

Christology Run Amok: Gregory of Nyssa Looks at Ecclesiastes

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Abstract. We begin by placing Gregory's remarks within the social context of life circumstances, teachings, and key events which informed his religious thinking. Then we provide a comparative base from which to examine his thoughts on specific verses by introducing traditional and ancient Hebraic interpretations. With this grounding in place, we closely examine salient patterns of interpretation which emerged from our findings. The most significant pattern of interpretation was a fervent attempt to apply a Christological paradigm to determine the meaning of verses from the very start, both explicitly by invoking the name of Christ and indirectly through related concepts such as resurrection and incarnation. However, many of these interpretations appear to interject ideas wholly alien to the verse under examination if not the text itself. In effect, Gregory's application of a Christological perspective often led him to employ allegorical method in ways which neglected, displaced or disregarded the ancient Hebraic meanings underlying verses. Lastly, another salient pattern that could be discerned was a strong tendency to draw upon a wide array of other biblical texts many times even to provide legitimacy and support for highly questionable or otherwise problematic interpretations.

Keywords: Church Fathers; Ecclesiastes; allegory; literal reading; Christological paradigm; asceticism; vanity; slavery; synod; homily; Eunomius; hermeneutics.

Life Circumstances and Teachings

St. Gregory of Nyssa (335 – 395 AD), one of a handful of the earliest eminent Church Fathers,¹ was living during a time of considerable heresy of the Christian doctrine in the Greek-speaking Byzantine Empire, the only exception among all the remaining Islamic Middle Eastern empires at that time. Adherents to some of the most heretical branches of Christianity were present among nearly 50 highly devout Christians, especially the Arians.

He was born into a large aristocratic Christian family, perhaps nine or ten children in total, some of whom were already saints. He explains in some of his letters how his parents suffered greatly for their faith through confiscation of their goods and execution of the maternal grandmother by the sitting Roman Emperor. Still, his father, a highly skilled advocate and rhetorician, always managed to rebuild the family's lost fortunes. His mother educated him at home, and it is not known for certain if he received more formal education than that. In letters, Gregory himself always claimed that the only teachers in his life were his elderly brother, Basil, and the apostles and the prophets.

Twice bishop of Nyssa in Cappadocia between 372 AD and his death, he is venerated as a saint in the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran Churches. Along with his older brother, Basil, and their close friend Gregory of Nazianzus, they are collectively known as the Cappadocian Fathers. Located in modern-day Turkey, the Cappadocia region was an early site of Christian activity where Apostle Paul had

¹ Various known by contemporary biblical scholars as the Church Fathers, the Apostolic Fathers, the Christian Fathers, Fathers of the Church, and here the early Church Fathers, they were a select group of ancient Christian theologians and writers viewed as most influential in establishing the intellectual and doctrinal groundwork of the Christian faith as we know it today. They lived and worked mostly from the late first to the mid-8th centuries AD, a historical period known as the Patristic Era (Peterson, 2016; Rasmussen, 2011).

established several missions and was well-known at that time as a center for developing Christian theology. In this regard, his significant contributions were in the areas of Trinitarian doctrine and the Nicene Creed as the definitive statement of Christian belief. His more philosophical writings were strongly influenced by Origen's teachings.

Unlike his brothers who lived as hermits, Gregory at first pursued a career similar to his father's, rhetorician. For a time, he became a reader of the church reciting excerpts from the Bible. When the Roman Emperor split the large region of Cappadocia into two separate regions in 371, however, Gregory was elected bishop of one of the Nyssa provinces in 372, probably with Basil's influence and support. Hence his namesake, Gregory of Nyssa. However, his policies were not as harsh as Basil's towards heretics, preferring to reconcile them with the Christian church rather than condemn them, a policy that would be used by his enemies against him later.

From that point onwards, Gregory faced considerable opposition in Nyssa province, with other bishops in nearby localities visiting the city to try to calm things down. Still, the discontent continued until a synod² was called three years later to charge Gregory with (of all lowly things) embezzlement of church funds and improper ordination of bishops. Imperial troops arrested him that winter, but he somehow managed to escape. Although the synod voted to depose him in his absence in the spring of the following year, he regained his former clerical position in Nyssa province just two years later, in 378, probably due to a general amnesty proclaimed by the new Roman Emperor at the time. When Basil died the same year, Gregory took over his clerical responsibilities.

² From the Greek term *synodos*, meaning 'assembly', a synod is a formal gathering or council of local or provincial bishops and other officials within the Christian church usually to discuss pressing disciplinary or administrative issues. Nowadays, it commonly refers to the governing body of a particular church rather than a large formal meeting of bishops per tradition.

After this time, Gregory traveled to various places to support various candidates for the bishopric, to participate in the First Council of Constantinople, to eulogize at funerals, to solve a problem where two men in one region bickered among themselves both claiming to be bishop, and then to Jerusalem to mediate another dispute where the ordainment of the sitting bishop was being opposed by local clergy. Throughout these travels, all of his attempts to mediate disputes failed and he was constantly confronted with allegations of holding unorthodox views including on the Trinity, the nature of Christ, and the belief in Origen's teachings on universal salvation (Azkoul, 1995; Ludlow, 2013; Mateo-Seco and Gaspero, 2010; Meredith, 1995).

Scholars have collected and discussed more than 30 disparate remarks on various verses in Ecclesiastes spread across at least eight homilies,³ two separate tracts *On Virginity* and *On Prayer*, and two responses to the heretical views of Eunomius at that time.⁴ The bulk of these remarks were mainly focused upon the first three chapters of Ecclesiastes which Gregory prepared for homilies to his congregation (Grillo, 2015; Hall, 1993; Pasquali, 1997). Only three comments were applied to other chapters, one each in chapters 4, 5, and 7, with no comments for the remaining chapters. Nevertheless, the interpretations contained within them represent concerted attempts to reflect

³ Homilies are simply religious lectures or discourses intended primarily for the moral instruction of church members through scriptural exegesis during a Mass. It differs slightly from a sermon which is essentially a religious talk on a particular moral topic provided a religious leader at liturgy not necessarily through commentary on Scripture.

⁴ Eunomius (died 393 AD) was one of the leaders of a 4th century heretical Christian sect that strongly believed in a type of Arianism, a belief that Christ was not of the same nature as God the Creator Father nor was He of similar nature. In various treatises, books, and letters, he had attacked the theological views of Gregory and some of the early Church Fathers. His followers were known as Eunomians, but also known by many other names such as Anomaeans and Aetians (Vaggione, 2000, 1987). His dire criticisms of the early Church Fathers sparked such anger in Gregory that he was compelled to write a lengthy refutation against Eunomius (Gregory of Nyssa, 2014).

upon the spiritual meanings behind many of the concerns Qohelet discusses.

Gregory on Vanity and Wisdom (Eccl 1:1-17)

Gregory addresses ten of the total 17 verses in Chapter 1 of Ecclesiastes. He initiates his commentary on Ecclesiastes by focusing intently upon the presumed author's name in the very first verse, from which is derived the central purpose of the book. Initially, he suggests that the text provides instructions on how to achieve a virtuous life by persuading the human mind to rise above bodily sensations to nurture "a desire for those things to which sense does not attain". In order to rise above the body, so to speak, all the "great and splendid" things in the "world of existence" must be willfully abandoned. In turn, this conscious renunciation would then enable "the eyes of the soul" to "catch a glimpse...of those things... unattainable by sense perception".

Sense perception cannot secure this glimpse because it has been "led astray by various deceits". The assertion here from the start is that rejection of the physical body and material existence itself is the only way to provide the soul imprisoned within it access to this glimpse, a claim based upon the belief in the duality of human nature (body and soul). What are "those things" which bodily sensations cannot access? The answer is soon in coming. In Gregory's mind, the Book of Ecclesiastes is about the Christian Church (the collective body of true believers) and the "True Ecclesiast" who commands it, namely the "Son of God". The meaning of the words contained in the Book of Ecclesiastes "... has reference to Him who established the Church forever through the gospel message, the "Son of God" (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, p. 192-193). The strong interpretative leaning towards asceticism is here already noticeable in Gregory's religious thought.

We can see here already that Gregory is attempting an allegorical rather than a literal interpretation of verses, and he appears to be thoroughly uninterested in a rational point-by-

point explication of the meaning of Qohelet's terms or vocabulary, at least not from within Qohelet's ancient Hebraic biblical perspective. Understandably, from his administrative and congregational point of view, the main goal seems to be to familiarize and enlighten members on what he felt was the central point of this challenging biblical text, namely, chasing after worldly things diverts the human soul away from celebrating and worshipping God.

So, then, it is clear that Gregory a priori brings into his interpretation of Ecclesiastes a firm belief in the pre-existence of the soul within each human being,⁵ not only the body which dissipates at death. Gregory's reference to the Christian concept of 'soul' within his very first remark on Ecclesiastes is important to keep in mind for a variety of reasons which will become clear later. Among other things, it will enable us to address his view on Qohelet's final statements at the conclusion of the book about where the spirit goes after death even though Gregory does not appear to comment upon it explicitly.

Nevertheless, each of the verses in Chapter 1 of Ecclesiastes has a lesson to be learned about the vanity or 'pointlessness' of human life on earth without God front and center. For example, Verse 1:4 on the stability of earth and the ever-changing conditions of human life teaches humanity the error of thinking they can own what belongs to God (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, p. 196). Verse 1:7 on the endless cycles of the rivers and the sea teaches humanity that "there is one path for all things" and that human nature corresponds to this one cycle throughout life. Our greed for intake of acquisitions may be endless, but our capacity for enjoyment of them is restricted just like the capacity of the sea can never exceed its limits (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, pp. 197-198).

⁵ Belief in the immortality of the soul was a complicated matter in ancient Judaism. The ultimate fate of the individual after death was not a firmly settled issue. The Sadducees did not believe in the immortality of the soul, whereas the Pharisees and Essenes did (Crawford, 2011; Segal, 2004).

Verse 1:9 about nothing is new under the sun teaches us about the real distinction between the soul and the flesh, or what is and what has been made. The soul impurified has been made from the beginning and will reappear purified in the hereafter. The flesh or body was carved “by the hands of God” and will be seen again as it was at the first after “the resurrection of the dead”, a phrase repeated three times in this particular one-paragraph remark. Verse 1:11 about no remembrance of things past teaches humanity that the evils committed by an evil nature makes it “forgetful of the good”. However, all these evils will be “obliterated by what again supervenes at the end” at “the final restoration” effected by “Jesus Christ our Lord”, a blessed name repeated four times across all remarks and many dozens of times under other guises (God, Lord, Son of God, Savior, and so forth).

The spiritual lessons for humanity derived from Chapter 1 in Ecclesiastes continue unabated. Verse 1:13 on the search for wisdom instructs humanity about “the great mystery of salvation” or “why God was revealed in flesh”, an obvious reference to the Incarnation. It might be equally instructive for us to look at the actual verse now:

“And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with”.

Gregory’s take on this verse is that it spells out or makes clear the specific reason for “the Lord’s fleshly coming to dwell with humankind’ (the incarnation), namely, “...to give his heart to investigating in his own wisdom what has come about under the heaven”. There was no need to investigate what was above the heaven, evidently, because “the evils were on earth” or under the heaven. The evils were on earth because “...the creeping animal, the serpent...makes the earth its food...injecting its venom into “those who have ‘lost the power to tread upon serpents”” (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, p. 202).

Like for the previous verse, verse 1: 14 does not mean what it actually says. It does not mean that "...God gave evil distress to people, for then the responsibility for ills would be laid on Him..." What it does mean is that God's great gift of "freedom of action" was used by humankind for sinful purposes. Although "...unfettered free will is good by nature", Gregory explains, "...the impulse of the mind" many times gets "dragged down..." by "...the urges of the natural passions" to make "...the choice of evil". When this occurs, it gives great "...distress for the soul". Gregory's last two comments on Chapter 1 of Ecclesiastes refer to the wisdom and experience of King Solomon. Verse 1: 16 about Solomon's wisdom teaches humanity how to get "...out of the reach of evil". "The way of escape from evil..." is by "...despising the things which are pursued by people". Wisdom spoke "...through Solomon himself" about what those things are, namely, all human works. In the final comment on Chapter 1, Verse 1: 17 on the experience of Solomon we learn that it teaches humankind to recognize the futility of "...the passionate and irrational deception...of bodily enjoyments..." (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, p. 205). Here again, we see that the rejection of bodily pleasures as typical component of an ascetic lifestyle or point of view looms large in Gregory's Christian belief system.

The Futility of Pleasure and Wealth (Eccl 2: 3-12)

Gregory's comments about Ecclesiastes 2:1-26 only addresses less than 25% of those verses or 6 out of a total 26 verses. In order for us to glean an accurate conception of what he thinks about the central theme of this chapter on the futility of pleasure and possessions, we need to examine carefully each one in turn, not simply gloss over one or two. This is even more the case since, overall, he responds at length to only three out of 12 chapters overall, devoting one comment each for chapters 4, 5, and 7 (see Appendix). Consequently, many of the controversial verses Ecclesiastes contains are not addressed directly such as the man-beast verses, for example.

He begins his remarks on Chapter 2 at verse 3 which states:

“I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives”.

The traditional interpretation of this verse is fairly straightforward. It talks about executing an intentional strategy of stimulating the body with wine but avoiding the out-of-control behavior that typically follows drunkenness for experimental purposes. The aim is to find out whether drinking wine can deliver the lasting happiness the heart so desires while keeping wisdom firmly in control so as to avoid the folly that typically accompanies drinking wine excessively. Later, Solomon concludes that there was no lasting profit, benefit or happiness to the heart from drinking wine even under the control of wisdom, only momentary pleasure for the fleshly body.

By contrast, Gregory interprets this verse in terms of Solomon searching for “the true good” which “alters not at all” for everyone “throughout all...the days of their life”. It is “equally absolutely good” “for every person alive”. According to Gregory, this good is “the thing that Solomon sought to see”. What specific ‘good’ is he talking about? He answers: “...none other than the work of faith”. Faith is available to everyone “on equal terms” for those who desire it. It is the only thing that will last throughout their lifetimes exactly in the same strength for everyone who genuinely accepts it. The final statement of this commentary makes clear how and why St. Gregory is arriving at this interpretation: “This is the good work which I pray may be done in us too, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be the glory forever and ever” (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, pp. 207-208).

St. Gregory reserves two commentaries on verse 4 of Chapter 2 in Ecclesiastes. The first remark pertains to Solomon’s engagement with world pleasures. The verse in question actually reads: “I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself;

I planted vineyards for myself". Traditionally, this verse has been interpreted as a broadening of the intentional experimentation with world pleasures initiated in the previous verse. Gregory begins his response by questioning or doubting "whether Solomon really did these things or made the story up for our benefit...I cannot say precisely". These are things "which nobody who was aiming at virtue would willingly be associated" with. Maybe Solomon discusses them so that "we might turn away from desire for what is condemned", St. Gregory suggests. What specifically is to be condemned in a king building houses and planting vineyards for himself is a question Gregory doesn't consider, evidently.

The other commentary on verse 4 in Chapter 2 addresses the related topics of vineyards and drunkenness. Gregory begins his remarks on this perceived relationship with a very lengthy laundry list of ill behaviors caused by exceeding moderation in drinking wine for both men and women. But among all the heinous behaviors, "destruction to the soul" and "estrangement from virtue" are by far the effects most injurious to the Christian faith. At this point, he calls upon Scripture to legitimize his interpretation.

After all, drinking wine recklessly caused Lot to commit "the unlawful heinous act of incest with daughters" by distracting his mind from what was happening at the time. Whether or not this is a fair or accurate interpretation of this particular biblical reference is open to question, of course. Even more open to serious doubt is whether these homiletic commentaries on verse 4 really address Solomon's focus upon the vanity of worldly labor at all.

The next verse which Gregory responds to is Eccl 2:7:

"I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also, I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who proceeded me in Jerusalem".

Evidently, Solomon appears to be cataloguing the worldly works to which he committed his time and labor. The aim of Chapter 2 appears to be to list all these worldly works and possessions as part of an experiment and life experience to show that none of them provided lasting satisfaction and happiness. All of them were exercises in futility, vanity, analogous to ‘chasing the wind’. By contrast, Gregory takes a different hermeneutic approach which neglects to consider the author’s intended meaning. Instead, he talks about how slavery is wrong without considering at all the nature of slavery itself within ancient Hebraic society.

In Gregory’s angered mind, what Solomon is talking about here is “a gross example of arrogance” in man thinking to himself that he could be “the master of his own kind”. This is boastful language that is “a challenge to God” by “turning (His) property into his own property and...”, by doing so, “...arrogates dominion to his own kind...” It doesn’t take a blind man to see that Solomon is “...overstepping his own nature through pride...” He has “...forgotten the limits of his authority... gone “...beyond what is subject to you...”, pitting “...yourself against the very species that is free...” and placing them “...on a level with four-footed things and creeping things”. Calling on Psalms and especially Genesis to support his interpretation, he chides him sternly: “...by dividing the human species in two with ‘slavery’ and ‘ownership’ you have caused it to be enslaved to itself and to be the owner of itself”. The reaction to slavery is surely inapplicable to the author’s intended meaning, yet still admittedly profound philosophically indeed.

Solomon does not know that “...the whole world was not worth giving in exchange for a human soul”. The reason this is true is fairly simple to understand, from Gregory’s point of view. Whenever a human being is put up “for sale”, “...nothing less than the owner of the earth is led into the sale room” where “...the property belonging to Him is up for auction too”, meaning everything else on earth (sea, islands, and so forth) (St. Gregory

in Wright, p. 210). The anger peaks as St. Gregory berates Solomon:

“In what respect have you something extra, tell me, that you who are human think yourself the master of a humble being, and say, ‘I got me slaves and slave girls’, like herds of goats or pigs.” (St. Gregory in Wright, p. 210)

Notwithstanding this eloquent and masterful oratory against slavery, it is rather doubtful that any of it applies to the ancient Hebraic theological and cosmological meaning underlying the verse’s authorship. Nowhere in this verse or elsewhere in Ecclesiastes does the reader get an unmistakable impression that Solomon views “slaves” as animals or that Solomon ruthlessly suppresses continual slave revolts within his domain. Rather, they were employed by him as guards, attendants, and servers to take care of his own security and household as well as his vast holdings of gardens, pools, a great variety of animals, land, and so forth. Most contemporary biblical scholars agree that it would take tens of thousands of slaves to properly care for all of his belongings.

Surely, as an educated, knowledgeable, well-read and experienced early Christian thinker, Gregory must have known at the time of his writing that slavery within ancient Israelite society (during the biblical era) was not what it was in other cultures even at that time. Although it was allowed begrudgingly, complete domination of another human being as chattel or personal property of the slave owner was emphatically not permitted by Biblical and Talmudic laws, whether slaves were Jewish or non-Jewish. Rather, slavery fell under contract law which reduces it to voluntary slavery as consent between persons.

First of all, the status of slave was by no means in all instances imposed by physical force as might be implied by contemporary understanding. There were many reasons why someone might

agree or consent to being another person's slave and depending upon the circumstances, the term 'agree' has to be viewed on occasion with some degree of caution. But still, that principle holds generally. For example, most foreign people might become Jewish slaves mainly as prisoners of war, but even in that case Jewish culture offered means of redemption such as a limited term of servitude or conversion to Judaism.

Other reasons for accepting voluntary slavery were as a way of paying off debts, escaping the ravages of poverty, becoming citizens or near-citizens, adopting the religious practices of a new culture, serving punishment for a crime, running away from a war-torn region, and a host of other reasons unrelated to involuntary forced slavery as a piece of property belonging to another person to do with as one wished.⁶ What's more, unique in the Ancient Near East at that time, the Torah forbids Jewish people to return slaves who have run away from bondage in their own lands to live in Israel, and commands Jewish authorities to treat them equivalent to any other resident foreigner (Deu 23: 16-17).

The next two remarks by Gregory on Chapter 2 in Ecclesiastes refer to verse 2: 8 on silver and gold. Actually, the verse itself refers to more than silver and gold in a running list of worldly pleasures and possessions that Solomon has experienced, as

⁶ Views on slavery within Jewish culture is a lot more complicated and very different from contemporary notions of and experiences with slavery. To begin with, it varied quite a bit in both religious and historical terms. There were numerous texts that governed ownership and treatment of slaves including the Hebrew Bible itself, the Talmud, and the Mishnah Torah. The Hebrew Bible had one set of laws for Hebrews (Lev 25: 39-43) and another set for non-Hebrews (Lev 25: 45-46), but the Talmud's slavery laws applied to all slaves. All of these laws included severe punishment of any slave owner who mistreated slaves. Jewish ownership of non-Jewish slaves was severely restricted by rabbinical authorities since they desired to offer them conversion to Judaism in the first-year term of slavery, thereby producing a constant stream of Jewish slave converts (Goldenberg, 2003; Hezer, 2005; Lewis, 1992; Singer and Adler, 2023; Tigay, 2004).

indicated previously. So, it is vitally important to state the verse here as it is in the Bible:

“Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men – many concubines”.

Gregory begins his commentary on this verse by relating gold to evil. There is no hope for someone with vast amounts of gold “...to be detached and aloof from all that draws him toward evil”, nor to extend life for many centuries or be free from aging and disease. No amount of gold or wealth can guarantee these things; it “offers no benefit in body or in soul”. Even if gold was available to everyone on a small scale, it would “...prove useless to those who possess it”. It can’t be smelled, heard, tasted, not even felt in a different way by others. No practical advice comes from it, no special training, no predictive abilities, and no comfort for bodily pains. In Gregory’s mind, it is completely useless.

For entirely questionable reasons when viewed from the author’s probable meaning, his second comment on Eccl 2: 8 expands into a lengthy diatribe against usury. But then, if something like gold that allegedly confers “no benefit to those who pursue it..., for what reason is it pursued?” Gregory asks himself. What is the affection involved in this pursuit? Do they pursue it just to congratulate themselves they have done so? “What is the mindless frenzy over the acquisition of things whose goal is futility,” the madness for riches that leads people to “commit murders and robbery”? What leads those with this madness to come up with “the pernicious idea of interest which one might call another kind of robbery or bloodshed without being far from the truth”?

According to St. Gregory, there’s not much difference in seizing someone’s property or money by force, stealing, murdering and “...acquiring what is not one’s own by exacting interest”.

Someone who seizes what belongs to others through the former means is called a criminal, but someone who “enforces his crime by contracts” is called the noblest of names such as philanthropist, benefactor, and even savior...” The person who steals from another is called a thief, while the person who “strips the debtor naked” is called a philanthropist.

Concluding his diatribe, Gregory returns to Solomon’s mention of silver and gold by claiming that it is offered by the king as a lesson from his own experience in order to train humanity “that this is one of the things condemned as wrong” and to “guard against the...evil” (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, pp. 211-212). Whether or not this is what the author of Ecclesiastes is actually saying, however, is open to question. Biblical scholars have pointed out that the Old Testament speaks only against charging interest to the destitute, other Jewish people, or anyone caught in an unfortunate life situation. Other than that, it condemns the application of extortionate rates of interest. What is interesting here is twofold. First, Gregory does not draw upon the relevant biblical texts of the Old Testament to address the question about usury in strictly biblical terms relevant to the time during which the Ecclesiast lived. Secondly, the notion of usury appears to be altogether foreign to the ancient Hebraic meaning of the verse itself.

Gregory’s next comment on Chapter 2 refers to verse 2:11, a sort of summary of all the worldly pleasures Solomon had considered:

“Thus, I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun”.

Gregory claims that “what the text means” is that “all enjoyable interest and activity disappears with its accomplishment”. All enjoyment is wiped out when the activity terminates. Like the letters formed by writing in water which dissipate into

shapelessness as soon as the finger writes them, there is “no trace of happiness left to the pleasure takers” once the “pleasant activity passes away”, “nothing is stored up for the future”. In other words, there is no advantage conferred upon those who labor for worldly pleasures and treasures, ‘no profit under the sun’. Striving for world pleasures and possessions is like writing your name in water, implies Gregory. Surely, Gregory comes closest here to the intended meaning although readers may quibble here and there with the stark existential connotations.

Contrasting Wisdom and Folly (Eccl 2:12-13)

In the final remark on Chapter 2, Gregory addresses Solomon’s contrast between wisdom, folly, and madness. The actual verse states:

“So, I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly; for what will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done? And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.”

For Gregory, this verse teaches human beings to “follow the real wisdom’, not human wisdom. Implicitly drawing on Genesis and explicitly calling on Psalms and First Corinthians for legitimation, Gregory asserts that ‘real wisdom’ “is none other than the Wisdom that is conceived of as before the universe... that wisdom by which God made all things...Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God by which all things came to be and were set in order...”

Then Gregory kicks it into spiritual high gear in his interpretation of Solomon’s comparison of wisdom and folly with light and darkness by introducing the Christological notion of evil. For Solomon, light illuminates what was previously unseen in the same way that wisdom illuminates what was previously unknown. For Gregory, however, it is quite a different matter. “I think it is appropriate”, he surmises, “that he (Solomon) uses the analogy of light in the discernment of the

good”, imputing Solomon’s intentions. “Light is of itself, perceived in its own essence,” he continues, whereas “darkness is...unreal”.

Therefore, he concludes, Solomon “shows by this analogy that evil does not exist by itself...”, but “...arises from the deprivation of the good...evil is the deprivation of being, and not something that exists” (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, pp. 214-215). Evil may or may not exist or it may or may not be a deprivation of the good logically or philosophically, but it’s rather doubtful that Gregory tapped into Solomon’s intended ancient Hebraic meaning here.

Why Gregory says that evil is something that does not exist is peculiar especially but not only from within an ancient Christian perspective. Even at his time, the writers of the Bible took for granted the existence of a spiritual world beyond the concrete real material world which contained spiritual forces or entities hostile to God’s will. As well, no matter how consistently Christological Gregory is in his understanding of Ecclesiastes, it almost goes without saying that this particular understanding of evil is nowhere mentioned nor implied in this verse and nor is it employed in the entire text of Ecclesiastes.

Gregory’s Season for Every Event (Eccl 3:2-8)

Next, Gregory proceeds to make ten comments on Chapter 3 which contains Solomon’s laundry list of renowned ‘a-time-to’ expressions. However, he only applies his remarks to five of the chapter’s total 22 verses scattered across various homilies on Ecclesiastes at different points in time, again about 25% of total chapter verses. His first remark on Chapter 3 is devoted to Eccl 3: 2 which states: “A time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted”. Gregory begins his commentary by stating that Solomon was right to make the tight bond between death and birth, but he insists that Solomon intends much more than just making this link. What Solomon really intends is to:

“...wake from sleep those who are sunk deep in fleshly existence and love this present life, and to arouse them in awareness of the future. This insight Moses, the friend of God, used secretly in the first books of Scripture, writing Exodus immediately after Genesis...” (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, p. 220)

The reader might ask: What ‘insight’ is Gregory talking about in regards to Moses? Answer: the insight of ordering or arranging the first two books of Scripture to correspond to “...a birth (‘Genesis’)” and “...a departure (‘Exodus’). The “great Ecclesiast...noticed this” by “classing death with birth”, Gregory points out emphatically. Again, regardless of how clever Ecclesiast or Moses or Gregory may or may not have been, it is arguably doubtful that the verse in question was to rouse anyone’s awareness of the future by using impending “death as a goad”, perhaps a veiled reference to a coming resurrection in a new kingdom of God asserted within Christian doctrine.

The next two comments Gregory makes about Chapter 3 refer to verse 4: “A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance”. The two phrases contained within this verse are addressed in two separate remarks. From Gregory’s point of view, the first phrase actually means that the present is more a time for weeping than for laughing. But the weeping will become joy in the future. The reason is because the joyful state of human nature “at the beginning” of creation was lost by “the first humans”. At that time, there were no “wicked words” like ‘mine’ and ‘yours’, no “disease of acquisitiveness”, and “no death, disease”. Everything was shared in “equality with the angels” with the “freedom to speak before God”. But the present sorrow due to what was lost “will become mother of joy that is hoped for”, Gregory concedes, implicitly drawing on notions about the kingdom to come (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, p. 220).

For the other phrase of the verse, Gregory arrives at interesting conclusions by reserving mourning for the sad status of the lowly body and dancing for the joyful status of the soul which

was once free to speak with God. The implication is that human beings were at one time only “souls” or spirits residing in a heavenly abode with other heavenly beings including God Himself. But the infamous “Fall” changed all that.

As a consequence, human beings are now “made of body and soul” with a corresponding twofold life energy “operating in each of them within us”. That’s why, Gregory reasons, “it would be a good thing to mourn in our bodily life...and prepare for our soul the harmonious dance”. More misery and sadness now in life will mean greater joy for the soul later. Then the humble will be lifted, the poor will be crowned, and “the one covered with sores...will rest in the bosom of the patriarch”, “our Savior, Jesus Christ...” (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, p. 222-223)

Whether or not these interpretations conform with acceptable Christian doctrine is a different issue than whether they respect the intended meaning of the ancient Hebraic author of Ecclesiastes or fall within the orbit of ancient Hebraic theology and cosmology. The traditional interpretation of the two phrases in this verse is understood as a continuation of a lengthy list of worldly events that occur to human beings during earthly life.

Under earthly conditions of continual change, it is unreasonable for human beings to expect limitless happiness uninterrupted by times of sadness and sorrow. It’s just a fact of human life that mourning at funerals will be complemented by dancing at festivals, while weeping at pain and disease will be complemented by laughter and joy with friends. At some point, God will make things right and redeem even the most lamentable of human circumstances. It is not for human beings to know what is only knowable to God.

Gregory also responds in the same way as the previous verse with two separate remarks for Eccl 3:5, which states: “A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to shun embracing”. Although the meaning of this

verse is far from settled definitively, most biblical scholars agree it lies within a limited range of meanings common to ancient Hebraic agricultural society at that time.

In terms of the traditional understanding of the first phrase, stones could be gathered to build houses, walls, and fences, to be hurled at enemies or thrown into their fields in times of war, or literally pelted at persons convicted of serious offenses. Given the agricultural base of the economy at that time, a farmer had to gather all the stones in his field before he could sow seeds and grow crops on it productively. For the same reason, stones in a vineyard had to be gathered and cast away. Of course, gathering stones and casting them could be a veiled reference to the biblical narrative of David and Goliath or to some other biblical texts.

For his part, Gregory views these literal meanings as “superficial interpretation” because the Ecclesiast claimed that collecting stones again was something timely, continually cast and collected. What are these “stones”, then, that the Ecclesiast is really speaking about? Gregory answers: “We certainly ought to consider that thoughts destructive of evil are the very stones accurately aimed at by the Ecclesiast”. Who are they cast at? Gregory responds: “...the one who rises in pride against our life”, presumably Satan. “Whenever he may plan some fresh assault...”, we must always have “the soul’s lap...full of such missiles” to “stone the enemy to death”. We collect these thought stones to “use at the right moment against those who vex us, utterly destroying them without weapons ever leaving hands.

The traditional interpretation of the second part of this verse closely follows the logic of what was said about the first part. There are many times when embracing is encouraged and many times when it is restricted within ancient Hebraic culture. During prescribed times of repentance and fasting, for example, it was to be avoided. Husband and wife may agree through mutual consent to avoid embracing in sexual relations for the

purposes of prayer. Embracing is often used in Scripture as a mode of friends greeting each other or to describe what occurs in family interactions at various times.

However, Gregory's response to the second phrase of the verse is to claim there is a deeper meaning underlying the phrase in question. In Scripture, he begins, the term 'embrace' is used in connection with David in Psalms exhorting the words, 'circle Zion and embrace her', and by Solomon himself in Proverbs affirming that those who honor Wisdom will be embraced by her. Since Mount Zion rises above Jerusalem, this means that "the one urging you to embrace her is bidding you to attach yourself to high principles...the very citadel of virtues".

The one who bids you to honor wisdom is actually announcing "the good news of the embrace she will give you in the future". These statements denote "the pinnacle of conduct and the essence of virtue. By the same token, the moment for avoiding an embrace occurs when "the one who has become familiar with virtue is a stranger to the state of evil...If you have become attached to the good, you surely avoid attachment to evil" (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, pp. 224-225).

Gregory's next remark about Chapter 3 in Ecclesiastes pertains to verse 6 which reads as follows: "A time to search and a time to give up as lost; a time to keep and a time to throw away". The traditional interpretation of this verse refers primarily to material things or property lost which cannot be found or re-acquired. Sometimes it's better to be content and accept the loss rather than take actions that risk more loss. As well, there are times to keep things that are close to your heart while casting away things that are not beneficial. Gregory responds mainly to the first phrase by claiming it refers to when "it is the right moment to seek the Lord", which moment is actually "all your life". Seeking the Lord is not a fixed moment in time, but "never to cease from continual search-that is the real timelessness" (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, p. 225).

Gregory devotes one comment to verse 7 in Chapter 3 which states: “A time to tear apart and a time to sew together; a time to be silent and a time to speak”. Traditionally, the first phrase has been commonly related to tearing garments apart as a way of expressing sorrow in mourning, and then sewing them back together again when the time for mourning has passed. Sometimes it is interpreted as meaning a kingdom being torn apart or divided for various reasons and then brought back together again in unity. The second part of the phrase has usually been interpreted to mean knowing when silence is golden and when to speak the right words at the right time to a troubled person to provide solace and relief, but also vice versa.

For reasons unrelated to ancient Hebraic theology, Gregory’s response to verse 7 is interpreted to mean knowing the difference between “the moment for keeping silent” and “the moment for speaking” about God. Gregory insists that it is always the good moment for speaking about “some good activity” of God, but not “in matters that lie beyond” this limit. This is because creation cannot be allowed to overstep its boundaries by talking about “God’s...being”. Creation should just “be content to know itself” (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, p. 227).

Next, Gregory devotes three separate remarks to Eccl 3:8 which states: “A time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace”. Here, as always, we have to keep firmly in mind that the terms used in ancient Hebraic, Aramaic, or even Greek verse do not equate to what they are now understood to mean. Often in the Bible, the terms ‘love’, ‘hate’, ‘war’, and even ‘peace’ had much greater ranges of meanings than they do in contemporary society.

Still, the traditional meaning of the two phrases in this verse follows the logic established in previous verses. The first phrase is usually interpreted broadly beyond sexual connotations to mean acting caringly toward something or to denote a caring or affectionate attitude toward another such as the love between God and his Creation or between a father and son. Hating

usually means intense dislike of something or someone, although one can hate something or someone to varying degrees or for various reasons. It does not always logically follow that the object of what is hated refers to a person.

The same reasoning applies to the terms war and peace. The typical Hebrew greeting of ‘peace’ or ‘shalom’ extends beyond a cessation of war between nations to mean the attainment of total well-being, serenity, and security. Although the term ‘war’ is usually reserved to describe hostilities between nations, it can also be used to describe any kind of warfare, spiritual or otherwise. What Solomon appears to be saying in this verse as in all the similar others is that his experience has taught him that there are moments when all of these activities are appropriate and other moments when they are not.

Once again, Gregory’s response to the verse does not appear to be concerned with the underlying ancient Hebraic paradigm from within which the author is operating. In his mind, ‘a time to love’ simply means to obey the Commandment which dictates to “love the Lord your God with all your heart...soul and...mind”, and ‘a time to hate’ simply means to hate “the inventor of evil, the enemy of our life” because destruction will fall upon “the one who loves...evil”. What’s more, virtues and vices can also be loved or hated, Gregory points out.

Luckily, “the Ecclesiast” sets out all the moments for “loving restraint” and “hating pleasure” so that our “soul...may make profitable decisions”. In terms of war and peace, Gregory asserts it is clear “who we should go to war with” (the ‘inventor of evil’) and who we should “make a peaceful alliance” with, namely, “the good army”. What is the good army? “It is clear...that it is the array of angels of the host of heaven” (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, pp. 227-228).

We have completed our examination of all Gregory’s remarks on the first three chapters of Ecclesiastes. What now remains to be reviewed are three separate comments one each for chapters 4,

5, and 7, with the verses of other chapters absent from commentary. Let us now look at the specific verse in Chapter 4 that Gregory chooses to focus upon.

Gregory on Companionship (Eccl 4:10)

Gregory's next commentary applies to Eccl 4: 10 which reads:

“For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up”.

Here we must take into consideration that this entire chapter generally deals with the evils of various oppressions. As well, this verse cannot really be understood properly without including consideration of the previous verse Eccl 4:9 which states: “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor”. In fact, it is wise to read verses 4:9-12 together collectively to reach a proper interpretation of what the Ecclesiast means since those verses are all variations on the same theme of ‘two is better than one’.

In work, if one falls the other is there to help; in travel, if one falls from a carriage or a horse, the other can help him up; in bed, if one is cold the other can keep him warm; and if the attempt is made to overpower one, the other can help to resist it. In other words, all the key concepts within the verse in question must be interpreted in the light of what the Ecclesiast is saying in the verse collective. Although admittedly, terms such as ‘fall’ and ‘lift’ may be interpreted in myriad ways, not all of these interpretations will respect the intended meaning of the Ecclesiast.

Even though this verse essentially advances the principle that companionship lightens the load of earthly human existence, Gregory applies it specifically to his treatise on virginity. Persons who “... intend to live a life of virginity are still young and immature”, so the first priority is “...finding a good guide and teacher on this path...lest...they... wander away from the

straight road. For, as Ecclesiastes says, ‘two are better than one.’” If these people don’t find the proper spiritual guidance and support, “...they get tripped up because of their vanity...they deceive(d) themselves...” The people likely to get ‘tripped up’ or fall prey to “...the enemy lying in ambush on the divine road...” are “...the slothful...the dreamers...the unsociable...” and others who don’t know “...the fruit of long-suffering and humility” Whether or not the Ecclesiast in this verse intended to provide advice to people aspiring to live a life of virginity is entirely open to serious doubt (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, p. 237).

The next verse in Ecclesiastes that Gregory comments upon is verse 2 in Chapter 5 which is essentially about adopting the proper attitude toward God the Creator:

“Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore, let your words be few.”

The traditional interpretation of this verse is relatively straightforward. What the Ecclesiast is advising in human relations towards God is not to arrive at quick impetuous decisions about moral issues and to avoid being harsh and unthoughtful in the use of words. When talking to God, human beings should be respectful and responsible to ponder thoughts carefully and speak from the heart, while exercising restraint and reverential fear in front of the magnificent king of the universe, Almighty God.

Gregory’s take on this verse closely approaches the Ecclesiast’s intended meaning. From his point of view, what the Ecclesiast argues is just “...how far the divine nature is above the speculations of human reason” and “...how widely the divine nature differs from our own...” Therefore, rightfully so, the Ecclesiast exhorts “...not to be hasty to utter anything before God”. Therefore, Gregory counsels: “...let us quietly remain

within our proper limits...For it is both safer and more reverent...” Whether or not the Preacher is advising not to say anything before God, however, is seriously open to question. Among other things, the God of the ancient Hebrews is a personal and loving God who answers their prayers and communicates with His people. Even from a philosophical or logical point of view, just because God’s nature transcends human intelligence does not mean human beings should forego talking to God (Gregory of Nyssa in Wright, p. 240).

The last verse which Gregory remarks upon is Eccl 7:16, a chapter which contrasts wisdom and folly. It counsels briefly: “Do not be excessively righteous and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself?” Like so many of the verses in Ecclesiastes, the traditional meaning of this verse is arrived at by placing it within the background of previous verses. In those verses, the Ecclesiast is developing the central theme of humanity not knowing all of God’s ways.

Everything that happens to humanity is due to the will of God the Father Creator including the tears and laughter, the sufferings and joys, the health and sickness, the poverty and the riches; God determines and wills it all. Does that give human beings the right to criticize and debate with God? No, for that would be overstepping our boundaries as the created. As created by God, it is simply unbecoming to be impatient or pridefully irritated with God’s ways towards humanity.

Here Gregory employs this verse as a weapon to fend off the attacks from the heretic Eunomius at the time, already previously mentioned (also see Footnote 4). Whereas Ecclesiast uses this verse to counsel others not to be overly righteous or overly wise in relations with God and fellow human beings, Gregory employs it to condemn Eunomius for “making himself overwise, as the Holy Scripture forbids us to do”. Whether the Ecclesiast intended this verse or any other verse to be used as a defense against the attacks of heretics claiming or implying

that they might have a monopoly on wisdom or correct biblical interpretation is another question altogether.

Summary and Conclusion

We have now concluded our examination of Gregory's views about various verses in the Book of Ecclesiastes. We began by placing these views within the social context of Gregory's life circumstances, teachings, and key events that informed his religious thinking at the time. Then we provided an appropriate comparative context of ancient Hebraic and traditional interpretations applied to the specific verses Gregory examined. We are now, hopefully, in a much more propitious position to critically examine salient patterns of interpretation that emerged from our findings than we would have otherwise been.

The most significant pattern of interpretation that emerged was the fervent attempt from the very start to apply a Christological paradigm to determine the meaning of verses,⁷ both explicitly by invoking the name of Christ and through related concepts such as resurrection, incarnation, and salvation. However, as we have intimated above, many of these interpretations stretched beyond the boundaries of logic and common sense given the fact that the Ecclesiast was an Old Testament author. These problematic interpretations seemed to be rooted in the patent failure to understand Ecclesiastes within its own terms, that is, from within the ancient Hebraic theological and cosmological point of view out of which it emerged.

From the beginning and throughout commentaries and remarks on various verses, Gregory's single-minded intent to

⁷ In simple terms, a Christological paradigm or perspective refers to the doctrine of Christ and its related concepts and beliefs, usually concerning the reflections, teachings, and doctrine pertaining to Jesus of Nazareth. More broadly, it encompasses the system of beliefs, values, and principles about the nature and work of Jesus Christ and related concepts such as Incarnation, Resurrection, and the relationship between the human and divine nature of Christ (Hillebrand and Stefon, 2024).

apply a Christological perspective often led him to employ an allegorical method in ways which mostly displaced or disregarded the underlying ancient Hebraic meanings of verses. It also led him to introduce ideas wholly alien to the verse under examination, if not the text itself.

Consequently, the primary message of Chapter 1 becomes Christ is the leader of the Church (the 'True Ecclesiast') rather than the vanity of earthly human life; the search for Wisdom becomes the purpose of the Incarnation; and no remembrance of things past after death for both fool and wise man becomes Jesus Christ will make the memory of humanity's fallen state vanish in the final restoration.

In Chapter 2, a simple lesson about the vanity of human pleasures and treasures becomes a search for the absolutely good of Christ Jesus our Lord; planting vineyards becomes a lengthy laundry list of ill behaviors caused by drunkenness; the contrast between wisdom and folly becomes following the wisdom of Christ; and the possession of gold and silver becomes a tirade against the ills of usury and an object lesson about the nature of good and evil

In Chapter 3, a time to weep becomes reconfigured as weeping the lowly status of the human body and bodily sensations in an apparent effort to promote an ascetic lifestyle. Here, perhaps a moment's solitary reflection upon the Incarnation itself might have indicated to Gregory that Christ lived and thought otherwise about bodily deprivations and self-denial, let alone extreme forms of ascetic behavior such as flagellation and self-mutilation. A time for throwing stones becomes thoughts thrown at evil; a time to search becomes seeking Christ; a time to shun embrace becomes avoiding attachment to evil; and a time to mourn becomes mourning bodily life, while a time to dance becomes the soul dancing freely and happily when bodily sensations are removed.

In Chapter 4, the practical advice that two is better than one becomes finding the right spiritual guide to lead a life of virginity. In Chapter 5, fearing God and keeping vows becomes not talking to God at all and quietly remaining within proper limits as created beings. Finally, in Chapter 7, the counsel not to be overly righteous nor overly wise becomes an accusation and defense against a known heretic.

Conceivably, all of these problematic interpretations are likely the result of trying to inject into an ancient text of the Old Testament ideas and notions largely foreign to the intended meaning of the Hebraic author. Gregory really doesn't try to understand the meanings of verses from the Ecclesiast's ancient Hebraic point of view. He tends to treat each verse as separate and distinct from the others by consistently avoiding to place meaning within the background of previous verses.

The result is occasional coincidental similarities of meanings between Gregory's Christological interpretation and the Ecclesiast's intended message when Gregory agrees, and rampant reinterpretation and rewriting of verses if he doesn't. Arguably, the steadfast execution of a Christological view to Ecclesiastes does not logically necessitate the displacement of ancient Hebraic meanings underlying the verses.

Of course, all this having been said doesn't mean that Gregory did not succeed at times to make proper interpretations of various ideas within Ecclesiastes, or that he failed to make many profound observations and insights about the meaning of various verses. It just means that, for the most part, he was not trying to interpret verses from within an ancient Hebraic point of view. In other words, he was not trying to understand Ecclesiastes within its own terms. From the beginning, Gregory was often saying that the verse doesn't mean what it actually says, or perhaps Solomon really did not do those things he said he did, or claiming Solomon intended to say more than what he said.

Lastly, a final interpretative pattern that could be discerned was a strong tendency to draw upon other biblical texts to provide support for interpretation of particular verses. However, many times these biblical texts were utilized to support gross misinterpretations or otherwise highly questionable interpretations. A major problem here was employing biblical texts strategically to lend support for an interpretation of a verse that was doubtful at best and illegitimate at worst.

It nearly goes without saying that if an interpretation of a particular verse failed to tap into the intended ancient Hebraic message of the author, then all biblical texts called upon to support that interpretation are wholly inapplicable to that message. If the intended meaning of Ecclesiastes or a particular verse within it was not about living an ascetic lifestyle or the ills of drunkenness or the evil of acquisitiveness or virginity or the cruelty of usury, to cite just a few of many available examples, then in reality the use of biblical references to support interpretation likely becomes superfluous, immaterial, and meaningless homiletic grandstanding.

Appendix**Ecclesiastes in Gregory of Nyssa**

The following references to Ecclesiastes by Gregory of Nyssa were compiled in: Wright, J.R. ed. 2005. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Old Testament IX. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Ref Subject Exegeses

- 1 – 1:1 Name of Ecclesiastes
Ecclesiastes is About the Church and the One Who Leads It
- 2 – 1:2 Vanity of Life
Vanity Means Futility
- 3 – 1:4 Stability of Earth and the They Instability of Human Life
Error of Those Who Think Can Possess the Earth
- 4 – 1:7 The Rivers and the Sea
Pattern of the Sea Indicates Our Journey Through Life
- 5 – 1:7 The Rivers and the Sea
Sea Never Exceeds its Capacity
- 6 – 1:9 Nothing New Under Sun
Distinction: What is/What is Made
- 7 – 1:11 No Remembrance of Things Past
At the Final Restoration Memory of Evil Will Utterly Vanish
- 8 – 1:13 The Search for Wisdom
Purpose of Incarnation is to Assist Humans in Search for Wisdom
- 9 – 1:14 All Human Works are Vanity
Vanity is Caused by Abuse of God's Gift of Freedom
- 10 – 1:16 Wisdom of Solomon
Way Back Toward the Good
- 11 – 1:17 Experience of Solomon
Solomon's Life Corresponded to His Experience
- 12 – 2:3 The Search for Good
Equality of Wish and Fulfillment
- 13 – 2:4 Vanity of Worldly Labor
Solomon with Worldly Pleasures
- 14 – 2:4 Vanity of Worldly Labor

Vineyards and Drunkenness

15 – 2:7 Male and Female Slaves

Why Slavery is Wrong

16 – 2:8 Silver and Gold

Uselessness of Gold

17 – 2:8 Silver and Gold

Case Against Usury

18 – 2:11 All Things Considered

Summary That Ends in Futility

19 – 2:12 Wisdom, Madness, Folly

Evil: Depriv. of Good, Nonexistence

20 – 3:2 Time to be Born/ to Die

Linkage of Death to Birth

21 – 3:4 Time to Weep/to Laugh

Time for Weeping not Laughing.

22 – 3:4 Time to Weep and Time to Laugh

Mourning is for the Body, Dancing is for the Soul

23 – 3:5a Throwing Stones and Gathering Them

Thoughts Directed to Better Things are Destructive of Worse Things

24 – 3:5b Marriage and Abstinence

Deeper Meaning of Embracing and Avoiding an Embrace

25 – 3:6 Time to Keep/to Cast Away

Right Time to Seek the Lord

26 – 3:7 Silence and Speech

Be Silent About God's Being, Speak About God's Activity

27 – 3:8 Love & Hate/War & Peace

Love God and Hate Evil

28 – 3:8 Love & Hate/War & Peace

Virtues or Vices... Loved or Hated

29 – 3:8 Love & Hate/War & Peace

Army of God's Peace

30 – 4:10 Spiritual Guidance/Support

Need for a Good Spiritual Guide

31 – 5:2 Watching the Mouth

God's Nature Transcends Our Intelligence

32 – 7:16 Not Overly Righteous/Wise

Local Position

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