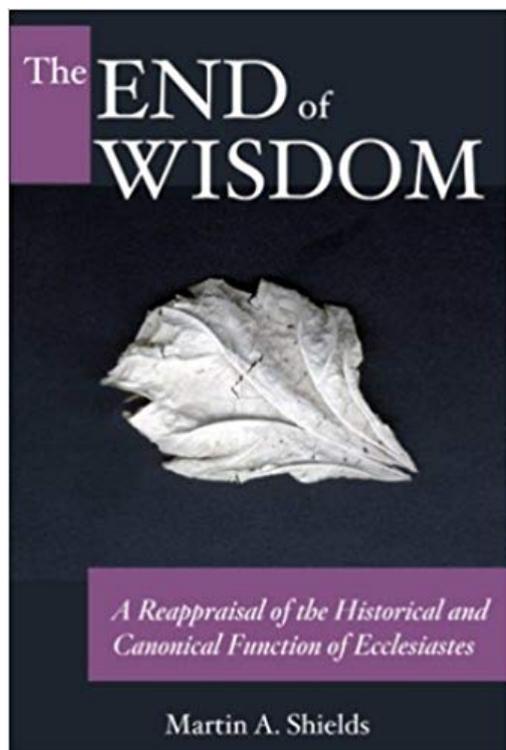


The End of Wisdom: A Reappraisal of the Historical and Canonical Function of Ecclesiastes *by* Martin A. Shields



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Through the ages, the book of Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth) has elicited a wide variety of interpretations. Its status as wisdom literature is secure, but its meaning for the religion of the Hebrew Bible and its heirs has been a matter of much debate. The debate has swung from claiming orthodoxy for the book to arguing that the message intended by its author is heterodox, in its entirety. There are a number of passages in the book that present difficulties for any comprehensive approach to the work. Martin Shields here fully acknowledges the heterodox nature of Qoheleth's words but offers an orthodox reading of the book as a whole through the eyes of the author of the epilogue. After a survey of attitudes regarding wisdom in the Hebrew Bible itself, which serves as an orientation to the monograph as a whole, Shields provides a detailed study of the epilogue (Qoh 12:9-14), which he believes is the key to the reading of the remainder of the book. He then addresses various problematic texts in the book in light of this perspective, arguing that the book could originally have functioned as a warning to students against joining a wisdom movement that existed at the time of the book's composition. Qoheleth is presented as a true adherent of this movement, and the divergence of his words from the theism presented in the rest of the Hebrew Bible becomes the basis of the epilogue's critique.

Finally, Shields proposes a historical context in which just this scenario may have arisen, showing that the desire of the writer of the epilogue is to correct a wayward wisdom tradition.



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