»Qohelet's call for joy«

A text-pragmatic oriented study on place and function of joy-statements in the Book of Koheleth

Dennis A. Koch, University of Hamburg

- Summary of doctoral project –

Like almost no other scripture in the Hebrew Bible, the perception of the wisdom book Ecclesiastes has polarized exegetic research in recent decades. The reason and form of this "polarization" can be found both in the author's very own style of narration and in the themes focused on therein. Thus, in the form of Kohelet, we are confronted with a person who reflects on the world, time and death in an "I-perspectivity" that is unusually clear for the Old Testament canon. His questions about the meaning of human effort, but also about the limits of wisdom, is characterized by a continuous sceptical undertone. Qohelet asks, but he also finds answers. In this way, besides trusting in an order of creation, there is despair at one's own efforts, but also hope for "new things under the sun". In the midst of this ambivalence of the human confrontation with the world, Qohelet's call comes to joy. A call in which *implied* emotions are combined with an *explicit* call to emotional joy: *a man should rejoice because Qohelet sees that nothing is better for humankind than to find joy in their toil*. But how can man rejoice in the face of the limitations of his own creation and recognition?

My dissertation project aims to address these and other questions with particular attention to the basic *communicative structure* of Ecclesiastes. For this purpose, traditional instruments of historical-critical exegesis are combined with new text-pragmatic and pragmalinguistic approaches. One of these can be found in the *empirical-textpragmatic approach* developed by Christof Hardmeier, through which communicative structures in biblical texts can be examined. As can be recognized from this, the interest of this project lies in taking up the role of the readers, which has received little attention in Qohelet's research to date. This will be illuminated in consideration of the development of topics and in context of the specific development of joy and pleasure statements within the Book of Qohelet. At the beginning and at the end there is the question to what extent joy can (and must be) understood as a constitutive element of Qohelet's theological orientation in world and reality. It should also become more evident that Qohelet's call to joy must also be perceived as a call to the presence of theology, church and society. Through this the theological meaning of "spaces of joy" in contemporary contexts should also be illustrated.

The present paper forms a first attempt to examine the communication between text and readers at the beginning of the book. It can be assumed that especially at the beginning of the book, essential foundations are laid for the development of the communication provided by the text. There, the so-called royal travesty (Qoh 1:12-2:26) plays an important role in establishing a communication connection between text and readers. This significance is particularly evident in the various "establishing functions" which can be investigated therein in terms of topic, development communicative counterparts and mode of reflection. For this reason, this paper focuses primarily on a detailed investigation of the structure, the thematic construction and the establishment of the reflective I ("Qohelet"). In this context, the introduction of Kohelet as a communicative and reflective counterpart of the reader is to be examined in more detail. This paper and the considerations contained therein are to be further developed in the further course of my work and become the starting point of the third chapter of my dissertation. In the further course of the work, this chapter is to be used as the basis for the concentrated investigation of the joy statements within Qohelet's discourse. For this reason, the ideas contained therein are of a provisional nature and they are to be further developed especially in discussions with the OTSEM network.

DENNIS A. KOCH
PhD student (University of Hamburg)
dennis.koch@uni-hamburg.de

Begin of studies: June 2017