

Deshalb machen sie sich auf die Suche nach diesem "Alles", das über alles bekannte, alltägliche hinausgreift und das menschliche Dasein erst rechtfertigt. Ihre ganz subjektiven Motive dürften sich kaum von den ebenso subjektiven Motiven der mittelalterlichen Pilger unterscheiden: Andacht, der Wunsch nach Heilung und Vergebung von Sünden, die Einlösung eines Gelübdes, aber auch Abenteuerlust und Ausstieg aus dem Alltag – so viel hat sich in den letzten 1000 Jahren nicht geändert, auch wenn keiner mehr Ablassbriefe verteilt. Stattdessen sind es Bestätigungen in Form von Pilgerbriefen, die den Daheimgebliebenen, aber auch einem selbst beweisen – ich war wirklich dort, habe es geschafft. Ich bin ein anderer Mensch geworden.

Ein Literaturverzeichnis beendet den hervorragend produzierten Band, der 40 Farb- und 4 Schwarzweißabbildungen enthält. Rundum ein interessanter und attraktiver Band und eine willkommene Abwechslung für Augen, die an die Bleiwüsten akademischer Fachliteratur gewöhnt sind. Rottloff bietet eine gute Einführung in die historischen Wurzeln und Ausgestaltungen eines die Kirche über Jahrhunderte prägenden Aspekts christlicher Spiritualität. Hinzuweisen ist noch auf den schönen Band von Andrea Rottloff zu Frauen in der römischen Antike: *Lebensbilder römischer Frauen*. Kulturgeschichte der antiken Welt 104 (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2006).



Shields, M A 2006 – *The end of wisdom: A reappraisal of the historical and canonical function of Ecclesiastes*

Publisher: Eisenbrauns. Hard cover, 250 pages. Price: Unknown

Reviewer: Prof Dr P M Venter (University of Pretoria)

As the subheading in the title indicates, this publication is a reappraisal of the book of Ecclesiastes with regard to its historical and its canonical function. As can be expected from a reappraisal, it does indeed present a controversial position. The author reworked his PhD. dissertation for this monograph to expound on his thesis that an "epilogist exploits the offense of Qoheleth's words to formulate a compelling critique of the wisdom movement of his day" (p 237). The author differentiates between Ecclesiastes (the final canonical book including the epilogue in Ecclesiastes 12:9-14) and the rest of the book written by one Qoheleth. The writer of the epilogue, acting as an editor of Qoheleth's work, took the latter's comments on the inadequacies of wisdom and turned them into a warning against the wisdom movement. It is this theory that gave rise to the book's title: The end of wisdom.

In the introductory section (pp 1-6), Shields outlines the age old problem of Ecclesiastes' inclusion in the canon. Having summarized a number of existing theories arguing for the book's acceptance in the Hebrew Bible, he presents his theory that the epilogue provides the key to solving the problem. He endeavors to show that the words of Qoheleth "are incompatible with the orthodoxy of the remainder of the Hebrew Bible" (p 6), but the presentation of his words by the epilogist reconciles it with that "orthodoxy". The epilogist "employed Qoheleth's words to discredit the sages" (p 34)

To prove his thesis, Shields reconstructs "an implied or literary history" (p 238, cf also p 37) of the wisdom in Israel. The wisdom movement begins with the wisdom of Proverbs "whose terse nature readily permits a naïve, mechanistic (mis)interpretation of the world"

(p 238). Job and Qoheleth represent the next trajectory showing severe reaction against this application of wisdom. Qoheleth illustrates that the notion “that the world operates via an underlying moral order simply does not reflect reality” (p 239). Qoheleth therefore marks the end of speculative wisdom in ancient Israel. The epilogist in Ecclesiastes exploited this view of Qoheleth and expounded on the idea that “the wisdom movement’s ideas had become incompatible with the ideas and ideals of ancient Israelite orthodoxy” (p 238). He introduced “the turning point in the history of wisdom in Israel” (p 37). The epilogist used Qoheleth’s words to undermine the credibility of the sages and the wisdom movement of his day. In a deconstructive way, he aimed to discredit the wisdom movement and send wisdom into a new direction. His epilogue is an appeal to return to “a theological wisdom grounded in the fear of God and obedience to his commandments” (p 238). The later wisdom books, like Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon, followed this direction.

In chapter 1 on wisdom in the Hebrew Bible (pp 7-20), the author indicates that the enmity towards the sages can be found elsewhere in the canonical books too. In most of the material very negative connotations are attached to wisdom, the main reason being the “wisdom movement’s incompatibility with the belief system of the remainder of the Bible” (p 7). It “is based on human ingenuity without reference to God” (p 17) and therefore “almost universally presented negatively” (p 20).

Chapter 2 (pp 21-46) reconstructs the wise as social group in the Hebrew Bible. In this chapter the author indicates that the provenience and the historical *Sitz im Leben* of Ecclesiastes are uncertain. The only date that can be given is one that is relative to other texts. A literary history of Ecclesiastes, indicating that the book represents one trajectory of a *wisdom movement* (p 46) can, however, be constructed. Sages functioned as an identifiable group within Israelite society. The epilogist reacted strongly to the sages of his time, using “Qoheleth’s honest appraisal of the wisdom movement [of his time] as largely futile and pointless” (p 237).

Chapter 3 (pp 47-109) presents a thorough analysis of the epilogue, for the first time in the publication demarcated as Ecclesiastes 12:9-14.. In Shields’ theory this epilogue “is foundational for understanding the book of Ecclesiastes as a whole” (p 47). In it the editor’s thoughts on Qoheleth and the wisdom movement of his time are formulated. It is through this epilogue that the existing collection of Qoheleth’s words obtains its function and meaning in the canon. Not merely recontextualizing Qoheleth’s criticism of the futility of the wisdom movement of his time, but actually using it against that movement, the author of the epilogue reformed the criticism into one new unit known as Ecclesiastes. Shields divides the epilogue into three subunits: 12:9-10 (a biographical comment about Qoheleth); 12:11-12 (warnings about the teaching of the sages); 12:13-14 (the conclusion of the matter). In his literary-poetic analysis of the Hebrew text, the author reaches the conclusion that Qoheleth did not move beyond the futility of his task to find an alternative form of wisdom, but confined himself to a negative critique of the futility of wisdom’s endeavor to find answers. While Qoheleth feared a distant unknown God, the epilogist feared a God who had revealed his will in his commands to his people (cf p 97). The words of the epilogist reflect “Israelite orthodoxy” (p 100) and are in direct contrast with the heterodox ideas of Qoheleth and the wisdom movement. Qoheleth’s theism is rooted in the transcendence and capriciousness of God standing in opposition to the ideas and beliefs in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. He propagates the futility of the present wisdom endeavor, but offers no knowledge of an alternative way of wisdom, whereas the epilogist points to the alternative of obeying God’s commandments. His advice is to be wary of the sages’ words.

In chapter 4 (pp 110-235) Shields again analyzes the entire book of Ecclesiastes in its Hebrew form according to its literary units. This chapter’s aim is to formulate Ecclesiastes’ own ideas as the basis for the work of the epilogist. In nearly every unit the author reaches the conclusion that Qoheleth’s observations and conclusions “consistently stand at odds with normative doctrine in the remainder of the Hebrew Bible” (p 173). The reader who is familiar

with orthodox teaching in the Bible “would find these honest revelations of this exponent of the wisdom movement deeply troubling and thus be inclined to accept the epilogist’s advice to be wary of the sages’ words” (p 173). At the end of this long study the author comes to the fourfold conclusion that Qoheleth does not denounce wisdom directly, that he nowhere “admits the possibility of divine revelation” (p 235), that the only viable course of action for Qoheleth is to enjoy life, and that Qoheleth’s conclusions are incompatible with the teaching of the remainder of the Bible.

Indices of authors and of scripture referred to, appear on the last pages of the book. The contents of Shields’ thesis will give rise to intense debate. His book is well researched, but one often gets the idea that he is forcing certain arguments in his favor. His idea of a single theology of the whole Old Testament as being “the orthodox” theology of revelation and covenant commands, repetitively used to prove his point of Ecclesiastes’ foreignness vis à vis the rest of the Bible, opens itself to severe criticism. A long history of Old Testament Theology is simply ignored by his idea of “orthodoxy”. Questions that beg answering are for example why Proverbs, with its “naïve” wisdom and Job, with its unorthodox theology, are still part of the canon although they represent a stage of wisdom that has been overtaken and why they are not also recontextualized in the same way that Ecclesiastes is? These questions merely constitute the beginning of the debate.



Van Ruler, A A 2007 – *Verzameld Werk, deel I: De aard van de theologie* (Besorgd door Dr D van Keulen)

Publisher: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum

Reviewer: Dr J P (Kobus) Labuschagne (University of Pretoria)

Arnold Albert van Ruler (1908-1970) is regarded by many as one of the three great Dutch “*Hervormde*” (*Reformed*) theologians of the 20th century – that is together with O Noordmans and KH Miskotte. It is his theological depth and insight, his widely accepted theological influence and his whole-hearted involvement in church-life that earned him this high regard. In spite of contemporary postmodern disinterest in *systematic* theology, many still admire and appreciate Van Ruler for his kind of theology that is deeply rooted in the tradition of the *catholica* – the Christian church through the centuries – and more specifically the *Reformed tradition* with its origin in the 16th century Reformation.

As a result of what can be seen as an ongoing interest in Van Ruler’s work and additionally even as a renewed interest in the works of Van Ruler, a group of concerned scholars in 2005 finally decided that Van Ruler’s work should be recompiled and published. Dr Dirk van Keulen was appointed as editor and he was assisted by a commission, which included the following members: Dr WJ van Asselt, Dr P van den Heuvel and Drs J Stelwagen. *De Aard van de Theologie* is the first of 7 volumes, and was published in July 2007. The others, which are to follow in due course, are:

- Volume 2: *Openbaring en Heilige Skrif*
- Volume 3: *God, schepping, mens, zonde*
- Volume 4: *Christus, de Geest en het heil*
- Volume 5: *Kerk, sacramenten en de laaste dingen*