

Abstract

This thesis aims to diagnose the main motivation behind Qoheleth's view of life in the book of Ecclesiastes—mainly “death” and its function towards the meaning of human life. The well-known verse “Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2) is quite the reason why Ecclesiastes is not a popular book among pastors who preach in churches. While mainstream readers consider the book pessimistic in terms of the meaninglessness of human existence, this thesis explores and sorts out the various positions which scholars specializing in this book or in wisdom literature may hold. The idea of death has always been a source of anxiety for humankind, and it is certainly an important topic that Qoheleth himself tackles. However, death is frequently viewed as a subsidiary issue under the many themes that are discussed among scholarly interpretations of the book. Thus, in order to locate and emphasize the theme of death in scholarly analysis, this thesis categorizes scholarly positions into the pessimistic, the optimistic, and the mixed views toward life. It points out that the reason for division among the various positions lies in how God's sovereignty affects human lives and how death can manipulate the meaning of life. The remaining parts of the thesis are dedicated to searching how Qoheleth uses death as a reflective agent to understand life: by looking at death in terms of “vanity,” death in Qoheleth's cycle of creation, and death in the theme of time. Overall, the main issue at hand is to pinpoint death as the focal factor for Qoheleth's understanding of life, and to underscore death as not the element of dread but an inevitable process that provides motivation to rethink human life.

摘要

傳道書中傳道者(Qoheleth)對生命有其獨特的見解，是有別於傳統舊約認知中的觀點。

本論文旨在探究推動傳道者進行思辯背後的原動力——「死亡」以及死亡對於人生的意義是否具有催化功能。傳道書中著名的經節「傳道者說：虛空的虛空，虛空的虛空，凡事都是虛空」(1:2)可說是地方教會牧者之所以不常在禮拜中以傳道書為主題經文的原因。由於缺乏意義的生命態度以及虛浮無謂的存有觀，主流讀者常以人生的悲觀論看待本卷書。儘管如此，本論文試圖從專門研究傳道書或智慧文學的學者論述中尋找並歸納不同的觀點。死亡的概念及想像時常為人類帶來焦慮，而死亡確實也是傳道者本身所處理的重要議題。然而在許多傳道書的學術研究中，死亡常常只被視為其他主題探討之下的次要討論。為了能夠討論並強調不同學者觀點當中對於死亡的了解，本論文將學界立場區分為對生命持悲觀論者、樂觀論者及綜合態度論者。內文指出學界論調分歧的主因在於上帝主權如何影響人命以及死亡如何形塑生命意義的認知差異。剩餘的部分則用於探討傳道者如何運用死亡作為反思生命意義的媒介／借鏡：分別由「虛空」主題、由傳道者的循環式創造觀、由時間框架去剖析死亡的議題。整體而言，本論文的首要任務在於指出死亡是傳道者用來了解並反思生命本質的關鍵要素，更強調死亡並非帶來恐懼，反而因為死亡是人命無可避免的歷程而成為反思人生的動力。

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