox, 316-317

²¹ Stefan Fischer, "Qohelet and "Heretic" Harpers' Songs". *Journal for Studies of the Old Testament* 98 (2002): 105-121

²² Whybray, 92

²³ Gregory Thaumaturgus, "A Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes" in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of The Writings of the Fathers down to AD325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprinted 1978) 9-17.

the inability of wisdom to offer any solutions to this emptiness.²⁴ This is a persuasive argument. The opening words of Qohelet are indeed pessimistic and have an air of hopelessness about them. One begins to read the book imagining that this might change, since, if this is wisdom literature, then wisdom should eventually triumph – but it does not. The final words of Qohelet carry the same theme. For him, life is dark and hopeless and even wisdom and the occasional shafts of light that appear through fleeting enjoyment are not enough to relieve it. Crenshaw also argues that Qohelet’s view of God is one of “divine arbitrariness” and of a God who is not “kindly disposed toward human beings”.²⁵ Citing the passages in Qohelet about injustice and wickedness, God testing human beings to show they are no better than animals, people being oppressed with no-one to comfort them, power belonging to the oppressor and the after-life providing nothing but “unrelieved darkness”²⁶, Crenshaw paints a strong picture of Qohelet’s view as extremely pessimistic. This is a convincing argument for me and seems to reflect the tone of the book more readily than Whybray’s belief that the tone of the whole book is positive²⁷, a view that is difficult to reconcile with the passages cited. Crenshaw also argues that the views expressed by Qohelet in the verses which exhibit a preference for non-existence over life stems from:

...a vision of the way things should be in a perfect world. Qohelet shared the sages’ conviction that a just moral order should accompany belief in the Creator, but sees no evidence to confirm the conviction. Instead oppression dominates. The resulting suffering incites Qohelet to praise the dead and the unborn.²⁸

This argument concerning Qohelet’s struggle with the randomness of life in the presence of an omnipotent Creator certainly seems to be at the heart of the book and of his constant declaration of everything in life as “hebel”. It is far more convincing to me than Whybray’s understanding of this passage as an “anomaly” similar to that of Jeremiah’s moments of despair²⁹. This argument

²⁴ James L Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987) 57, 45

²⁵ Crenshaw, 101

²⁶ Crenshaw, 101-102, 104

²⁷ Whybray, 92

²⁸ Crenshaw, 107

²⁹ Whybary, 93

seems to be stretching the limits of the joy thesis. The verse is hardly anomalous to the sentiments of the rest of the book, in fact the calls to joy would seem to be the anomalies. Nor does Qohelet appear to be like a Prophet in my reading, for he stands back in the face of oppression, wringing his hands in despair, but making no effort to challenge the oppressor and no call to us to make a stand against oppression and injustice as all the Prophets did. Qohelet is not a Prophet and does not appear to have any of the qualities of the prophetic life. He merely stands back, observes and despairs. As we have already observed in Fox, Qohelet is without the Prophet's faith in a God of Covenant, One who will eventually bring deliverance, and it is in this that he challenges conventional wisdom and the very Torah the final verses of the book tell us we must obey.

In this regard Crenshaw believes that the Epilogue is completely "alien to Qohelet's thinking"³⁰. This is true, I believe, and I also agree with Crenshaw, Fox and Sharp who all argue that Qohelet is not the author of the book but a persona, created by the author from whom he stands apart.³¹ The "frame" indicates a different voice as does the use of the third person at 7:27. There are arguments that these were later additions by an editor or redactor, but the argument for Qohelet as a persona seems stronger to me; it is a device employed in much literature and is used here, I will argue, for the purposes of pedagogy. If Qohelet is a persona, the fact that the Epilogue seems alien to the rest of his thought becomes less problematic, particularly if, like Sharp, we see Qohelet as an unreliable narrator, one whose "viewpoint is meant to be rejected by the reader"³². This reading of Qohelet is extremely convincing and deals with many of the areas that seem problematic, particularly the contradictions and many faceted opinions expressed in the book. It also gives the book a coherence without the imposition of a formal structure, something it is widely agreed is difficult to discern. We will return to explore this idea further shortly, but

³⁰ Crenshaw, 192

³¹ Crenshaw, 58; Fox, 372; Carolyn J. Sharp "How Long Will You Love Being Simple? Irony in Wisdom Traditions" in *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming) 201

³² Sharp, 198

let us continue for a while longer with the argument that Qohelet is a pessimistic book. As noted at the outset of this examination, Watson believes the book is “rigorously hope-less” and that this is in some ways a “consoling gospel of resignation”, outlined by Solomon who has the “pleasure of calm, contemplative, philosophical despair in the face of the tragic ambiguities of human existence”.³³ This view of Zen-like calmness and contemplation is also held by Borg³⁴, however it is difficult to see Qohelet as a calm teacher, at peace with the world and simply accepting everything as it is. The tone of the Qohelet’s musings seems to be one of frustration and struggle with the world: he does not, in the end, “Go gently into that good night”³⁵ but rather ends his life railing at the absurdity of existence in the face of an omnipotent God who chooses not to help humankind but rather lets them die after a life full of pointless toil, injustice, oppression and struggle. This is not a convincing picture of a calm, contemplative philosopher!

Watson argues that the pessimism of Qohelet challenges not only conventional wisdom but also the views of the Prophets, who believe that something new is possible rather than the “illusion” Qohelet believes this to be: “Another way of expressing this challenge would be to say that Qohelet rejects the scheme of promise (prophecy) and fulfilment.”³⁶ This analysis of Qohelet’s views is persuasive. It is clear that the book challenges many of the ideas of conventional wisdom, particularly in its conclusion that wisdom too is vanity (2:13-15), however, the ideas expressed by Qohelet about the transitory nature of life, that everything will eventually be forgotten, erased from memory, and that there is “nothing new under the sun” clearly indicate a massive challenge to the idea of God as a caring Creator who stands on the side of the oppressed against injustice, and of the existence of Israel as a people called by God into a Covenant relationship, commanded by God to stand against oppression and for justice, and

³³ Watson, 283

³⁴ Marcus J Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2001) 168-170

³⁵ Dylan Thomas, *The Poems of Dylan Thomas* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corp, 1943)

³⁶ Watson, 283,284

whose identity exists because it has been passed down through memory. Qohelet challenges all of this; as Watson again notes:

... his assertion that 'what has been is what will be' allows no space at all for the possibility of 'new heavens and a new earth' in which 'the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind' (Isa 65:17; cf 66:22). The Canonical significance of this book lies precisely in its challenge to the belief that underlies so much of the rest of holy scripture.³⁷

This is a convincing argument for me. Qohelet's view of life is deeply pessimistic and it is in the depth of the pessimism and its rejection of the values held most dear by its original audience that the purpose of the book becomes clear. It is designed, I believe, precisely to challenge and to elicit a response of discomfort and even disagreement from the reader. The views of Qohelet, the persona, are completely one-sided and omit the most important parts of the Jewish belief system: a just Creator God who is involved with them as a people through the Covenant. The gaps in the book begin to shout out, and the references to God as Creator and the hints of the creation story (eg: 3:19-20, 12:7) constantly pull us back to an image of a deity very different from the one being portrayed by the character whose words we are reading. These references remind us of the God of the Torah, the God who commands that we love God with all our heart and soul and mind and love our neighbour as ourselves. This God is not distant and arbitrary as Qohelet would have us believe, and we inherently *know* this: we know that there is good to balance the evil, that there are those who not only comfort the oppressed but seek to end oppression, committing their lives in the fight against injustice.

We know also that not everything is erased from memory - the people of Israel and their faith in Yahweh alone are testament to that. Qohelet's words too remain, in what Sharp describes as an ultimate irony³⁸, still read and contemplated thousands of years later. I agree with Sharp who notes that quite early on our suspicions are aroused and we soon begin to see that Qohelet's

³⁷ Watson, 285

³⁸ Sharp, 209

views are not to be trusted.³⁹ We begin to argue with his conclusions. Certainly we see the injustice, the oppression and the struggles he notes. We know that is true. But we also see the other side, the actions taken to right the wrongs, the good which shines out in the darkness, the love and care expressed by one human being to another. We see another side and find ourselves almost shouting “No, Qohelet, your view is too one-sided, there is more and you have missed it”.

Sharp argues that the book is heavily ironised and that we are being directed by its hyperbolic pessimism to see what happens when we disobey God and to direct us by this method to instead “fear God and obey the Torah”⁴⁰. This reading is very convincing. The book is clearly unbalanced, exhibiting a bleak view of a life lived without hope, relying on human strength and finding it wanting. It also portrays a view of God as distant, uninvolved and arbitrary. I agree with Sharp that the opinions of the persona Qohelet are the result of this view of God and reliance on epistemological enquiry and wisdom. We thus find ourselves challenging Qohelet’s opinion and filling the gaps with the God of the Prophets, the God of the Covenant, the God who cares about humankind, in short the God of the Torah. As Christians we find ourselves answering the darkness and hopelessness of Qohelet with the light of Christ and the resurrection. We begin to read the book formationally, as did Gregory of Nyssa in his homilies⁴¹. Whilst the original audience would not have had the Christ revelation, they would certainly have been able to see the God of Covenant between the lines and in the gaps of the book. Viewed in this light the Epilogue does not seem anomalous; it is a rather direct statement of what the rest of the book has indicated and led us toward.

It is difficult then, to see the book of Qohelet as a book of joy, even if joy does not necessarily mean happiness but rather hope in the face of despair, or peace in the midst of difficulty. There is no sense of this is my reading of the book of Qohelet. Whybray’s argument

³⁹ Sharp, 203, 205

⁴⁰ Sharp, 199

⁴¹ Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes ed. George Stuart Hall. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), 31-144

that the calls to joy dominate the book and consistently bring us back to a positive note is not convincing. The negative is too overwhelming and the few calls to enjoyment cannot begin to alleviate this, much less completely reverse it. As Sharp notes the passages on enjoyment "... cannot serve ironically to undermine the relentless cynicism and despair of the rest of his discourse"⁴². They appear more as the resigned sighs of a grudging acceptance of impotence in the face of a random world and a distant God. Rather than being a journey to joy Qohelet's musings are a path to pessimism and despair, exhibiting a bleak view of the world resulting from of a concept of God as distant and remote and a view of the world as chaotic and random with no sense of justice or peace. This is challenging: it challenges conventional wisdom literature, it challenges the Prophets and the historic writings and it challenges us as modern readers. We find ourselves pulled into its vortex for a while and then we begin to pull away, to push against Qohelet's musings and his bleak conclusions. This kind of literary device has been used many times. In a recent lecture on the work of William Blake, Christopher Rowland noted that the inconsistencies in Blake's world arouse the intellect and the faculties to act. Entering Blake's world brings disorientation before it brings clarity⁴³. This, for me, is what the book of Ecclesiastes is designed to do. We enter the disorientation of Qohelet's world and it arouses us to think, to challenge, to question, to act. We are eventually thus brought to clarity and back to the God of the Covenant and of the Torah, so conspicuous by direct absence, so alive in gaps and between the lines. We find ourselves sorry for Qohelet and his demise in brokenness and despair, ultimately hope-less. But we find *ourselves* brought to a new vision of hope: hope in a God of relationship, hope in a Creator God who calls us not to hand-wringing anguish but to loving committed action. "Fear God and obey the Torah" says the Epilogist at the end of the book and in

⁴² Sharp, 211

⁴³ Christopher Rowland, "From Impulse Not From Rules: the Life, Character, and Teachings of Jesus in the Light of the Prophecy, Poetry and Art of William Blake: Antinomianism and the Forgiveness of Sins: Perspectives on Neglected Themes in the Gospels and the New Testament". Shaffer Lecture delivered at Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut on October 16, 2008.

spite of, or perhaps because of, Qohelet's advice to the contrary, we find ourselves willing and ready to do so.

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