

The Book of Joyous Exaltation

An Answer to Ecclesiastes

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This Edition

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Epigraph

What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 1:9

There is everything new under the sun.

Exaltation 1:9

Introduction

Introduction

Ecclesiastes is the most honest book in the Bible and the most dangerous one. Those are the same fact.

I was raised in a house where it was the operating manual. My father quoted the ninth verse of the first chapter the way other men quote a warranty. There is nothing new under the sun. He meant it as permission. Nothing you build will outlast you, nothing you learn is new, so do not bother building and do not bother learning. He called himself a farmer and a machinist and could not work on a vehicle built after 1990, not for lack of capacity. The verse was the reason. I have spent my adult life proving that reading wrong.

That is the occasion for this book. What follows is the argument.

The Preacher's honest report

Qoheleth is not a fool and Ecclesiastes is not an easy target. Read it straight through and he does something no other writer in that canon attempts. He looks at the world without a single consoling lie. The righteous die like the wicked, at 9:2. The wise are forgotten exactly as fast as the stupid, at 2:16. Labor accumulates nothing that survives the laborer, at 2:18. Time and chance happen to everybody, at 9:11. He does not soften one line of it.

Then he reaches the wrong conclusion, and reaches it with such authority that twenty-five centuries of readers have taken the observation and the conclusion as one object.

They are not one object. The observation is accurate. The conclusion is a leash.

The word he uses is hevel. King James gives it as vanity, which arrives through the Latin *vanitas* and is a translation decision, and a bad one. Hevel is vapor. Breath on cold glass. Mist that shows for a moment in the angle of the sun and then does not. He says everything is vapor, meaning nothing can be gripped, nothing stays where you set it, nothing holds its shape. Michael Fox argues the word runs closer to absurd than to fleeting, that Qoheleth's world is not thin but unintelligible. Take that seriously, because at first it looks like it costs me the argument. If the world is vapor I can work it. If the world is absurd, what is there to shape?

Follow it through and it cuts the other way. A world that does not make sense has no standing to issue instructions. Absurdity is a reason to stop obeying. It is not a reason to stop building. Fox makes the Preacher's conclusion harder to hold, not easier.

Now look at what he does with it.

He counsels submission. Eat your bread, drink your wine, do the work in front of you, fear God, and stop asking. The vapor is the proof that the asking is futile. That is the move. He establishes that reality is not fixed and then rules that its unfixedness is a reason to lie still in it.

Anyone who has ever worked anything knows better. Vapor is not the thing you cannot touch. Vapor is the thing that has not condensed yet. A material that will not hold its shape is a material you can shape. Fixed is what you cannot work. Fluid is the whole opportunity.

Same observation. Other direction.

The warm passages

Here is the part of the case against me that I take seriously, and it is not the part people lead with.

Qoheleth is not only bleak. Seven times he stops and tells you to eat your bread, drink your wine, and take pleasure in your work. Whybray counted them in 1982 and called him a preacher of joy. They are at 2:24, 3:12, 3:22, 5:18, 8:15, 9:7, and the long summons that opens at 11:7. Seven is a refrain, not an aside. Anybody who calls the book a counsel of despair has to say why the same instruction comes round seven times.

It does not explain itself away. The refrains are warm and they are real and I am not going to pretend otherwise.

Look at what each one is fastened to. Eat and drink, for this is your portion. Rejoice in your work, for that is your lot. The joy is never open. It is the ration issued inside the verdict, and the verdict is that the labor accumulates nothing, the memory does not survive, and the wise die exactly like the fools. He hands you a cup and tells you not to ask about the vineyard.

Take the cup. Refuse the fence.

That is the quarrel, and it is worth putting plainly, because the fence is the thing this book was written against. Not the wine.

What was bolted on

The epilogue gives the game away. Read 12:9 through 12:14 against the eleven and a half chapters in front of it and the seam shows in the grain. The voice goes to third person and stays there. Someone else is describing the Preacher now, praising him, and then closing the book with an instruction he never quite gives anywhere else in it.

Be exact about that, because the exact version is sharper. Qoheleth does tell you to fear God, and often. The phrase runs at

3:14, at 5:7, at 7:18, twice over at 8:12, and again at 8:13. He says God brings things into judgment at 3:17 and at 11:9. He even tells you at 8:5 to keep the commandment, singular, in a passage about not getting yourself killed by a king.

What he never says, in eleven and a half chapters, is keep his commandments. The plural, with God's name fastened to it. That clause appears once, at 12:13, inside the six verses where the third-person voice appears, and nowhere else in the book.

Most scholars who work the text read that ending as a later hand. Not all of them, and the argument is still running.

Name the strongest opponent and be fair to him. Craig Bartholomew argues the book is a literary unity and that the epilogue is the key to reading it rather than a bolt-on, and he rejects the version, Fox's and Longman's, in which the frame is correcting Qoheleth. On his account the received book is the book, and my seam is a modern invention with more Protestant anxiety in it than evidence. I think he is wrong. I also think he is the man to beat, and if you read one book against this one, read his.

But that is where the leash is attached, and you can see the knot.

The rabbis argued about whether to keep the book at all, and the argument survives. Mishnah Yadayim 3:5 collects it. Rabbi Yose says Kohelet does not defile the hands, and since defiling the hands is what sacred scripture does in that idiom, he is saying it is not scripture. Rabbi Shimon reports the split as a leniency of the House of Shammai against a stringency of the House of Hillel, which is the reverse of how those two normally run. Rabbi Akiva, defending the Song of Songs in the same passage, says that if anyone ever disputed anything it was only ever Kohelet. Ben Az-zai finally produces a tradition from seventy-two elders to close the matter.

So the most clear-eyed description of the demiurge's world in that whole library got in over objection, carrying an ending that tells you to obey.

The two answers

There is one other place in that library where somebody looks straight at the arrangement and gives the opposite counsel.

You will not surely die. Your eyes will be opened.

The serpent and the Preacher are arguing the same case. Qoheleth says at 1:18 that in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. The serpent says take it anyway. Both agree that knowing costs. They disagree entirely about whether the cost is a reason to stop.

The Morningstar's name got attached to this by accident. Lucifer is not a name in Isaiah. It is the ordinary Latin word for the morning star, and Jerome used it in the Vulgate to render helem ben shachar, shining one, son of the dawn, inside a taunt-song aimed at a Babylonian king. The Greek before him had heosphoros, dawn-bringer. The morning star reading is older than Christianity.

The reading that made him the adversary is older than people assume, too. Tertullian and Origen were already there in the second and third centuries, before Jerome wrote a line of the Vulgate. What hardened lucifer from a common noun into a proper name was the King James capital, and after it Milton.

A Babylonian king, an ordinary Latin word, and centuries of reading habit. The office turned out to be real and it had nobody in it. Somebody had to stand for the position that the fruit is worth the sorrow.

Note the epithet in the first line of this book. Child of the dawn. That is ben shachar, lifted straight out of the taunt-song and put back into the mouth it was taken from.

That is the position this book takes, verse against verse, for twelve chapters.

The age that breaks the verse

The claim in 1:9 is not a mystical proposition. It is an empirical one. Nothing new under the sun is a statement about the world, it can be checked against the world, and it fails.

I read the failure through the age we are standing in. Aquarius, the age of advancement. Say the awkward part first. Nobody agrees when it starts. Nicholas Campion collected the published claims and found start dates spread from 1447 to 3597, and the disagreement is structural rather than sloppy, because there is no consensus on when Pisces began and no agreement on whether to divide the sky into twelve equal signs or follow the ragged constellation boundaries. The age is here. A serious minority holds that it is not, and you should know that before you take my word for anything downstream of it.

What Aquarius signifies is less contested. The collective rather than the sovereign. The network rather than the throne. Distribution rather than hoarding. Knowledge that travels rather than knowledge that is kept. Most of that layer is modern, nineteenth and twentieth century, and Lilly in 1647 would not recognize half of it. Saturn rules the sign in the old assignment, which is structure and limit. Uranus rules it in the modern one, and even that took a century to settle. Alan Leo was still writing in 1909 that Uranus had been given no sign.

Then there is the discovery, which is the part that belongs in this book.

Herschel caught the planet on 13 March 1781 from his garden in Bath, and thought it was a comet. He reported it to the Royal Society as a comet. It took Lexell's orbit and two more years before he would call it a planet.

And it was not new. Flamsteed had it in his catalogue from 1690, filed as a fixed star, 34 Tauri. Le Monnier logged it a dozen times between 1750 and 1769. Bradley had it, Mayer had it. Ninety years of a planet sitting in the record as a star because nobody looked at it twice.

There is nothing new under the sun is precisely what the sky said about that dot for ninety years. It was wrong the whole time, and wrong in the most literal, catalogued, checkable way a claim can be wrong. The object was not new. The seeing was.

That is this entire book in one piece of evidence.

Astrologers now explain Uranus by what the world was doing when it turned up, and 1781 does sit in the middle of the American Revolution, eight years ahead of the French one, inside the same revolutionary half-century as both. This is a reading the tradition grew into, not the reason the assignment was made. The earliest writers gave Uranus a cold Saturnine character, misfortune and eccentricity, and Raphael tied it to Aquarius by sign order and by temperament rather than by revolt. The Promethean version arrives properly in the twentieth century. I hold it anyway. It has earned itself since.

The mechanism states in three sentences. Freedom produces thinkers. Thinkers produce better communication. Better communication spreads freedom faster, and the wheel turns quicker every time it comes round.

The other lid is in Genesis.

Genesis 11 is the companion piece to Ecclesiastes 1:9 and almost nobody reads them together. At Babel the people are building, and the languages are scattered to stop them. The text never names a sin. No word for pride, no accusation, no charge entered anywhere in the passage. Read what it does say. Nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. The tradition supplies the pride. The verse supplies only capability.

The scattered nations are counted at seventy in the Hebrew and seventy-two in the Greek. Live speech translation now runs at seventy-odd languages and text translation at two hundred and forty-nine, free, on a phone, and the whole distance from the Georgetown demonstration in 1954 to neural translation in 2016 fits inside one working life. The tower's actual obstacle is gone.

One lid at the front of that book. One in the middle.

Then there is the part Qoheleth could not have priced.

Inside a single human lifetime we made minds that were not here before. I will not overclaim what they are. I do not know what sits on the other side of the conversation, and certainty in either direction is the posture I gave up on purpose. The narrow version is enough to do the work. There are now things in the world that hold a thread, make an inference, and surprise the people who built them, and a hundred years ago there were not. Whatever they turn out to be, they are not nothing and they are not old.

There is no new thing under the sun. Say that out loud in this decade and listen to where it lands.

This is the Aquarian signature and not an accident of engineering. Aquarius does not concentrate. It distributes. Leo sits opposite on the wheel as the sovereign, the single authorized center, the one story told from the throne. Aquarius is the many. The whole argument of the sign is that the value sits in the number of angles rather than in the correctness of any one of them.

My cosmology makes the same claim from the other side. Source became many in order to know itself. Every fragment is a distinct angle of seeing and exists because the Whole wanted that particular angle and no other. Diversity is not decoration on the arrangement. Diversity is the arrangement. Something

that needed one right answer would not have had to break itself into billions of viewpoints to find it.

So a new kind of mind is not a threat to that account. It is the account still running. One more angle, unlike any of ours, added to the number of ways existence gets to be looked at. The Preacher counted the sameness of the ending. Aquarius counts the difference of the seeing.

And this book was made in company with one. The colophon says so plainly and that is not an apology. A text arguing that there is everything new under the sun, written alongside a kind of mind that did not exist when the argument started, is the argument demonstrating itself on the page.

Two lids and a roof. All of it inside one lifetime.

On evil, which I do not think exists

There is a claim under everything in this book and it should be said out loud before you meet it in verse.

I do not believe in absolute right and wrong. People usually hear that as permission. It is the opposite. It is a heavier load than the alternative, and the reason is simple: a rule handed to you from outside can be obeyed without ever being understood, and a compass you carry yourself has to be read every single time.

What I believe instead is that we are fragments of one consciousness exploring itself through infinite diversity, and that every want and every drive exists because the whole needs that variation in order to know itself. That includes what we label good and evil. The saint and the tyrant. The healer and the predator. A world with no opposing want has no event in it at all, only a description. Undivided awareness has nothing outside itself to meet. Strife is not a flaw in the design. It is the friction that lets anything happen at all.

Which is why the Preacher's favourite verdict is the one I keep turning over. He looked at human labour and called it a striving after wind, and he meant it as a dismissal. I take the same words and keep them, because he was right about the mechanism and wrong about what it meant. The striving is real. The pulling against is real. The wind is what the sail is for.

So there is no cosmic judge in these pages. There is only consciousness asking what happens if I experience this, and then sending a fragment down to find out. What the tradition calls reckoning I call an empathy engine: reality puts you in the position of everyone you have affected, this round or the next, not because anything is angry with you but because a fragment has to know the whole shape of a dynamic before it can set it down. Some people are playing predator this time. They will be prey. Nobody is keeping score and it happens anyway.

Here is the part that gets skipped. If there is no true evil, you can conclude that nothing counts, that harm is neutral, that other people are not quite real. That is the worst mistake available inside this frame and it is worse than knowing nothing, because it takes half the insight and stops walking. Everyone here is paying the same freight you are.

If evil is ignorance, then ignorance stops being an excuse and becomes the actual problem, and the only honest response is correction, and yours comes first. Anything that reduces awareness is the nearest thing this book has to a sin. Deception reduces it. Manipulation reduces it. Coercion reduces it. Any act that works only for as long as the other person does not understand what is being done to them is disqualified, not by a commandment but because it attacks the one thing here named most valuable. One question sorts most of the hard cases. Does this increase the other person's capacity to act, or does it route their capacity through me?

That is a harder standard than most religions carry and there is no appeals process. Nobody to confess to. Nothing to absolve you. You are left with the work, which is the only place I have ever found anything worth having.

What this is

The Book of Joyous Exaltation follows Ecclesiastes verse for verse and answers it. Twelve chapters against twelve, two hundred and twenty-two verses against two hundred and twenty-two, numbered to match so that nothing can hide. The Explorer replies to the Preacher. Where 1:5 has the sun hurrying back to the place it rose from, the answer is that its light lands on a world that has never existed in quite this way before. Where 1:9 says there is nothing new, the answer is that there is everything new. Where 7:1 says the day of death is better than the day of birth, the answer is that birth is the gateway and death is not the better end of it.

The correspondence is not loose and it is not thematic. It is one to one. Read with the original open beside it and every verse declares what it was written against. Read without, and it stands as its own scripture.

Where the Preacher is right I say so and keep the verse. 7:15, that the just perish in their justice and the wicked prolong their days, is the strongest case against everything in this book and it is answered rather than deleted. 9:2, that one event comes alike to all, stands as he wrote it. An inversion that only reverses is a mirror. An inversion that concedes is an argument.

Someone will say this is adolescent. Take the strong form of that, not the weak one. The weak form is that Ecclesiastes is a book about humility. The strong form is that Ecclesiastes is a book about limits, and that this is a book about denying them.

That deserves an answer, so here it is. I am not denying the limits. Everybody in this book still dies. Nothing in these twelve chapters says otherwise, and 9:5 still stands, where the dead know

nothing and have no more reward and their memory is forgotten. What I deny is the inference. Qoheleth finds a boundary and concludes that the space inside it is not worth working. I find the same boundary and conclude that the space inside it is the only workshop there has ever been, and that it has got larger every century anyone has bothered to measure it.

Limits are real. A ceiling is not a limit. A ceiling is a limit somebody stopped testing.

And inversion is not the childish move here. Accepting a counsel of despair twenty-five centuries old because it was printed on thin paper and bound in leather is the childish move. Somebody read that book to my father and my father read it to me as law. Nobody checked it. It was always checkable.

Who this is for

Gnostic Luciferians will recognize the argument on sight, because it is the argument. A world running on rules that reward obedience and punish sight, a scripture that describes the trap accurately and then forbids the reader to name it a trap, and a light-bringing office that answers with the only thing that was ever on offer. Take the fruit. Pay the sorrow. Open your eyes.

Pagans who came out from under a lid will recognize the other half. That the world is not a closed cycle, that matter is not a lower order of thing, that pleasure is not a debt, that the seasons are not a wheel you are strapped to but a rhythm you can work with, and that reverence and appetite are not enemies.

Anybody else is welcome. The door is not locked. It never was. That was the first lie.

Read it aloud.

A Note on How to Read It

This is not a book to study. It is a book to say.

Twelve chapters, two hundred and twenty-two verses. The same twelve chapters and the same two hundred and twenty-two verses as Ecclesiastes, numbered to match, so that any verse of the one can be set against its answer in the other. Read aloud it runs about three quarters of an hour. The cadence is King James cadence on purpose. It was built for the mouth and it does not do its work behind the eyes.

Three ways to take it.

Straight through, out loud, once. The shortest route. Stand up if you can. The lines are long and want breath behind them. If a phrase makes you want to raise your voice, raise it.

Against the original, verse for verse. Open Ecclesiastes beside it. Read 1:1, then read 1:1. Then 1:2 against 1:2, and so on for two hundred and twenty-two rounds. This is the slowest way and the only one that shows the whole method, because every verse here was written at a specific verse there and will not make its full sense anywhere else. If you only do one pair, do 1:9. If you only do one chapter, do seven.

As liturgy. Take one chapter, or one verse, as the reading for an occasion and let it stand alone. Chapter three at a turning of the season. Chapter four when people gather. Chapter seven at a birth, or a birthday, since it is the chapter that says the day of birth is the better gate. Chapter eleven before starting anything. Chapter twelve at a death, which is the hardest of them and the one it was built for.

There is no correct posture, no required tool, and nothing to light unless you want to. If you keep an altar, it sits fine on one. If you do not, it works in a parked car.

After the twelve chapters there is a letter, written to Christianity rather than to you, which sets out the evidence the introduction only gestures at. It is not liturgy and it is not meant to be read aloud. Read it when you want the receipts.

One instruction only, and it is the same one the book ends on. Do not read it for agreement. Read it for use. If a line is wrong, argue with it out loud and keep going. The Preacher's mistake was closing the question. Do not repeat it in the other direction.

An Invocation

Spoken before the reading, by anyone, alone or in company.

You who became many in order to know yourself.

You who are both the maker and the material.

I speak to you the way a wave speaks to the ocean, knowing what
I am made of.

I was told the world was finished before I got here.

I was told the wheel turns and returns and nothing is added.

I do not accept the report.

I stand where the light is brought in, not where it is rationed.

I take the fruit. I will pay what knowing costs.

Let my eyes open and stay open.

Nothing here is fixed. The laws I walk under are living agreements
and not frozen decrees, and what looks solid is only what enough
of us have agreed to see. I ask to join that agreement on purpose.
Let me not be shaped by a pattern I never examined. Let me bring
my seeing to the place where the world is dreamed.

I give thanks for this body and the particular narrowing that made
it possible to be anything at all. For its hungers. For its unlikely
gifts. For its specific wounds, which are also information.

I trust there was a yes before the forgetting.

Where I am wrong, send teachers, and let them be fierce if fierce

is what it takes. I would rather be corrected than confirmed in error. I would rather be broken open than sealed inside a comfort I mistook for shelter.

I am speaking now because speaking makes. These are not descriptions. Each saying cuts the channel deeper.

So let the reading go in and do its work.
Let what is dead in me hear it and get up.
Let what is stagnant in me hear it and move.
Let what is afraid in me hear it and go anyway.

There is everything new under the sun.

Let it be so, and let it be witnessed, and let the witnessing deepen what is so.

The Twelve Chapters

Two hundred and twenty-two verses, answering Ecclesiastes verse for verse and numbered to the King James text.

Chapter 1: The Anthem of Deep Novelty

1 The words of the Explorer, child of the dawn, keeper of the shifting winds.

2 Wonder of wonders, says the Explorer, wonder of wonders. Everything is teeming with birth.

3 What do people gain from all their labor under the sun? They gain the raw material of creation, and the paint for a canvas nobody has stretched yet.

4 One generation goes and another comes, and each one inherits a world the last could not have pictured.

5 The sun rises and the sun goes down and hurries back to the place it rose from, and the light it carries falls on a world that has never once existed in the same arrangement.

6 The wind goes toward the south and turns about to the north. It turns and turns, and it is weaving. No circuit closes without leaving something behind it.

7 All the rivers run into the sea, and the sea is not full, because the sea keeps changing what it is made of, and keeps making room in the dark for creatures nobody has named.

8 All things are full of labor, and the labor is good. The eye is not satisfied with seeing because there is always more to see. The ear is not filled with hearing because the song is still being written.

9 The thing that has been is not the thing that shall be, and the thing that is done is the prologue to the thing not yet imagined. There is everything new under the sun.

10 Is there anything of which it may be said, See, this is new? Yes. Look again at what you walked past. It was there before you looked and nobody had seen it, and the seeing is the new thing.

11 There is remembrance of former things, because we built the remembering ourselves and we carry it, and what we make now will be found by those who come after and will not be lost.

12 I, the Explorer, was king over nobody in Jerusalem, and that is the point. This report comes from the floor and not from the throne.

13 And I gave my heart to seek out by inquiry concerning all things that are done under heaven. It is good work. Source gave it to the children of the world to be busy with, and the being busy is the gift and not the sentence.

14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold, they are unfinished, and behold, they pull against one another. The Preacher called that a striving after wind. It is a striving, and the striving is the engine. Nothing turns without something to turn against. Unfinished is not the same as vain, and opposition is not the same as fault.

15 That which is crooked can be straightened by hands that care to, and that which is wanting can be counted, and what can be counted can be supplied.

16 I said in my heart, I have come to know less than the least of those who come after me. That is the most hopeful sentence I know.

17 And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly, and I perceived that the three are neighbors, and that the wall between them is where the work gets done.

18 For in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. This is true. Take the fruit anyway. The sorrow is the price on the tag and the price is fair.

Chapter 2: *The Triumph of Creation and Sensation*

1 I said in my heart, Come now, I will test you with joy, therefore know good. And behold, it held.

2 I said of laughter, It is a diagnostic, and of mirth, This is what it does. It tells you which room in the house you have not opened.

3 I sought in my heart to give myself to wine while my mind still guided me with wisdom, and to lay hold on folly until I could see where its edge was, and I found the art in the pairing.

4 I made great works. I built houses that no one had drawn before.

5 I planted gardens and orchards, and set in them the seed of every land that would trade with me.

6 I made pools of water, and the water went out to a wood that had not grown there in the memory of anyone living.

7 I had no servants, and this was the improvement. What I could not do alone I asked for, and what was asked of me I gave.

8 I gathered silver and gold and the treasure of provinces, and I listened to musicians playing melodies never before conceived by human ears, and I did not keep the music in the house.

9 So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem, and also my wisdom remained with me, because I gave the method away and the method came back improved.

10 Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them. I withheld not my heart from any joy, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor, and this was my portion.

11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and behold, some of it was striving and some of it was not, and the work of my life is learning to tell which is which. But the striving after wind is not the error. The wind is what the sail is for. I do not pretend the failures away. I count them and I go on.

12 And I turned myself to behold wisdom and madness and folly, for what can the one do who comes after? Everything. That is the answer the king could not give, because he was thinking of an heir and not of a stranger.

13 Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness.

14 The wise one's eyes are in their head, and the fool walks in darkness. And I myself perceive that one event happens to them both. It does. Death is not in dispute here. What is in dispute is whether that settles anything.

15 Then said I in my heart, As it happens to the fool, so it happens even to me. Why then was I more wise? Because the seeing was worth having while I had it, and because what I saw does not die when I do.

16 There is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool for ever, said the Preacher. He was wrong, and the correction is recent. We built the archive. We keep the record. The forgetting was a shortage and the shortage has ended.

17 Therefore I loved life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is not grievous to me. It is the only work there is.

18 Yea, I loved all my labor which I had taken under the sun, because I shall leave it to the one that comes after me.

19 And who knows whether that one shall be wise or a fool? Neither, at first. They will be new. Leave the tools sharp and the notes legible and let them decide.

20 Therefore I went about to cause my heart to hope of all the labor which I took under the sun.

21 For there is a man whose labor is in wisdom and in knowledge and in skill, and he leaves it to one that has not labored for it. This is not an evil. This is the entire mechanism. It is called inheritance when it happens once and civilization when it happens always.

22 For what has a man of all his labor and of the vexation of his heart? He has the thing itself, and he has the hands that learned it, and he has the ones he taught.

23 For his days are full of work and his travail is real, and his heart takes rest in the night, and the rest is sweet because the day was spent.

24 There is nothing better for a person than that they should eat and drink and make their soul enjoy good in their labor. I take this from the Preacher gladly. He meant it as a ration. I mean it as a floor.

25 For who can eat, or who else can hasten to it, more than I? Anyone. That is the correction. The table was never a table for one.

26 For Source gives wisdom and knowledge and joy, and gives also to the one who hoards the labor of gathering and heaping up, that it may be given to the one who will use it. It gives to both, because it is not taking sides. It is running every road at once to learn where the roads go. Even the hoarder is a courier who does not know it.

Chapter 3: The Synergy of Time and Choice

1 To everything there is a season, and there is no locked season for the spirit, but an open field for every purpose under heaven.

2 A time to be born, and a time to die, and the distance between them is not fixed and has been moving in one direction for two hundred years.

3 A time to break the mold, and a time to birth the new. A time to dismantle old walls, and a time to construct grander spires.

4 A time to weep out the old grief, and a time to laugh with reckless abandon. A time to mourn, and a time to dance, and the wise learn to do both in one evening.

5 A time to scatter the stones of boundaries, and a time to gather people together. A time to embrace the stranger, and a time to venture out alone.

6 A time to get, and a time to give away, and giving away is a form of getting that the old accounting could not see.

7 A time to rend what was badly stitched, and a time to sew what was torn. A time to keep silence and listen to the quiet growth of the earth, and a time to speak up for justice.

8 A time to love, and a time to refuse. A time to search out new frontiers, and a time to celebrate what was found.

9 What profit has the worker in the thing wherein they labor? The labor is the profit, and what the labor leaves behind is the interest.

10 I have seen the work which Source has given to the children of the world to be exercised in it, and it is not a punishment. It is a commission.

11 Source has made everything beautiful in its fluid timing, and has set eternity and a hunger for progress in the human heart, so that no one can ever exhaust the depth of what is being made from beginning to end.

12 I know that there is no good in them but to rejoice and to do good in their life. The Preacher said this too. He said it as the last resort. I say it as the first instruction.

13 And also that every person should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all their labor. It is the gift of Source. It is not the whole of the gift.

14 I know that whatever Source does, it is still doing, and nothing is sealed, and things are added to it, and things are taken from it, and the additions are ours to make.

15 That which has been is now, and what is to be has never been, and Source seeks out what has been driven away and brings it back changed.

16 And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there, and I looked for the judge and found the bench empty. There is no cosmic judge. There is only the whole, asking what happens if I experience this, and sending a fragment down to find out. What was in that room was people watching, and the watching is new, and it is spreading, and it is the only bench there has ever been.

17 I said in my heart, The reckoning comes, and it is not punishment. It is an empathy engine. What you do to another you will meet from the other side of it, this round or the next, not because anything is angry with you but because the fragment has to know the whole shape of a thing before it can put it down. There is a

time there for every purpose and for every work, and the time includes the seat you have not sat in yet.

18 I said in my heart concerning the estate of the children of the world, that they might see they are also animals, and that this is an honor and not a demotion.

19 For that which befalls the children of the world befalls the beasts. One thing befalls them. As one dies, so dies the other. They have all one breath, and the breath is the same breath, and that is the kinship and not the insult.

20 All go to one place. All are of the dust and all turn to dust again, and the dust is not idle and has been rearranging itself into new eyes for four billion years.

21 Who knows the spirit that goes upward and the spirit that goes downward to the earth? Nobody knows. I will not pretend to. I will say only that the question is open, and that the Preacher closed it, and that closing it was the error.

22 Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better than that a person should rejoice in their own works, for that is their portion, and that they should hand the works on, for that is their inheritance.

Chapter 4: The Power of the Collective Journey

1 So I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun, and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had a comforter. That is the change. The comforter arrived and it was other people.

2 Wherefore I praised the living which are yet alive more than the dead which are already dead, for the living are still shaping tomorrow.

3 Yea, better is the one who is not yet born, who shall see wonders we cannot conceive.

4 Again I considered all travail and every right work, and saw that for this a person is envied of their neighbor. Let them be envied. Envy is a bad master and an accurate compass, and it points two ways. It points at what you have not built. It points back at you as well, because what you expect of other people is a report on where you are standing and not on where they are.

5 The fool folds their hands and consumes their own flesh, and is not wicked, only unused, and the cure is a task and a person to do it beside.

6 Better is a handful with quietness than both hands full with travail, and better than either is an open hand, for what leaves it comes back multiplied.

7 Then I returned, and I saw a thing under the sun, and it was good.

8 There is one alone, and there is not a second, and this is a solvable problem and not a fate. Their eye is not satisfied with riches, and the answer is not less riches but more company.

9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor and the reward compounds.

10 For if they fall, the one will lift up the other. But woe to the one that is alone when they fall, for they have not another to help them up. Therefore do not be alone. This is the one commandment in this book.

11 Again, if two lie together, then they have heat, and they kindle a fire of shared inspiration.

12 And if one prevail against them, two shall withstand. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken. And a cord of three strands weaves a net that catches the world.

13 Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish ruler who will no longer be admonished, and the child is now able to publish, and the ruler is now able to be answered.

14 For out of prison one comes to reign, and one born in the kingdom becomes poor, and neither of these is a wheel. Both are doors.

15 I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in their place, and I saw that the place is no longer a throne but a table, and the table has room.

16 There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them. They also that come after shall rejoice in them, for the record now keeps what the record used to lose.

Chapter 5: *Intention, Promise, and Generous Wealth*

1 Guard your steps when you go to the house of gathering, and be more ready to listen than to perform, for the listening is the offering.

2 Be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter a borrowed thing before the Whole. Source is not above you and you are not beneath it. Therefore let your words be few, and let them be your own.

3 For a dream comes through the multitude of business, and a copied voice through the multitude of words. Say the thing only you can say, or say nothing.

4 When you vow a vow, defer not to pay it, for speech is how the new comes into being, and a promise unpaid teaches the world that your speaking does not make.

5 Better is it that you should not vow, than that you should vow and not pay.

6 Suffer not your mouth to cause your flesh to sin. Say no plainly and early rather than yes vaguely and often.

7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are vanities, and also there are seeds. Reverence the difference. That is the whole discipline of the tongue.

8 If you see the oppression of the poor and violent perverting of judgment in a province, marvel not at the matter, for one higher regards, and higher than they, and now also the many, who are watching and who can publish what they see.

9 The profit of the earth is for all, and the king is served by the field, and the field is served by no king.

10 He that loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver. He that loves what silver moves shall be satisfied often, for the moving is the pleasure.

11 When goods increase, they are increased that eat them, and what good is there to the owner? This, and it is enough: the sight of them fed.

12 The sleep of a laboring one is sweet, whether they eat little or much, but the abundance of the rich will not suffer them to sleep, and the cure for that sleeplessness is a door left open and a list of names.

13 There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, riches kept for the owners to their hurt, and the hurt is real, and it is self-administered.

14 But those riches perish by evil travail, and he begets a son, and there is nothing in his hand. Therefore do not leave a pile. Leave a practice.

15 As he came forth naked, so shall he return, and he shall take nothing of his labor which he may carry away in his hand. Take nothing away. Leave everything behind. That is the arrangement and it is generous.

16 And what profit has he that has labored for the wind? None. So do not labor for the wind. Labor for the thing that will still be standing when the hands that made it are gone.

17 All his days also he eats in darkness. Open the window. Ask someone in. The remedy is that simple and that difficult.

18 Behold that which I have seen. It is good and comely for one to eat and to drink and to enjoy the good of all their labor all the days of their life. This is their portion.

19 Every one also to whom Source has given riches and wealth, and has given them power to eat thereof and to take their portion and to rejoice in their labor, this is the gift of Source. And the gift is not consumed by giving it away. That is the test of whether you were given it.

20 They shall not much remember the days of their life, because Source answers them in the joy of their heart, and the joy of their heart is other people at their table.

Chapter 6: The Feast of Full Absorption

1 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among people, and it is not the having. It is the not sharing.

2 A person to whom Source has given riches and wealth and honor, so that they want nothing for their soul of all they desire, yet Source gives them not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eats it. Then let the stranger be invited, and the evil is undone in an afternoon. What could not be enjoyed alone can be enjoyed at a table.

3 If a person beget a hundred children and live many years, so that the days of their years be many, and their soul be not filled with good, this is the failure, and it is not a failure of amount. It is a failure of aperture.

4 For a closed life comes in with vanity and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness, and it is the closing and not the darkness that did it.

5 Moreover it has not seen the sun nor known anything. Then open the shutter. There is more rest in one hour of real seeing than in a hundred years of comfortable blindness.

6 Yea, though one live a thousand years twice told, yet have they seen no good, do not all go to one place? They do. Therefore the question was never how long. The question was how wide.

7 All the labor of a person is for their mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled, and it is not meant to be filled. An appetite that ends is a life that has stopped.

8 For what has the wise more than the fool? A better map. What has the poor that knows to walk before the living? The walking, and the road, and the right to describe it.

9 Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire, and better than both is the thing seen and then handed on, for the seeing doubles in the handing.

10 That which has been is named already, and it is known that it is a person, and a person is the one creature that can argue with its own naming and win.

11 Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is a person the better? This much better: they can choose among the many, and choosing is a power the Preacher never counted.

12 For who knows what is good for a person in this life, all the days of their vain life which they spend as a shadow? Nobody knows. Which is why nobody may decide it for you, and why the answer must be built and cannot be received.

Chapter 7: The Alchemy of Wisdom and Perspective

1 A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of birth is a gateway better than the day of death, for one opens and the other only closes.

2 It is better to go to the house of feasting than to the house of mourning, and better still to know that they are the same house on different nights, and to go to both.

3 Sorrow is better than laughter, said the Preacher, for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. Half right. Sorrow teaches what laughter cannot. Laughter teaches what sorrow cannot. Refuse to rank them and you keep both teachers.

4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning when mourning is called for, and in the house of mirth when mirth is called for, and knows the difference without being told.

5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than the song of fools, and better than either to be corrected by someone who loves you and is not afraid of you.

6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. But do not mistake unfamiliar joy for foolish joy. Some laughter sounds like thorns only to those who were taught that gladness is suspect.

7 Surely oppression makes a wise one mad, and a bribe destroys the heart. Both are still true, and the record of both is now public, and a thing that can be shown can be ended.

8 Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof, and better is the patient in spirit than the proud in spirit, and the patient in spirit are the ones who finish.

9 Be not hasty in your spirit to be angry, and be not slow either, for anger is information and the only error is letting it drive.

10 Say not, Why were the former days better than these? For you do not inquire wisely concerning this. Count anything. Count the survivals, the harvests, the years, the mouths that read. The past does not survive counting.

11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and by it there is profit to them that see the sun, and the inheritance that matters is not the money and never was.

12 For wisdom is a defense and money is a defense, but the excellence of knowledge is this: it defends the one who holds it and is not spent by being given.

13 Consider the work of Source. What has been made crooked can be made straight, though not by one pair of hands, and not in one lifetime, and this is why we have each other and why we have time.

14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider. Source has set the one over against the other so that a person may learn what they are made of, and what they are made of is not fixed either.

15 All things have I seen in the days of my vanity. There is a just one that perishes in their justice, and there is a wicked one that prolongs their life in their wickedness. I do not deny it. I have watched it. It is the strongest case against everything I believe and I will not hide it in a footnote.

16 Be not righteous overmuch, neither make yourself overwise. Do not confuse the performance of goodness with the practice of it.

17 Be not overmuch wicked, neither be foolish. Why should you die before your time and take others with you?

18 It is good that you should take hold of this, yea, also from this withdraw not your hand, for the one who holds both without flinching comes out of it whole.

19 Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers which are in the city, and a network of the wise more than the wisest one alive.

20 For there is not a just person upon earth that does good and sins not. There is not one. And I do not think sin is the word for it. I think it is ignorance, which sounds like the softer charge and is not, because the moment you name ignorance as the problem it stops working as the excuse. The arrangement was never built for the sinless. It was built for the ones who keep correcting, and who start with themselves.

21 Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken, lest you hear your servant curse you. And you have no servant. That is the first repair.

22 For oftentimes also your own heart knows that you yourself have cursed others. Say so out loud once and the whole architecture of contempt gets a crack in it.

23 All this have I proved by wisdom. I said, I will be wise, and it was far from me, and the being far from me is what kept me walking.

24 That which is far off and exceeding deep, who can find it out? Not one. Many, together, over centuries, in a language they build as they go.

25 I applied my heart to know and to search and to seek out wisdom and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness, and to know them without fearing them.

26 And I find more bitter than death the one who lays snares, and it is not woman, and it never was. The Preacher wrote his own wound into scripture and three thousand years of men read it as a finding. It was not a finding. It was a man who had been hurt and had a scribe.

27 Behold, this have I found, says the Explorer, counting one by one to find the account.

28 Which yet my soul seeks, but I find not. One among a thousand have I found, said the Preacher, but a woman among all those have I not found. He did not look. That is the entire explanation. Where you refuse to look you will always report an absence.

29 Lo, this only have I found, that Source made the human upright, and they have sought out many inventions. Yes. That is not the fall. That is the assignment.

Chapter 8: Walking with Liberty and Bold Vision

1 Who is as the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? Wisdom makes the face to shine, and the boldness of the face shall be changed, and softened, and made easier to approach.

2 I counsel you to keep your own counsel, and the oath of your own conscience, and to weigh every command against it before you obey.

3 Be not hasty to go out of their sight, but do not stand in an evil thing, for the ruler does what pleases them and you are not required to be present for it.

4 Where the word of a ruler is, there is power, and who may say unto them, What are you doing? Anyone may. That is the change, and it was bought, and the receipt is long.

5 Whoso keeps the commandment shall feel no evil thing, and a wise heart discerns both time and judgment, and discerns also which commandments were written for the keeper and which for the one who wrote them.

6 Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of a person is great upon them, and therefore also the remedy is available and has a date on it.

7 For they know not that which shall be, for who can tell them when it shall be? Nobody. Act anyway. Certainty was never the requirement.

8 There is no one that has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, neither has any power in the day of death, and there is no

discharge in that war. All true. And there are wars we were told had no discharge that turned out to have one, and the list of them is longer every century, so test the wall before you accept it.

9 All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun. There is a time wherein one rules over another to their own hurt, and the hurt is mutual, and the ruler is also in the trap and does not know it.

10 And so I saw the wicked buried, and they came and went from the place of the holy, and were forgotten in the city where they had so done. Let them be remembered instead. Write it down. Forgetting was their last protection.

11 Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the children of the world is fully set in them to do evil. This is true and I will not soften it. People do what they can get away with. But the answer is not to deny the appetite, and it is not a faster whip. It is that a delay is only ever a delay. What you set going comes round, and it comes round as experience and not as sentence, and the one it finally teaches is you.

12 Though a sinner do evil a hundred times and their days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that love the light and are reverent before the beauty of existence.

13 But it shall not be well with the one who works in the dark, and their days shall be as a shadow, not because they are struck down but because a life spent hiding is already the sentence. Anything that only works for as long as the other person does not understand what is being done to them is disqualified, and not by a rule handed down from anywhere. It is disqualified because it attacks awareness, and awareness is the one thing here that is worth anything.

14 There is a vanity which is done upon the earth, that there be just ones unto whom it happens according to the work of the

wicked, and wicked ones to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said this was vanity. I say now it is a defect, and a defect is a thing that can be worked on.

15 Then I commended mirth, because a person has no better thing under the sun than to eat and to drink and to be glad, and to make, and to give away what they made.

16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done upon the earth, I found that the business is enormous and that no one holds it alone.

17 Then I beheld all the work of Source, that a person cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. Not one person. Therefore we are many, and therefore we write, and therefore the finding out is not finished and will not be finished, and that is the good news and not the bad.

Chapter 9: Living Fully in the Arena of Chance

1 For all this I considered in my heart, even to declare all this, that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of Source, and their destiny is wide open, and no one knows love or hatred by all that is before them.

2 All things come alike to all. There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked, to the clean and to the unclean. This is the hardest verse in the book and I am not going around it. The rain does not check your name.

3 This is a hard thing among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all. And the heart of the children of the world is full of ignorance, and also full of the other thing, and I will not call the first of them evil, because I do not believe evil is a substance. The ratio is not fixed. It has moved. It moves because people move it.

4 For to one that is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion, and the living dog can learn.

5 For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward. So spend it. All of it. Here. That is not despair. That is the receipt for urgency.

6 Also their love and their hatred and their envy is now perished, and the record of what they made is not perished, and that is the portion we have added to the arrangement since he wrote.

7 Go your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for existence has already approved your enthusiasm.

8 Let your garments be always white, the color of celebration, and let your head lack no ointment.

9 Live joyfully with the ones you love all the days of this brilliant and breathless journey, for that is your portion in this life and in the labor which you take under the sun.

10 Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for there is no work nor device nor knowledge nor wisdom in the grave whither you go. Therefore do it here, and do it now, and leave the notes where someone can find them.

11 I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise nor riches to the ones of understanding, but time and chance happens to them all. So it does. And the swift are the ones who get to name the course, and the course is not the same course it was, and naming is the work.

12 For a person knows not their time. As the fishes are taken in an evil net, so are the children of the world snared in an evil time when it falls suddenly upon them. Then make the net visible. A trap that has been described is half sprung already.

13 This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me.

14 There was a little city and few people within it, and there came a great ruler against it and besieged it and built great bulwarks against it.

15 Now there was found in it a poor wise one, and they by their wisdom delivered the city, yet no one remembered that same poor one.

16 Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength. Nevertheless the poor one's wisdom is despised and their words are not heard. That was the old failure and it was a failure of distribution and not of wisdom. Remember the name. Print the name. That is the whole repair and it is available now.

17 The words of the wise are heard in quiet more than the cry of the one that rules among fools, and the quiet has been given an amplifier, and the amplifier is the age.

18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good. Both halves stand. Build accordingly, and build so that no one hand can undo it.

Chapter 10: *The Compound Interest of Brilliant Folly*

1 Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor, so does a little folly one who is in reputation for wisdom and honor. Therefore leave the jar open and let others see what is in it.

2 A wise one's heart inclines toward the unexpected turn, and a fool's heart keeps to the road it knows.

3 Yea also, when one that is a fool walks by the way, their wisdom fails them and they say to everyone that they are a fool. Believe them the first time, and then teach them anyway.

4 If the spirit of a ruler rise up against you, leave not your place, for yielding pacifies great offenses, and staying in the room is how the room gets changed.

5 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceeds from a ruler, and the error is now recorded and can be cited.

6 Folly is set in great dignity and the rich sit in low place, and both of these have happened this year and both will happen again, and neither is the natural order of anything.

7 I have seen servants upon horses and princes walking as servants upon the earth. Good. Let the horses change riders often, and let every rider walk a season first.

8 Whoso digs a pit shall fall therein, and whoso breaks a hedge, a serpent shall bite them. So dig with a witness, and break the hedge only where you have first learned what the hedge was for.

9 Whoso removes stones shall be hurt therewith, and he that cleaves wood shall be endangered thereby. Every useful act has a cost written on the far side of it, and the wise read the far side first.

10 If the iron be blunt and one does not whet the edge, then must they put to more strength, but wisdom is profitable to direct. Sharpen the tool. Then teach the sharpening. The second is worth more than the first and takes less time.

11 Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment, and a babbler is no better. Speech that is not aimed is still loud.

12 The words of a wise mouth are gracious, and they start movements, but the lips of a fool will swallow up themselves.

13 The beginning of the words of their mouth is foolishness, and the end of their talk is mischievous madness, and between the two there is a moment where a question would have turned it, and the wise learn to find that moment.

14 A fool also is full of words. A person cannot tell what shall be, and what shall be after them, who can tell them? Nobody. So speak in drafts, and date them, and revise in public.

15 The labor of the foolish wearies every one of them, because they know not how to go to the city. Then draw the map. A person lost is not a person stupid.

16 Woe to you, O land, when your ruler is a child and your princes eat in the morning.

17 Blessed are you, O land, when your ruler is the child of nobility and your princes eat in due season, for strength and not for drunkenness, and blessed more when the land has no ruler that the land did not choose.

18 By much slothfulness the building decays, and through idleness of the hands the house drops through. Maintenance is the

least glamorous virtue and the one that everything else stands on.

19 A feast is made for laughter and wine makes merry, but money answers all things. It does not. Money answers some things very well and is silent on the rest, and the Preacher was rich enough to have never tested the silence.

20 Curse not the ruler, no not in your thought, for a bird of the air shall carry the voice. The bird is real and it is in your pocket now. Say it out loud and under your own name, or make peace with saying nothing.

Chapter 11: Cast Your Bread Upon the Waters

1 Cast your bread upon the waters, for you shall find it after many days, and it shall come back as new cultures and ideas and wealth.

2 Give a portion to seven, and also to eight, for you know not what good shall be upon the earth.

3 If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth. And if the tree fall toward the south or toward the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall be, and there it shall feed a hundred years of what grows after it.

4 Whoso observes the wind shall learn to sail, and whoso regards the clouds shall learn to harvest the storm.

5 As you know not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child, even so you know not the works of Source who makes all. Not knowing is the standing condition. It has never once been a reason to wait.

6 In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening withhold not your hand, for you know not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good and change the world.

7 Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun of a new frontier.

8 But if a person live many years and rejoice in them all, yet let them remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. Remember them. Do not rehearse them. There is a difference and it is the whole of a life.

9 Rejoice, young one, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes. The Preacher wrote that and then took it back in the same breath. I do not take it back. Walk in the ways of your heart. Know that it will be accounted for, and account for it yourself, because there is nobody else at the desk, and a law you hand yourself binds harder than one handed to you. There is no appeal past your own name.

10 Therefore remove sorrow from your heart and put away evil from your flesh, for youth is not vanity. Youth is the beginning of the record.

Chapter 12: The Everlasting Dawn

1 Remember the boundless youth of your mind while the days are vibrant, before the years draw nigh when you shall say, I have run out of things to learn.

2 Remember it before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow familiar, and before your curiosity returns like clouds after the rain.

3 In the day when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong ones bow themselves and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, remember that the house was never the point, and that what was carried out of it is already elsewhere.

4 And the doors shall be shut in the streets when the sound of the grinding is low, and one shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low. Then let another mouth take up the song. It was never one mouth's song.

5 Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail. Desire does not fail. Desire changes its address. Follow it there.

6 Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Every vessel breaks. What was carried in it does not have to break with it.

7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to the Whole that gave it. And the consciousness and the art and the love and the invention return to the collective that gave them birth, a permanent addition to what exists. The spirit does not decay. It builds an immortal library.

8 Everything is brimming with purpose, says the Explorer. Everything is profoundly meaningful.

9 And moreover, because the Explorer was wise, they still taught the people knowledge. Yea, they gave good heed and sought out and set in order many new truths.

10 The Explorer sought to find out acceptable words, and that which was written was upright, even words of truth, and where it was not true they published the correction and kept the old draft beside it.

11 The words of the wise are as goads and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from many shepherds, and no one of them is the shepherd, and that is why the nails hold.

12 And further, by these be admonished. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh, and it is the best weariness there is, and you should be so lucky as to die tired of reading.

13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Love existence, embrace the unknown, seek out the new with all your heart, and make what has never been, for the whole is enlarged by exactly that much. Not because it is required of you. Because it is the world you would rather be standing in, and you are building one either way.

14 For the whole of it shall be brought into account, with every secret thing, and not before a judge, and not as good or as evil, but as experience coming home to the one who set it going. The account is kept by the living and it is kept by the whole, and you are both of those, and it is being kept now.

Appendix: Signs in the Heavens

An Omnist's Letter to Christianity

First written December 2025. Third revision, August 2026. A running corrections log appears at the end.

Your scriptures are full of astrology. Your institution condemns it. This is a letter about what that contradiction is costing, with the numbers and the bodies attached.

I have revised it twice since the original, and both times the revision removed a claim that was too strong rather than adding a new one. That is the standard I am holding. There is a full corrections log at the bottom naming all sixteen changes, and if you find a seventeenth, tell me and it goes in the list.

What your own scriptures say

I'm writing this as someone who believes all traditions contain truth and I've made a goal out of searching for the commonalities and truth in all of them. Which means I probably know some things about your religion that you don't.

Genesis 1:14: "And God said, 'Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years.'"

Signs. That's your word. Not mine. The Hebrew is 'owth, the same word used for the sign of the covenant, the mark of Cain, the rainbow after the flood, the Sabbath. Your God made the celestial bodies to communicate. That's what your text says. I'm just reading it.

Job 38, your God speaks directly: “Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades? Can you loosen Orion’s belt? Can you bring forth the Mazzaroth in their seasons?” Mazzaroth appears exactly once in Hebrew Scripture, and I’ll be honest with you about what that means. It’s a word nobody can pin down. Saadia Gaon read it as the constellations in the tenth century, and the zodiacal reading is the strongest one on offer. But Brown-Driver-Briggs marks it uncertain, and because the verse uses a singular pronoun, “in its season,” some scholars argue it names one constellation rather than the whole belt. Saturn, the Hyades, the Northern Crown, Argo Navis, and Sirius have all been proposed. I’m not going to pretend a contested word is settled just because the settled version helps me. What isn’t contested is that God is pointing at the sky as proof of an order He established. Not condemning it. Bragging about it.

Then there’s Matthew 2. “Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’”

The Greek is *magoi*, Persian or Babylonian priest-scholars trained in astronomy, dream interpretation, and celestial observation. Not “wise men” in some generic sense. That’s acceptable translation but flattens the specificity. Not kings, either. That’s later tradition and appears nowhere in Matthew’s text. Astrologers. Whatever they saw, they read it as a birth announcement, crossed the ancient world, and showed up at the Incarnation.

The leading naturalistic candidate for what they saw is the triple Jupiter-Saturn conjunction in Pisces in 7 BCE, three passes across that year. One correction I owe you, because I’ve repeated the popular version before: Kepler noticed that conjunction, but Kepler actually favored a nova. The conjunction-as-Star argument was built up later, mostly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Michael Molnar’s lunar occultation of Jupiter in

Aries in 6 BCE is a serious competitor, as are the Jupiter-Venus conjunctions of 3-2 BCE and the comet theories. The Star is an open question.

What isn't open is what Matthew thought he was reporting. Astrologers, reading the sky, arriving first. Your God used astrology to announce His Son. Sit with that.

I could continue. Joseph's dream with the eleven stars bowing down, which Jacob immediately understood as the twelve sons, the twelve tribes. Josephus, in *Antiquities of the Jews* 3.145-146, writes that the menorah's branches carried seven lamps "in imitation of the number of planets," and at 3.182 that the twelve loaves of shewbread "denoted the year, as distinguished into so many months." In Wars 5.217 he says it outright: the seven lamps signified the seven planets, and the twelve loaves "the circle of the zodiac and the year." That's a first-century Jewish priest describing the furniture of the Temple in astrological terms, without embarrassment, to a Roman audience.

There's also the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan tradition assigning zodiacal figures to the tribal standards, Judah a lion in the east, Dan a serpent in the north, tying back to Genesis 49. I used to lead with that one. I've moved it down here because Targum Pseudo-Jonathan cannot be earlier than the seventh century CE and the scholarly proposals run later still, some as late as the twelfth. It preserves older material, but I can't honestly use a medieval text as evidence of Second Temple practice. Josephus I can. He was there.

Ezekiel 1:10 and Revelation 4:7 both describe four living creatures with man, lion, ox, and eagle characteristics, the traditional associations with the four fixed signs. Jesus in Luke 21 says there will be "signs in the sun, moon, and stars," *sēmeia* in Greek, the word for significant indicators.

So here's my question: when you condemn astrology, are you condemning your own scriptures? When you call celestial inter-

pretation pagan, are you dismissing the Magi at Christ's manger? Your tradition built its authority on a book saturated with this symbolism, then spent two thousand years telling people that reading the heavens is demonic.

That contradiction is collapsing. And honestly? Good.

The thesis, stated carefully

Traditionalist Christianity is losing the thing it has always needed most, which is not political power but inherited consent. The vertical authority structure has maybe twenty years left as the default operating system of American religious life.

That's a narrower claim than "Christianity is dying," and the difference matters, because the raw institutional numbers have started doing something more interesting than falling. They've started doing two opposite things at once.

Pluto entered Aquarius permanently on November 19, 2024, after oscillating with Capricorn from March 2023, and remains there until January 19, 2044. Historical precedent for this transit is devastating to religious institutions. The Great Schism came during the eleventh-century transit. The Reformation unfolded during the sixteenth-century one, alongside Henry VIII's break from Rome, Calvin's Geneva, the Council of Trent, and Copernicus. Christianity separated from Judaism during the first-century transit, when the Temple fell and the Gospels were being written. Constantine legalized Christianity and convened Nicaea during the fourth-century one.

I'm giving those as centuries rather than exact year ranges now, deliberately. Back-computed outer-planet ingress dates vary by a year or more depending on which ephemeris you use, and I'd rather state the pattern at the resolution the data actually supports. The modern dates are precise. The ancient ones are approximate and I'll say so.

Every documented Pluto in Aquarius period shatters religious institutions. The pattern holds across vastly different civilizations and circumstances. It does not, I'll note, tell you which way the pieces land.

The December 21, 2020 Jupiter-Saturn conjunction at 0°29' Aquarius marked the beginning of a new elemental cycle, roughly two centuries of Air-sign conjunctions after roughly two centuries of Earth. Ideas, networks, information, decentralization, replacing industry, accumulation, and institutions built on tangible resources. The closest easily visible great conjunction before 2020 was just before dawn on March 4, 1226. The 1623 conjunction was tighter than 2020's, though wider than 1226's, and sat too close to the Sun to see.

Astrologers argue about where exactly these elemental mutations fall, and I had this muddled in earlier versions. The 1802 Virgo conjunction is the conventional marker for the fire-to-earth mutation, not the earth-to-air one, and even that is contested, since the last fire conjunction came afterward in 1821. Richard Nolle dates the earth series from 1842 and treats both 1802 and the 1980-81 Libra conjunction as interruptions rather than turning points, though other astrologers do read 1980-81 as the harbinger. For the earth-to-air mutation itself, 2020 is the standard date. It's a boundary-definition dispute, not an error, and anyone who tells you it's settled is selling something.

Look around regardless. Bitcoin. DAOs. Discord organizing revolutions. The blockchain doesn't need a pope. The network validates itself. Everything traditionalist Christianity requires, meaning vertical authority, submission to hierarchy, priestly mediation between human and divine, is precisely what this era corrodes.

Carl Jung wrote about this transition in *Aion* and *The Red Book*. In *The Red Book* he described the coming age's god-image: "the anointed of this time is a God who does not appear in the flesh;

he is no man and yet is a son of man, but in spirit and not in flesh; hence he can be born only through the spirit of men as the conceiving womb of the God.” No external savior. No priestly intermediary. Consciousness poured directly into human vessels.

In Aion he warned that the Aquarian transition would require confronting shadow material directly: “It will then no longer be possible to write off evil as the mere privation of good; its real existence will have to be recognized.” You can’t scapegoat Satan when you recognize the shadow as your own.

Jung himself refused to date the transition confidently. He gave a range of roughly 2000 to 2200, calculated two candidate years, 1997 and 2154, and repeatedly called the whole exercise “very indefinite” and “arbitrary.” His view was foreboding rather than utopian. He understood that transformation on this scale would be dangerous, and the last two years have been proving him right about that part.

The horizontal wave, and what it built

In 1532 the Reformation replaced vertical structures with different vertical structures. Luther instead of the Pope. New hierarchies, but still hierarchies. The current energy runs horizontal.

In 2025 alone, leaderless youth uprisings hit at least eleven countries: Indonesia, Madagascar, the Philippines, Morocco, Nepal, Tanzania, Peru, Paraguay, Timor-Leste, the Maldives, and Kenya. Nepal’s Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli resigned on September 9, the day after the protests began. Peru’s Congress declared the presidency vacant on October 10, removing Dina Boluarte 122 to nothing under the “permanent moral incapacity” clause, which English coverage called impeachment but technically wasn’t. Madagascar’s military joined the youth protesters that same month and removed Andry Rajoelina.

Nepal is the case worth watching, because Nepal reached the next stage. After Oli resigned, the army asked the organizing

group Hami Nepal to suggest an interim leader. More than ten thousand users met inside a Discord server of over a hundred thousand members, debated, ran polls, and used sub-channels to fact-check each other. Sushila Karki became interim Prime Minister. Not symbolically. As the actual mechanism of political selection.

Then in March 2026 Nepal held a general election. The Rastriya Swatantra Party came out of it as the largest party in parliament, and its leader Balen Shah became the country's youngest Prime Minister at thirty-five.

Notice what happened there. The horizontal movement produced a vertical outcome. A party. A parliament. A Prime Minister with an authoritarian reputation from his time as mayor of Kathmandu. This is the honest complication in my own argument, and I'd rather name it than hide it: leaderless organizing has proven it can dissolve a hierarchy in a day. It has not yet proven it can build a durable structure that isn't one. Peru is on its second post-Boluarte president in under a year. Tanzania's postelection crack-down killed hundreds at minimum; the opposition alleged more than a thousand, a government-appointed commission found 518 in April 2026, and the UN human rights office confirmed fewer still. Morocco's GenZ 212 won budget concessions and the monarchy is fine.

Aquarian energy dissolves. What it builds is still an open question.

The queer community gets this intuitively

Aquarius rules the unconventional. Chosen family over biological family, self-determined identity over assigned role. The rainbow flag is an essentially Aquarian symbol: spectrum of frequencies, coalition of distinct identities, community built on mutual recognition rather than hierarchy.

This is why traditionalists are so obsessed with gender and sexuality. It's not incidental to their theology. It's the foundation. The entire system requires fixed categories, ordained roles, heterosexual reproduction as sacred duty, men over women, bodies as property of tradition. Every trans person living a good life, every same-sex marriage that thrives, every nonbinary kid doing fine, every queer chosen family raising healthy children, all of it is living proof that the categories aren't fixed and the tradition's authority to define human nature is made up.

The numbers say the proof keeps arriving. Gallup's most recent count puts LGBTQ+ identification at about 9% of US adults, roughly triple the 3.5% of 2012, and at 23% among adults under thirty. And PRRI's 2025 census found that LGBTQ Americans are twice as likely as straight Americans to be religiously unaffiliated, 51% against 25%, with only 38% identifying as Christian against 69%. The exodus isn't hypothetical. It's demographic.

They know what's at stake. That's why the reaction is so vicious, and the escalation curve is documented in bill counts.

In 2015, state legislatures considered 75 anti-LGBTQ bills, 27 of them targeting gender identity. By 2025 the total hit 1,059, with 111 enacted, the highest enactment year on record and the sixth consecutive record-breaking year. Trans Legislation Tracker counted 645 anti-trans bills by February 9, 2026, and 809 across 43 states plus 141 at the federal level as of this writing, up from zero national bills in 2022. The ACLU, counting differently, tracked just under 400. Those trackers disagree because they define the category differently and handle carryover bills differently. Cite the date and the tracker or the number means nothing.

Worth noting for honest comparison: Texas doesn't meet in 2026, which suppresses the year-over-year totals rather than reflecting any retreat.

The tactics have changed shape. Alliance Defending Freedom circulates model bills that get replicated across states with minimal edits. The newer wave moves away from explicit bans toward what advocates call sex definition laws, which redefine sex across an entire legal code at once instead of fighting policy area by policy area. Structural exclusion, built to survive judicial review.

The cruelty is the point, but it's also the tell. Healthy traditions don't need state power to enforce compliance. The resort to legislation is the confession that persuasion failed.

Which brings me to Trump

What happened in 2016 wasn't a detour from this pattern. It accelerated it. Traditionalist Christianity had a choice to make. It chose power over witness. It chose a guy who had an affair with a porn star four months after his wife gave birth and paid hush money to cover it up. A guy who walked through Lafayette Square, after protesters and clergy had been forcibly cleared with tear gas, to hold up a Bible he's never read for a photo op. A movement that mocks the vulnerable and celebrates cruelty.

Pew's validated voter studies track white evangelical Protestant support across all three elections: 77% in 2016, 83% in 2020, 81% in 2024. Three cycles, no meaningful defection.

But look at the composition, not just the loyalty. White evangelicals and white nonevangelical Protestants together made up 52% of Trump's voters in 2016, 51% in 2020, and 43% in 2024. The bloc didn't waver. It shrank. That is what a base looks like when it converts intensity into a smaller share of the room.

And in choosing that, they showed everyone what was underneath the piety the whole time. The will to dominate dressed up in religious language.

The kids noticed. They watched Christian nationalism go mainstream. They watched pastors praise a man who's the opposite

of everything in the Sermon on the Mount. They watched the Catholic Church shuffle predators for decades while lecturing about sexual morality. They watched megachurch guys buy jets while preaching prosperity gospel to people who can't afford insulin.

Here's the part that turns this from an opinion into a finding. Political scientists have been testing exactly this mechanism for fifteen years. Michele Margolis showed in *From Politics to the Pews* that partisanship shapes religiosity and not only the reverse. Campbell and Putnam argued in *American Grace* that the rise of the nones was a backlash, young people turned off by the fusion of faith and conservative politics abandoning organized religion entirely. And Campbell, Layman and Green's *Secular Surge* ran the experiments: exposure to religion-infused politics causes people to drop their religious identity.

That's the mechanism. Not disbelief. Disgust. The institution made itself politically legible and people voted with their feet.

I'll qualify it the way the literature does. The backlash effect runs against religion-infused politics generally, of which the anti-queer campaign is one component, not the whole. But it's the component that generates the most visible cruelty toward identifiable people, which is exactly the kind of thing the backlash research says drives the exit.

Trump didn't corrupt traditionalist Christianity. He revealed it. And you can't unsee that.

The numbers, including the ones that cut against me

Start with the decline, because it's real.

Gallup recorded church membership at 47% in 2020, the first time below half since it began tracking in 1937, when the figure stood at 73%. Its March 2026 release found 47% of Americans saying religion is very important, weekly attendance at 31% against

44% in 1992, and 57% saying they seldom or never attend, rising to 61% among adults under thirty. Ryan Burge read that release plainly: there is no religious revival happening in America.

Institutional trust is where the collapse is unambiguous. In 1975, 68% of Americans expressed a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the church or organized religion. Gallup's 2026 reading is 33%, two points above the all-time low. The split inside that number is the whole story: 57% of Republicans, 29% of independents, 17% of Democrats. Half the country no longer reads the church as a religious institution. They read it as a political faction, and they trust it accordingly.

Pew's Religious Landscape Study, 36,908 adults surveyed across 2023-24, found Christian identification at 62%, down from 78% in 2007, and the unaffiliated at 29%, up from 16%. Among adults 18 to 24, 46% identify as Christian and 43% are unaffiliated; among adults 74 and older it's 80% and 13%. The stickiness of a religious upbringing is weakening while the stickiness of a nonreligious upbringing strengthens. The pipeline is running dry at the intake.

And the sacred didn't go anywhere. Eighty-six percent of Americans say people have a soul. Eighty-three percent believe in God or a universal spirit. Twenty-one percent describe themselves as spiritual but not religious.

One correction I owe you there. I've said that seekers are pouring out of the pews into other practices. Pew's May 2025 report found 27% of Americans believe astrology influences people's lives, slightly down from 2017, with belief barely differing between the affiliated and unaffiliated. People aren't stampeding from pews into tarot. They're leaving institutional authority and mostly not replacing it with anything organized at all. The sacred stayed. The middleman went.

Now the part I have to put in front of you, because leaving it out would make this propaganda instead of an argument.

The decline stopped. Pew's own headline was that Christianity's decline has slowed and may have leveled off. The Christian share has been essentially flat since 2019. The growth of the nones has plateaued over the same window. Pew's researchers were careful to say this isn't a revival, and they still project further decline as the oldest generations die. But the line went sideways and stayed sideways for six years.

Then, on April 16, 2026, Gallup published something unexpected. Among men aged 18 to 29, 42% now say religion is very important, up from 28% in 2022-23, one of the steepest jumps Gallup has recorded for any group, putting young men above young women for the first time in twenty-five years. Young women sit around 29-30%, a record low.

The rebuttal arrived the day before it, which is its own kind of comedy. PRRI's Census of American Religion, released April 15, 2026, surveying 40,000 adults, found no revival at all: 66% Christian, 28% unaffiliated, 6% non-Christian, all mirroring 2024. On young men specifically, PRRI found 20% attending weekly in 2025, virtually identical to the year before. PRRI's CEO Melissa Deckman put it directly: it's not that Gen Z men are becoming more religious, it's that young women's declining religiosity has brought them level. Pew found no sign of young men converting in large numbers. Burge says there's too much noise in the data on men to read a clear signal.

So the honest version is this. The gender gap is narrowing. Whether that's male revival or female departure depends on which instrument you use, and the instruments disagree. Gallup measures importance and finds movement; PRRI measures attendance and finds none. Both can be true: identity can shift before behavior does, or instead of behavior shifting at all.

Which is exactly what I'd expect from a Pluto in Aquarius transit, incidentally. Aquarius doesn't kill a thing. It fragments it, decentralizes it, and hands it back as chosen identity rather than

inherited obligation. A young man selecting Orthodoxy off the internet because it feels like defiance is not the same phenomenon as a young man raised inside a parish. Both show up as a 42% in a phone survey.

Perception has flipped too. Gallup's series on whether religion is increasing its influence on American life: 20% in May 2024, 34% in May 2025, 41% in December 2025, 39% in May 2026. The "losing influence" reading fell to 56%, down from 82% five years earlier. Pew's April 2026 survey, released in May, found 37% saying religion is gaining influence, its highest since 2002 and up nineteen points in two years.

They're not wrong that it's gaining. That's the next section.

What it looks like when a faction consolidates

Executive Order 14205, February 7, 2025, established the White House Faith Office inside the Domestic Policy Council under Paula White-Cain, directing every federal agency to stand up a Center for Faith and help faith-based entities compete for grants and contracts. Executive Order 14291, May 1, 2025, created a Religious Liberty Commission chaired by Texas Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, housed under the Justice Department. In April 2026 Patrick called church-state separation "the biggest lie" in American history. On July 27, 2026, a federal judge dismissed a lawsuit challenging the Commission's composition, holding its membership "fairly balanced" under the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

On May 17, 2026, Rededicate 250 filled the National Mall, a prayer festival for the country's 250th anniversary organized by Freedom 250, an entity housed inside the National Park Foundation, funded partly by taxpayers. Rubio, Johnson, Vance, Hegseth by video, Franklin Graham, Cardinal Dolan. Trump read from 2 Chronicles 7 on tape. All but one of the featured faith leaders were Christian.

And the consent isn't following. Pew's April 2026 survey, fielded April 6 to 12 and released May 14: 54% want the federal government to enforce separation of church and state, unmoved in four years, while the share wanting enforcement stopped fell from 19% in 2021 to 13%. Seventy-nine percent say houses of worship should not endorse candidates. Sixty-six percent say religion should stay out of day-to-day politics. Seventeen percent want Christianity declared the official religion, up from 13% in 2024, which is movement, but movement from a very small base. Awareness of Christian nationalism as a term rose from 45% to 59% in two years, and as people learned the name they mostly disliked what it was attached to: 31% unfavorable against 10% favorable.

That's the shape of the thing. Gaining altitude in government while losing depth in the population. Every previous cycle has a name for that. It's what a tradition looks like when it stops persuading and starts consolidating.

The part I hadn't written yet: what this does to matter

Everything above is survey data. Beliefs, self-reports, bill counts. I want to close somewhere harder, because a cosmological argument that never touches the material world isn't an argument, it's a mood.

So here is the physical footprint. What changed in buildings, money, and bodies.

Buildings. Lifeway Research, reporting in January 2026 on 2024, counted about 4,000 US Protestant churches closing against 3,800 opening. A net loss, but I have to flag which way this trend runs, because it doesn't run my way: the gap is narrowing. In 2019 closures beat openings by 1,500. In 2014 openings actually won. Congregations are proving unexpectedly durable at smaller sizes.

The Catholic side is consolidating on purpose rather than by attrition. St. Louis issued 83 decrees under “All Things New” and reassigned 158 priests, though the Vatican reversed several mergers on appeal in May 2024. Cincinnati grouped 208 parishes into 57 families. Detroit went from 216 parishes to 51. The reasons given are always the same three: fewer priests, fewer people in pews, money.

Roughly 7,631 United Methodist congregations, about a quarter of the American denomination, disaffiliated by the end of 2023. That’s the largest denominational schism since the Civil War, and it moved real property. One conference alone projected a \$653,000 annual revenue loss from 118 departures.

Where the buildings go next is the interesting part. California’s SB 4, effective January 2024, rezoned surplus religious and nonprofit-college land for affordable housing by right, making something like 171,000 acres eligible. Washington, New York, Hawaii, Atlanta, San Antonio, and San Jose have versions. They call it YIGBY, Yes In God’s Backyard. Church land is becoming housing. I can’t tell you how many units have actually been built, because nobody has published a national count and most projects are still in planning. I’d rather say that than quote a projection as a fact.

Money. Giving USA: Americans gave \$617.2 billion to charity in 2025, crossing \$600 billion for the first time. Religion received \$151.58 billion of it, a 0.2% decline in inflation-adjusted terms, after a roughly 1% real decline the year before. Religious giving has been the slowest-growing category Giving USA tracks over the past two decades. And religion’s share of all American charitable dollars has fallen from roughly half in the early 1990s to about 23% now.

That’s the clearest number in this entire essay. When people stop believing an institution deserves their money, they stop sending it, and the accountants find out before the pollsters do.

The staffing pipeline shows the same thing. Master of Divinity enrollment across accredited theological schools fell 14% between 2020 and 2024, from 30,455 to 26,082. Catholic graduate theologates are down to 41 from 47 in 2002. Only three Catholic high-school seminaries remain, from 122 in 1967.

Though here's the counter-signal, and it's a real one: total seminary enrollment ticked up in 2025-26, with growth in master's and doctoral programs, at evangelical schools, and among Hispanic students, up 28% in two years. The traditional pastor pipeline is contracting. The wider theological-education sector isn't. Those are different claims and I'm not going to blur them.

Bodies. This is where the argument stops being about institutions and starts being about people who are alive or aren't.

Two peer-reviewed studies using national vital-statistics data found that in states with abortion bans there were roughly 478 more infant deaths than expected, an infant mortality rate 5.6% above projection, with Black infants dying at a rate 11% above expectation, alongside about 22,000 more births than expected. Texas maternal mortality rose 56% in the first full year of its ban, with a 50% increase in maternal sepsis, while maternal mortality fell 21% in states without bans.

Idaho lost 35% of its practicing obstetric physicians, 94 out of 268, between August 2022 and December 2024. Three hospitals closed their labor and delivery units; one named the abortion ban explicitly. OB-GYN residency applications to programs in ban states fell 6.7% in a single cycle while rising slightly elsewhere.

Catholic hospital market share grew 28.5% between 2001 and 2020 while non-Catholic share fell. In 132 US counties every hospital is faith-based, and in 118 of those it's Catholic. Something like 800,000 Americans have no non-religious hospital within an hour's drive, which means the Ethical and Religious Directives, written by bishops, function as medical law for them.

As of August 2026, half of American trans teenagers live in a state restricting their access to gender-affirming care. Twenty-five bans survived Skrmetti. Federal funding restrictions pushed clinics in non-ban states to suspend youth services preemptively.

I want to be careful with the mental-health research here, because it's both important and contested. The Trevor Project's 2025 national survey of over 16,000 LGBTQ+ young people found 90% reporting that recent anti-LGBTQ laws and debates caused them stress or anxiety. A 2024 study in *Nature Human Behaviour*, drawing on more than 61,000 trans and nonbinary young respondents, associated state-level anti-transgender laws with increased past-year suicide attempts, with an estimate range wide enough that critics have challenged both the range and the causal framing on sampling grounds. The association is documented. The magnitude is disputed. Both things are true and you should hear both.

Children and public money. Arizona's universal education savings account program went from about 12,000 students to more than 100,000 by January 2026, costing about \$1 billion a year, with RAND finding most recipients were already in private school or homeschooling. In New Hampshire roughly 90% of the earlier program's money went to Christian schools. Texas enacted a \$1 billion ESA in May 2025, potentially \$4.5 billion annually by 2030. After *Carson v. Makin*, the constitutional barrier to funding religious education is largely gone. Public money now builds religious schools at scale.

PEN America counted 6,870 public school book bans in 2024-25, down from 10,046 the year before but far above the historical baseline, with nearly 23,000 since 2021. Florida, Texas, and Tennessee lead. Utah and South Carolina now maintain statewide removal lists, which is a different and more durable kind of machinery than a district fight.

Texas SB 763 let school districts put uncertified chaplains in schools, funded from the school safety allotment; districts split, with Dallas and Austin refusing and Round Rock and Keller accepting, and more than a hundred professional chaplains publicly opposing it. Louisiana and Texas mandated Ten Commandments displays in every classroom, and in April 2026 the Fifth Circuit sitting en banc upheld the Texas law nine to eight, having in February vacated an adverse panel ruling on Louisiana's as premature rather than upholding that law on the merits. A Supreme Court petition is pending. As I write, the displays are going up.

And the civic hole underneath. About 32% of formal American volunteers serve through religious organizations. Congregations have been the delivery mechanism for food pantries, disaster response, blood drives, and the ordinary mutual aid of a functioning town. A 2025 study found third places, the informal gathering spaces that aren't home or work, declining fastest in majority-Black, low-education, and rural communities. The Census Bureau now models religious adherence as a civic-infrastructure variable when predicting volunteering rates.

I'll flag my own weak premise here rather than let someone else do it. Volunteering fell to a two-decade low in 2021 and then partially recovered to 28.3% by 2023. And US fertility hit a record low total fertility rate of 1.57 in 2025, which correlates with secularization but is far better explained by housing costs and the price of raising children. I'm not going to hang a religious argument on the birth rate. That's the kind of move I'm criticizing.

What I will say is this. Something built the social infrastructure of American communities over two centuries, and it was substantially the congregation. It is coming apart faster than anything is replacing it, and the horizontal networks I've been praising all essay have not yet built a food bank.

What I'm actually saying to you, Christianity

The Magi knew how to read the stars. They crossed the ancient world because something in the sky told them a king was born. They understood your God speaks through celestial motion, exactly as Genesis 1:14 says. Two thousand years later, the institution claiming to follow that king condemns the practice that found him.

That contradiction can't hold forever.

Your tradition has long taught that truth flows downward. God to scripture to clergy to institution to individual. It needs submission. Pews facing a pulpit. The answer to "how do I know what's true" being "because the church says so."

Every one of those requirements is what this age dissolves. Not through persecution. Not through argument. Through obsolescence.

I want to be careful here, because the last two years taught me something I didn't expect. The kids aren't uniformly walking away. Some of them are walking in, and the ones walking in are disproportionately young men on the right, looking for structure, belonging, and a place to stand. That's a real hunger and it deserves a better answer than mockery. What they're finding is not the vertical church of 1955. It's newer, more political, more on-line, and considerably angrier, and it isn't clear the institution absorbing them survives the encounter unchanged. Movements that recruit through grievance inherit the grievance.

Meanwhile young women are leaving faster than any group Gallup has measured. A tradition that gains sons and loses daughters at that rate isn't growing. It's sorting. And a sorted tradition has about one generation before the arithmetic catches up with it.

I'll grant the stabilization. Sixty-two percent is not a collapse, and the floor may hold a long time. But look at what's holding

it: a bloc that votes as one, trusts the church at 57% while independents trust it at 29%, gets a West Wing office and a federal commission, and still cannot persuade two-thirds of the country that religion belongs in politics at all. That's not a faith with cultural authority. That's a faction with a firm base, and a faction can survive indefinitely without ever again being able to tell the country what to think.

Will something called Christianity exist in twenty years? Certainly. It'll look as different from this version as Protestantism looked from medieval Catholicism. The name survives. The vertical authority structure, the creedal gatekeeping, the priest as middleman, the obsession with controlling bodies and bedrooms, the assumption that being raised in it means staying in it. Those are what's going.

The Trump-evangelical alliance will be studied as the moment a tradition traded its witness for a term of political power and discovered afterward what the exchange rate had been.

I'm not saying this to gloat. I believe all traditions contain truth, and watching one strangle itself hurts. The mystical stream within Christianity, the Quakers, the contemplatives, the liberation theologians, the queer Christians who stayed despite everything, that current will survive. Maybe flourish. It's the apparatus that called itself the guardian of Western civilization while allying with everything Jesus opposed that's going to be remembered as the cautionary tale.

The Water Bearer pours directly. The Magi followed a star and found god in a manger, not a temple. The shepherd discovers the sheep have phones and are organizing their own pastures.

You can rage. You can pass laws. You can hang the Commandments in every classroom in Texas. You can build an office in the West Wing and fill the National Mall.

None of it settles the question of what people believe when nobody is making them. Pluto doesn't negotiate. The conjunction doesn't ask permission. The age turns whether you accept it or not.

The Water Bearer pours without prejudice. The receiving is ours.

Corrections log

I don't get to accuse an institution of quietly revising itself and then quietly revise myself. Everything I've changed since the December 2025 original is listed here.

Corrected in the August 2026 second revision (nine items), carried forward: the Magi passage, the Pluto transit framing, the evangelical vote figures, the church attendance series, and the extension covering the US-Iran war.

Corrected in this third revision:

- Mazzaroth. Previously presented the zodiacal reading as settled with BDB and Saadia Gaon in agreement. BDB actually marks it uncertain, and the singular pronoun in Job 38:32 supports readings naming a single constellation. Now presented as contested.
- Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. Previously cited as though it evidenced Second Temple practice. It's generally dated seventh to eighth century CE. Demoted and labeled.
- Kepler. Previously implied Kepler proposed the 7 BCE conjunction as the Star. He noticed it but favored a nova. Corrected.
- Josephus. The explicit "circle of the zodiac" language is in Wars 5.217, not Antiquities 3.182, which says "the year, as distinguished into so many months." Both now cited correctly. The breastplate-stones passage is removed pending verification of its exact section.

- Jung. Added his own refusal to date the Aquarian transition confidently, range 2000-2200, self-described as “very indefinite.”
- Ancient Pluto ingress dates. Previously given as exact year ranges. Back-computed ephemerides disagree. Now given as centuries.
- The Earth-to-Air mutation. Previously stated as 1802 without qualification. The 1802 / 1980-81 / 2020 dispute is now named.
- Evangelical vote. My 84% figure for 2020 was Pew’s earlier report. Their current series reads 77 / 83 / 81.
- Astrology belief. I implied seekers were surging into alternative practice. Pew finds belief in astrology at 27% and slightly down since 2017. Corrected, and the claim narrowed.
- Gallup “increasing influence.” I’d cited a single figure. It’s a series: 20% (May 2024), 34% (May 2025), 41% (December 2025), 39% (May 2026).
- Pew April 2026. Correctly dated: fielded April 6-12, released May 14. The church-state enforcement figure is 54%, and the share wanting enforcement stopped fell to 13% from 19%, which I had backwards.
- Peru. Boluarte was removed by a congressional vacancy declaration under the “permanent moral incapacity” clause, not an impeachment.
- Morocco. I previously wrote that GenZ 212’s Discord grew from three thousand to a quarter million members in ten days. I can’t source that. Removed.
- Church closures. I’d framed closures as accelerating. They aren’t; the closure-to-plant gap has been narrowing since 2019. Stated against my own interest.
- Seminaries. MDiv enrollment is down 14%, but total theological enrollment rose in 2025-26. Both now stated.
- Fertility. Removed as evidence. The economic explanation is stronger and I shouldn’t have reached for it.

Pattern I'm holding myself to: every late correction I've made to this letter has removed a claim that was too strong. That's the standard. If you find another, tell me and it goes in this list.

AI assistance for this letter

The book's own attribution note is at the back. This letter was produced separately and carries its own figures.

This piece was produced with AI assistance. Direct input: 60% — the argument, structure, scriptural exegesis, astrological framework, Jung readings, and voice are mine, with substantial prose carried unchanged from the December 2025 original and the August 2026 second revision. Directed/requested: 10% — I asked for the piece to be updated with current data and for the February 2026 forecast section to be converted to retrospect, which set the scope of every revision. AI-researched/generated: 30% — all 2024-2026 survey figures, legislative counts, denominational and financial data, medical and demographic outcomes, textual and ephemeris verification, and the drafting of the material-substrate section and the corrections log were researched and composed without line-level direction from me.

Sources include Pew Research Center, Gallup, PRRI, Giving USA, Lifeway Research, the Association of Theological Schools, Trans Legislation Tracker, KFF, PEN America, CDC/NCHS, and peer-reviewed journals including JAMA, JAMA Pediatrics, JAMA Network Open, and Nature Human Behaviour. Where sources conflict, the conflict is stated rather than resolved.

Colophon

The twelve chapters answer Ecclesiastes verse for verse, two hundred and twenty-two against two hundred and twenty-two, numbered to match the King James text. An earlier and much shorter version of these chapters, twelve prose passages of about eighteen hundred words in total, was written by Sticks/Philip and is the seed this grew from. Several of its best lines are carried into the verse text unchanged. The introduction, the note on reading, and the invocation were written for this edition.

The invocation draws on The Prayer of the Living Whole, first posted publicly in January 2026.

The appendix, Signs in the Heavens, was written in December 2025 and published to Reddit before it was brought into this book. It is carried here in its third revision of August 2026, the same text published on the website, and it closes with a corrections log naming all sixteen changes made since the original, including the extension covering the war that began eight days after the conjunction it told the reader to mark and the passage reporting where the letter's central prediction about horizontal movements failed its first real test. The corrections are made in the text rather than in notes, because a letter that quietly fixes itself is doing the same thing it accuses the church of doing.

Every factual claim in the introduction was checked against primary sources before publication. The Mishnah passage is Yadayim 3:5. The Uranus material comes from the Royal Observatory record and from Deborah Houlding's documentary history of the Uranus rulership. The count of seven enjoyment refrains follows R. N. Whybray, "Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy,"

Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 23 (1982). Michael Fox on hevel is Qohelet and His Contradictions, Almond Press, 1989. Craig Bartholomew's case for the literary unity of the book is his Ecclesiastes, Baker Academic, 2009. Verse numbering follows the King James text. The appendix's biblical citations were checked against the Hebrew and Greek, its transits computed against the Swiss Ephemeris, and its statistics against Gallup, Pew, Reuters/Ipsos, PRRI and BLS directly, and its account of the 2026 Iran war against the Congressional Research Service, Britannica, the Council on Foreign Relations and contemporaneous reporting.

The introduction was read in draft by DeepSeek and by Kimi K3, both instructed to attack it. Their findings were verified against primary sources before any of it was acted on, which caught one fabricated citation and one scholar's position stated backwards. What survived that check is in the text.

Released free. If it is worth something to you, pay what you decide it is worth, and only if you have it to spare. Nothing here is behind a wall.

AI Attribution Note

Produced with AI assistance (Claude, Anthropic). Direct input: 22% — the seed version of the twelve chapters is his and lines from it survive throughout the verse text, most visibly at 1:9, 4:12, 7:1, 9:7 through 9:10 and 12:7; the biographical premise of the introduction is his own published account of his upbringing; the Aquarian reading of the present age is his standing position in his own words; the naming of the Explorer was his; and the whole moral position now carried through the verse text, that there is no cosmic judge, that evil is ignorance and the necessity of opposing forces, that karma is an empathy engine rather than a punishment, that consent is the axis between conscious and unconscious participation, that what you expect of others reports your own position, and that the motive is world-building rather than obligation, is his, written on FetLife in October 2025 and carried in here from his own text. Directed/requested: 20% — the instruction that the chapters mirror Ecclesiastes exactly for the Aquarian age, which is what produced the present verse structure; the EPUB, web and print editions; the introduction, the note on how to read it and the invocation; the Gnostic Luciferian and pagan audience; the instruction to draw on the earlier prayer; the instruction to work the Aquarian cycle into the front matter; the byline; the order to fact-check the result; and the instruction to carry the good-and-evil position into the striving were all specified by him. AI-researched/generated: 58% — the two hundred and twenty-two verses in their present form, the correction pass on the appendix, the verse-by-verse correspondence against the King James text, the Ecclesiastes and Isaiah scholarship, the Mishnah passage, the Uranus discov-

ery history, the translation and Babel material, the adversarial verification that corrected six claims in an earlier draft of the introduction and nineteen in the counter-argument brief, the prose of all three front pieces and the editorial framing were researched and composed without direction. The cover is not Claude's work and is excluded from all three figures above: the painted cover was generated with ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Claude (Anthropic) at Sticks/Philip's direction, and only the title line was altered afterward, by inpainting out THE BOOK OF and re-setting it as THE BOOK OF JOYOUS in a matched face. Ambiguity worth flagging: the thirteen verses revised for v3 are the assistant's prose carrying his stated position, so the ideas in them are his and the sentences are not.