Job: A Literary and Mystical Interpretation

By Spencer Miles Boersma

If there were no heaven, I would still love you.
If there were no hell, I would still fear you.
- Saint Theresa of Avila

Introduction: A Survey On How Almost Everyone Gets Job Wrong

The book of Job has suffered greatly at the hands of interpreters.[1] Classical interpreters such as Chrysostom only comment on the first 2 chapters,[2] neglecting the rest. Gregory the Great's *Moralia* on Job is beautiful, but since it is an allegory, its interpretations have little to do with the drama presented.

It is the Medieval and Reformation interpreters, such as Maimonides, Aquinas and Calvin, who were more diligent to deal with the literal meaning through the body of the book, but their interpretations still miss important elements. Maimonides, saw God as educating Job about providence. Job misunderstood the nature of direct and intermediate causation, the upshot of this distinction is that the blame squarely rests on Satan, not God.[3] Job is guilty of speaking almost blasphemously about God.[4] Maimonides excuses this because of Job's pain, but insists that Job is a man who speaks with an "erroneous opinion" as one "without wisdom."[5] Aquinas is far gentler, more resolute to seeing Job as innocent.[6] Job is wise, knowledgeable in doctrine, but impractical (an egg-headed theology professor like himself, perhaps!). He acts like an apologist of the resurrection. Job's sin is ignorance of a less dramatic, practical nature. Job misses the "effects" of God around him.[7] Also, he is guilty of debating his friends with too much levity, thus failing to convert them.[8] These readings I call the "providence" readings, and I don't think they work. Does the book of Job support the separation of causation? Is Job ignorant and blasphemous? I don't think so.

Modern interpreters have not done much better.[9] With perhaps the exception of Gustavo Gutiérrez, who resolutely reads the book for the solidarity with the poor (but even then, he does not understand some of the greater literary dynamics of the book, which I will get into).[10] Historical interpreters that make comparisons to the Babylonian Theodicy and other similar works do point out that Job is by all accounts the most gracious treatment on theodicy in its time. Other theodicies have no compassion for the suffering, and God does not answer their cries. So there is some profit there.

Most modern commentators, however, just get bogged down asking questions of form and dating. However, the fact is we really don't know a whole lot about the historical context of Job. We don't know who wrote it. We are not entirely sure

when it was written. The language of the manuscripts suggests around 500-600 B.C. but there is evidence for both older and newer dates as well, each interpretation having their own anomalies. I think the 600s work best because that is when, for instance, the formative sources of the Pentateuch started coming together. Genesis mentioned that Abraham came from "Ur of the Chaldeans" and Job mentions the Chaldeans. What is interesting about this is Abraham was estimated to live around 2000s B.C., but we know that the Chaldeans arose no earlier than the 500s, thus it is likely that the writer or final editor of that source of Genesis was writing from this later century. So also with Job, which makes sense as Job's reflections on the law complements and critiques the understanding of the law in the Pentateuch.

We are not entirely sure what the original looked like. We can't even be sure if a Jewish person even wrote the original (which raises interesting question about inspiration via authorship, but then again, Lemuel's mother got included in the Proverbs, and we have no idea who that person is: some think it was a name for Solomon, others a king in Assyria, both are throwing darts). The fact is many books of the Old Testament were written or edited anonymously because ancient people did not place the same importance on authorship as we modern individualistic people do. Books were assumed to be the products of communities not merely individual authors. So, we should not be surprised to see several minds behind books like Isaiah or several traditions forming the Pentateuch.

Job may have been a non-Jewish book that the Jews claimed for their own and modified. There may or may not have been additions and revisions to the book over time, most notably Elihu's statements (who is the only Jewish person and is not mentioned at the beginning or end, thus he may have been spliced in), but also the Job of 1-2 is very different from the Job from 3. Is that evidence of Job being the combination of several works about him brought together? Also, the beginning and end are in prose, while the rest is in poetry. There could be literary reasons for that, but again, we are not sure. All we are left with is this intriguing book, full of perplexing features.

We are left treating this as a unified literary work set within the Jewish canon and within the Christian canon, and thus, contra the historical-critical interpreters, these literary-canonical structures provide the most concrete meaning of the book. Job seems to be a work of literature referencing a possible historical figure (Job) from the time of the Patriarchs (cf. Ez. 14:14). So, that would make the book probably more like Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* or *King Lear*. In other words there may have been a historical person named Job, or at least the writer assumes there was, but this historical instance is expanded into a narrative dialogue to flesh out the theology into 40 some odd chapters of rounds of poetic monologues.

That influences the way the truth of the text presents itself. It is highly literary, but that does not mean it is untrue, in fact, quite the opposite. Because it is poetic, and poetry is less attached to particular history, as Aristotle says, it attains

a level of universality. It is wrestling with issues that are timeless: God, his mystery, his goodness, his sovereignty, human suffering, human perseverance, compassion, empathy, injustice, blame, etc. One could object and say if Job was not actually restored at the end, what hope is there for those like Job? And as I will point out, as Christians confess the resurrection of Christ, the true Job, regardless of whether Job actually historically existed, the restoration of Job (which is quite important to the truth of the book) is true not because of what may or may not have historically occurred in Job, but because of what definitively happened in Christ.

With this talk I would like to argue the following:

(1) I will argue against the standard reading, which I will summarize soon. I will argue that the purpose of this narrative is not directly theodicy, but "anthropodicy." It is not the justification of the way of God (in this case in the face of human suffering) as there is no answer given to Job about this. Instead, this has more to do with the justification of a believer's altruism in the face of inconceivable evil, which in turn forms the basis of "practical theodicy," you might say.
(2) Seeing Job as a literary product is very important. I will argue that God, Satan and the other characters are complex and dynamic personas within the drama, which complicate the traditional reading.
(3) This is also important because the drama is pedagogical to the listener, and it is written that way. Job is meant to do something to you. You are to feel Job's anguish. You are, by the end, drawn into his character, since he is worthy of emulation. The narrative calls us to love God the way Job does. This is called the "this is that" typological dynamic in the Bible. We become a type of Job as he becomes our archetype. This taking up of character is the mystical and Christo-centric element of the narrative.
(4) Thus, It is also important to read this Scripture as an Old Testament type of Christ, which I will show offers its own meaning. The purpose of Job is for us to live like Christ.

The Traditional Reading

So, let me summarize the book of Job, according to the traditional reading, which I have also called the "providence" reading. The beginning of the book has Job presented as a blameless upright person. He is wealthy, but good. Then it says that the heavenly beings came to present themselves before God, Satan, the accuser was with them. God brags about Job, and Satan posits the accusation that Job only loves God for what God gives him: Take away all the he has, and Job will curse God. Quite whimsically, all Job's livestock, servants, and family are killed. Job, however, in lament, tears his robe but worships God, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Job passes phase one.

Then Satan tries again, and convinces God to strike his health. Job then is inflicted with sores so bad he cuts himself with a potshard to relieve the agony. His wife comes along and in her bitterness entices him to "Curse God and die." Job refuses, and the text says, "In all this Job did not sin with his lips." His three friends show up to comfort him. Job passes stage two.

Then trouble starts. Job, all of a sudden, is now at the brink of total despair. He laments the day he was born. It is so bad it borders on blasphemy. It is so shocking that the three friends try to dissuade his interpretation of his predicament. The main part of the book consists of three rounds of monologues between Job and his three friends. Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. Eliphaz is the best debater, Bildad is more pushy, and Zophar is probably the least effective, and even gets cut out of the third round of debates, presumably because Job silenced him.

We should note that Eliphaz and Bildad have names that imply they are very rich and disingenuous people. Eliphaz means "God is his strength" and being a Temanite, means he was probably the ancient equivalent of a duke. Bildad mans "son of contention," which means he likes to pick fights (which he definitely does against Job, being the most zealous debater). He is a Shuite, Shuah being the sixth son of Ahraham by Keturah, which means he was probably prominent as well. Zophar's name essentially means "to chirp" like a dumb bird. Naamah was a town that Judah took over in Josh. 15:41, so his last name does not give him the same credibility as the others.

The friends accuse Job of wrong doing because it is inconceivable to them that God would allow this to an obedient man. Their theology of the law is the good get good, the bad get bad, and if you have bad happen to you, you obviously have done something bad. They are forced to scapegoat Job as the thought of Job being innocent, yet stricken by God is too dangerous a possibility to even think of it. So they repress the idea and Job. Job turns it around on them, insisting on his integrity, and also pointing out that these people are people of great wealth and also apathy. Here they are interrogating a dying man at his last breath all while claiming perfection of character for themselves. As Job says, "Those at ease, have contempt for misfortune" (Job 12:5), and, "You see my calamity and are afraid" (Job 6:21).

Job shoots them all down, insisting he is innocent and that God has crushed him for no reason. In doing so, however, he effectively calls into question the goodness of existence itself, which adds to the anger of the three friends. Then there is an interlude where the narrating voice asks where wisdom can be found.

Then a young guy named Elihu son of Barachel, the Buzite of the family of Ram shows up. His name, which is deliberately a mouthful, is impressive in meaning: "He is my God," son of "God blesses" the "one who has been despised" of the family of the "Exalted." Elihu is a young up-start that tags along, and speaks in

anger at the whole discourse. Here the young shames the old. He insists that Job's major flaw is that he is trying to justify himself rather than God.

Then God shows up, answers out of a whirlwind, and drills Job about his mystery and transcendence. He effectively puts Job back in his place. Job seems to admit this and repents.

However, God is gracious, and after Job repents, God rebukes the lack of empathy his friends had. Job is restored with even more livestock and family. He lives to a ripe old age, and the book has a "they all lived happily ever after" type feel.

In this, the answer to the problem of evil is that God is mysterious and transcendent; he has a plan; you don't know it, however; you just got to trust him like the early Job did, but not like the later Job.

The Problem with the Traditional Reading

So, that is the traditional reading. I am going to argue there are a few things wrong with this.

(1) First is Job never stops fearing God, and by all accounts, Job is wise. He does know what he is talking about. In the final dialogues, God accuses Job by asking, "Who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (38:2) then launches into a battery of questions supposedly exposing Job's ignorance. However, this is not the testimony of the beginning of the book. Job seems to indeed fear God, and he has not sinned.

Job is described at the beginning as a man "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (1:1). Job does know, at least he knows *enough*, and he declares that God has done wrong to him on the basis of this knowledge of who God is and ought to be. This is confirmed in the second chapter as Job laments, "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God and not receive the *bad*?" This implies that what God has done to Job is in fact *evil* (it's the same word) or at the very least has acted in a calamitous way, but the narrating voice of the text says, "in all this Job *did not sin with his lips*" (2:10), implying that his value judgment of calamity done to him from God was not blasphemous or sinful.[11] God even says of the wager to Satan that while Job is a "blameless and upright man," Satan has incited God "against him, to destroy him for no reason" (2:3), which is exactly Job's point: God is against him for no reason. Job attributes the calamity to God, and even cries out angry to God, but does not curse God (which is Satan's goal).

Job 16:19 and in other places insists that he trusts God despite what is happening. "In his hand is the life of every living thing" (Job 12:9). In Job's self-description, he is not being arrogant, he truly does fear the Lord to the point of

terror: “There I am terrified at his presence, when I consider I am in dread of him. God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me” (23:15-16). It causes him to curse the very day he was born (instead of God, we should note). No one understands God’s power better than Job.

In chapter 28, Job repeats these traits as criteria for legitimate wisdom: “But where shall wisdom be found?...Truly the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.” (28:12, 28). And of course, God at the end of the book, corrects Job’s friends, saying that Job has spoken rightly of him (42:7).

Moreover, in suffering, Job exemplifies incredible empathy for the poor. He not only despairs himself, but all those that suffer. He takes on their suffering as well. For him, he is finally getting the plight of the poor. Job’s plight awakens him to the plight of all humanity (cf. Job 14). We miss these if we do not read the drama resolutely through his wisdom and innocence.

Job’s criteria for wisdom are corroborated throughout the Wisdom literature.[12] Wisdom literature, such as Proverbs 8, states that there is a marvellous ordering of creation, an intrinsic ethical dimension, and because of this, Wisdom says, “Happy is the one who listens to me…Whoever finds me finds life and obtains favour from the Lord; both those who miss me injure themselves; all who hate me love death” (Pr. 8:34-36). Job is correct and wise, the problem is the result: he is dying and in despair. Yet the result is not beyond the wisdom literature either as the accusatory tone of Job mirrors many other text in the Psalms and Prophets. Those that see his statements as too extreme and therefore blasphemous, we should note that other Scripture say similar. Think of Psalm 88, where God is respected, but lamented as the source of the person’s damnation. “You [God] have put me in the depths of the Pit… You have caused my friends to shun me, you have made me a thing of horror… Why do you cast me off?... Your dread assaults me… Darkness is my closest companion” (Ps. 88). There is nothing Job says that Psalm 88 does not. Or consider how Jeremiah in Jer. 20:7-8 accuses God of raping him, and we see that angry laments is not unique to Job or condemned. It is the honesty God is pleased with.

So, finally, at the end of the book God indeed says that Job has spoken well of him. Some commentators apply this just to his repentance statements, which are not much. However, God sets Job’s words in contradiction to the friends’ words, which indicates God is referring to the whole of what Job has said. Thus, it is indefensible that Job has blasphemed God by God’s own account. This is important.

(2) Satan is a less than straightforward character. Satan in the first two chapters appears like a prosecutor angel before the presence of God. He brings a charge against Job, carries it out, but is absent after chapter 2.

But he is not gone, it seems, and you have to have a literary mind to see it. Satan as the accuser persona is passed along in the drama. Satan is a heavenly being,

yes, but he is also a role. Jesus says to Peter, “Get behind me Satan!” which is referring to Peter’s actions, not as though he is possessed.[13]

The wife of Job, who answers right after Satan, says the same thing to him as Satan bets with God: “Curse God and die.” After Job’s wife, three so-called friends come, and after they sit with him (good for them), Job laments his life, and then they essentially break into three rounds of interrogation. They try to charge Job with wrong going much like a legal tribunal. So Satan and the heavenly court battle are reflected in an earthy one.

This is especially apparent in Eliphaz’s first speech that echo’s Satan’s words. Eliphaz even admits that a mysterious spirit told him that no one is good before God (4:12-18).

More interesting still, God shows up out of a whirlwind…

(3) When it comes to God when he answers out of the whirlwind, the common Christian reading errs on the side of approval, seeing the idea that God could appear negative at this stage of the story as completely unthinkable and preposterous.[14] However, this is problematic on two fronts. First is God is understood as causing Job’s suffering at the beginning of the book, and second, God’s character in the whirlwind is very unbecoming. Frankly, God answers Job like a huge pompous jerk. Job is there suffering because of him, winning God’s wager with Satan, and God comes down and gives him a lecture. The friends at least listened first.

First, the frame of this whole story is that God *has in fact done this to Job*. He has in fact causes the calamity. He approved it. Satan may have been the direct cause, but he was acting by the direct permission of God, who willingly gives Job over to his power (1:12; 2:6), acting on a wager whose premise seems rather bizarre for God.

This, we might say is a “pre-Christ” view of God. Christ is the “image of the unseen God” (Col. 1:15) and is therefore the clearest and more intensified picture of God in the Bible, such that the New Testament saw some of Old testament portrays of God as unclear, absorbed or nullified in Christ. For instance, Joshua’s genocides are unthinkable today for Christians, and that is because Jesus (whose Hebrew name is “Joshua”) is portrayed as conquering the spiritual enemies of God by the way of the cross, not violence. Jesus is the New (non-violent!) Joshua. We can offer all sorts of explanation as to why Joshua has God approving of holy war, but the rock bottom conclusion Christians come to is that this is not what God commands now because of what we know in Christ.

We have a post-Christ view of God, but in some passages in the Old Testament God is understood to be in control of both good and evil (cf. Jud. 9:23; 1 Sam. 18:10; Isa. 45:7; Amos 3:6; Lam. 3:38). This suggests that the Old Testament has at least in some places what is called a “superlapsarian” view of divine

sovereignty: God controls all things, even evil, even causing our fall into sin, all for a greater moral plan. Thus, as other Scripture insist, like Isaiah 63:17, if God is in control, as the prophet cries out about the disobedience of the people: "Why then O Lord do you make us stay from your ways?" This means Job cannot be easily claimed by either Calvinists, who appeal to God's transcendence in sovereignty (but incoherently dismiss his responsibility for evil), or Free Will theists, who appeal to human and demonic autonomy and therefore culpability apart from God's agency. For Job, God is fully sovereign and that just makes things more complicated, because, for Job, the buck does stop with God. God is responsible for evil.

Furthermore, why would God entertain Satan like this in a bet? Why do it all in the first place? The heavenly aspect of the prologue, at least to me, seem highly literary. Job is poetic, based on a character in the distant past. The meaning of the name Job is "suffering," which makes one ask, "Who names their kid suffering?" Its author, who is anonymous and unidentifiable, is probably a poet and does not claim to have prophetic insight. The author seems to be setting the scene with a hypothetic situation to drive the rest of the book. The notion of a wager between God and Satan just seems too unbecoming of God to take seriously as an actual transcript from the heavenly court. Jesus does not bargain with Satan as he is tempted, and so again, we interpret Job through a post-Christ view of God. If this is literature, such a set up makes way more sense for who God reveals himself to be through the rest of the Bible. Thus Job has a sense like this: "Once upon a time, God and Satan made a bet to see if anyone would love God completely selflessly." The point is not the bet, but rather the possibility of altruism in Job's character.

This helps us appreciate that this was written before the New Testament's picture of God as "God is light and in him there is no darkness" (1 John 1:5) and the accuser has been over through as Christ says, "I saw Satan fall like lightning" (Luke 10:18). Satan (therefore evil or malicious accusation) has no function in God. Thus, Paul says in Romans, "If God is for us who could be against us?" Christ offers a more intensified and clearer picture of God. If God is in Christ and Christ perfectly abides by the law and in fact is its very Word (John 1:1), and the law prohibits causing harm to others, the New Testament brings God's goodness into focus in Christ who is God without sin.

Second, the theophany of God out of the whirlwind shows at face value a very troubling picture of God. So when God in chapter 38 answers Job out of the whirlwind, which many commentators see as God clarifying divine providence, rebuking Job's arrogance. However, God's answers to Job out of the whirlwind seem to be the exact opposite: he shrouds divine providence in mystery. God reminds Job rather harshly of his ignorance in the face of transcendent mystery without ever disclosing anything of God's plan: nothing of the wager between God and Satan, nothing of a comfort or hope of restoration for Job. This is odd. Job is suffering, winning a redundant bet with Satan of God, and God comes

down to give him a tongue-lashing. It does not make sense. It certainly does not make providence any clearer for Job.

Elihu accuses Job of being obsessed with his own justification, to which we can only insist, "Of course an innocent man would plead for his innocence! Could we expect anything less?" Any other expectation makes God's court sound like the Wisconsin court in *Making a Murderer*. If Job is innocent, he should be honest about that. What is more ironic is that God comes down and acts the same way: instead of encouraging Job, he questions him into relenting, protecting God from accusations in turn: an odd irony. Job is condemned for justifying himself, but meanwhile, God does the same. "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" seems oddly problematic here.

This is God answering, Yahweh, but God answers out of the "whirlwind" in a rather off-putting, harsh way.[15] Is this how God addresses his wise and obedient servants, suffering to win his wager? The answering out of the whirlwind is taken to indicate a theophany by most commentators, but all the uses of "whirlwind" in Job suggest judgment: "Terrors overtake them [the wicked] like a flood; in the night a whirlwind carries them off" (Job 27:20) says Job himself.

One mention of a whirlwind is used by Job to rebuke his friends. Job maintains his integrity and warns his friends what the portion of the wicked is. He mentioned that *they* are the ones that will be carried off by a whirlwind (27:20). Interestingly enough, God does shows up in chapter 38, not – it seems at this stage in the narrative – to judge the friends but Job with a whirlwind, a tragic irony for Job. If we fail to read the narrative as a drama, we miss this important foreshadowing and irony.

Note that there is another instance where the whirlwind is mentioned. Job in chapter 9 depicts God in a very similar light to God out of the whirlwind in chapter 38 and on:

> God will not turn back his anger; the helpers of Rahab bowed beneath him. How then can I answer him, choosing my words with him? Though I am innocent, I cannot answer him; I must appeal for mercy to my accuser. If I summoned him and he answered me, I do not believe that he would listen to me voice. For he crushes me with a *tempest* [similar Hebrew word to whirlwind]. (9:13-17)

Job worries that if God shows up, he will render him speechless, unable to answer and defend himself. This is foreshadowing again, and this is what indeed happens later. God appears and does not seem all that interested in listening to Job as he launches into his interrogation, immediately silencing Job. And, most importantly, Job describes himself as crushed by God's tempest, a windy storm, not unlike the how God answers out of a whirlwind! God as he answers out of the whirlwind is speaking as an accuser to Job, not his redeemer. God speaking out of

the whirlwind is Job's greatest fears realized. God is indeed his accuser. The 64 million dollar question then is this: If God is not for Job, will Job curse God?

No. He doesn't. Job repents in "dust and ashes." He gives in. He refuses to curse. He merely choses to die. It is at this moment, Satan looses the bet.

A Deeper Theological Narrative Logic

So, there are some things that are deeper than what they appear on first glance. If we leave the issue as it is here, without a deeper theological reflection as to the effect of the narrative, the true scandal of the book of Job is not Job's suffering, but rather Job's God. God is the accuser. Yes, God has the right to do whatever he wishes with people. Yes, he has the right to interrogate any person he chooses. Our fate is in his hand. Job knew that. But does this line up with a fuller canonical picture of God as good? As Abraham said to God, "Will not the judge of the Universe do what is right?"

To contemplate Job as Christian Scripture requires not just locating it's meaning on the page per se, but rather, in the fullness of the narrative and in the fullness of the canonical narrative, particularly the Gospels, looking for a text's salvific purpose. For this reason, Christians have interpreted the text Christo-centrically, seeing Job as a type of Christ and compelling Christ-like character, a Christ-like response to suffering. However, in order to do this, this means seeing the God who answers out of the whirlwind as a type of God the Father. Obviously they are not quite the same, but for typology to work the resemblance need not be 100% (Jews regularly point out that the Suffering Servant in Isa. 53 has children, where Christ does not, and that need not bother us). This helps us understand how the accuser persona that the whirlwind picture comports with its pedagogical purpose.

So, at this point I want to introduce three theological models based on classical mystics to help in interpreting the language of the book: Dionysius and Meister Eckhart for understanding the portrayal of God out of the whirlwind, as well as Luther's theology of the cross for understanding Job.

(1) First, why does God appear harsh to Job? God appears as unbecoming of God. Dionysius, in his *Celestial Hierarchy*, meditates on images for God, particularly on problematic ones.[16] He categorizes images into the sacred, like God as "Word" or "Being," and the ridiculous, like how God describes himself as a "worm" in one Scripture. Interestingly enough, since God is ineffable, all images of God are accommodations to the finitude of the human mind and therefore *all* images in Scripture are ultimately dissimilar and therefore ridiculous. So, for him, when Scripture displays God as having irrational anger or is described as a worm (Ps. 22:6), these are not scandals but rather opportunities. They remind us of God's goodness: as all created things no matter how fallen irresistibly communicate the divine in some way. But also these images pay homage to transcendence,

functioning to remind the reader that all speech about God must be negated in order to protect his inexpressible nature. He uses this to discuss angelic imagery in the rest of the book, much like a theological hermeneutic for scriptural imagery. I am suggesting that his coupling of metaphor and negative theology can be useful for a spiritual reading of Scripture, specifically, the bizarre whirlwind depictions of God in Job. It frees us from an unhelpful literalism. God is not a Father as to make the male into more God than the female. God is not a warrior as to approve of all war, etc. These are images that must be considered for how they point fallibly to the ineffable, and then negated, as to respect how all language inevitably fails to describe his indescribability.

What Dionysius does with simple metaphors and God's inner being, I extend to the narrative portrayal. God is faithful love, but in order to accomplish his purposes, he appears as unloving. The question is "why?" or "for what purpose?"

(2) For this, Meister Eckhart supplies an interesting theory of language and contemplation that I think is congruent with what the depiction of God is getting Job to do. Eckhart said, "You should love God. [But] you should love God apart from his loveableness, that is, not because he is lovable, for God is unlovable."[17] The intent of what Eckhart[18] is saying is to remove in contemplation all that is between the mystic's soul and God, coming into a theosis-like oneness with God. To do this he provokes the reader to think of God beyond language by negative language itself. If love is a thing, God is beyond all things, and so to love God in his essence is to love him beyond his love. True unity with God, for Eckhart, means that the human participates in the being of God – the "I am that I am" (Ex. 3;14) – and therefore exists and loves in a similar way. He who lives in God, loves as God loves, having mercy on whomever he has mercy (cf. Ex. 33:19). As Eckhart says, "love has no why."[19] God is who he is, and loves selflessly because he loves, a mystical outpouring from his indefinable character, and that is in part, the goal of Eckhart's playful provocations: to make the reader more like God. Job is a narrative provocation where God antagonizes Job in order to show the possibility of altruism. God appear unlike God to provoke Job to display his full godliness.

The beginning of the story is the wager between God and Satan that there is a person, namely Job, who will obey God for no benefit or reason. The role of Satan is accuser, permitted to strip away these benefits and reasons. However, Satan drops out as other characters come in. Job's wife antagonizes him. His would-be friends become a tribunal of three accusing him. Elihu joins. Then, it would seem, to remove all reason to be loyal to God, God comes down and answers as one appearing like an accuser, as one quite unconcerned with Job's suffering and overly concerned with the very thing Elihu accuses Job of: self-justification. God appears as unlovable, God as un-God. The narrative presents God as dissimilar to himself, as an accuser. Now, he does not validate any cheap accusation of the friends, but he certainly does not look like the being in which Job trusts that his "redeemer lives," quite the opposite.

When Job repents in dust and ash, it happens just after God flaunts the unkillability of the Behemoth and Leviathan, pointing out Job's inability to bring the proud low (40:12). Job's response to this is strange. God seems to insinuate that only he is more powerful than these, only he can destroy them, but that doesn't answer Job's complaints at all. Job already knows this. Job does not seem to have a problem understanding God as powerful; he has a problem with whether God is *good*. Job could merely continue and say, "I know you control these. I know you can destroy them. So why haven't you?!" But he doesn't. He repents.

Job repents admitting that he has spoken of things "too wonderful" for him and that he has spoken "without knowledge" (42:2-3). This is a step of profound humility. However, Job's repentance does not clear up the issue that was framed at the beginning: that God, by his own account seems to have set himself against Job for no reason, which Job as wise intuits. Job, it seems, does not seem to be repenting of his foolish words. My suggestion is that he repents of his right to hold anger against God, which is more in line with the wager. Note that God does not offer an explanation for Job's suffering, and if we read this through the wager at the beginning, if God did offer an explanation or promise to prosper Job through this, Job would not have loved God in the same way God loves people in all their sin. He would be in on the secret, and this would by the cosmic equivalent of cheating. The purpose of the speeches is not, and in fact, cannot be about learning the doctrines of providence. If it were, God would have been hedging his bet.

God out of the whirlwind is God revealing himself in the dissimilar for the intentional purpose of provoking virtue in Job, making Job more like God. This might sound weird but God does that same thing in Jesus. A Syrophoenician woman cries out "Lord, help me! Please heal my daughter," but Jesus replies in Matt. 15, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs," which is a terrible and demeaning response. But she insists, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." This indicates incredible and even unjustified humility for the purpose of getting her daughter healed. Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great." It is far greater than the disbelieving Pharisees Jesus banters with earlier in the passage. So Jesus says, showing his true persona, "It shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once. Jesus assumes an antagonistic persona in order to provoke virtue.

The proclamation is given before Job's repentance is a recitation of the same words God says to him when he interrogates him: "Hear, and I will speak; I will question you and you will declare onto me." This could be the pivotal moment where Job declares a curse to God right to his face in absolute despair for offering no explanation and letting him go through all this. Instead, he repents, despising himself rather than letting God be despised. At this point, we can understand that Satan has lost as Satan was hoping that Job would curse God to his face. The exact opposite is true. Job sees God, a rather awesome yet morally disappointing

portrayal of God, and he despises himself. The language of "dust and ashes" seems to insinuate mortality. Perhaps, Job was willing to lay down his life at this very moment. He is after all lying there at the brink of death from his sores. Was Job a sacrifice for God's sake here against Satan? Is Job's statements that much different from Christ's cries, "Why have you forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46) followed not with a curse but with, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk. 24: 46)?

Job takes all the negativity of his suffering and interrogation and responds with peace, rather cursing God like Satan wants. He allows the blame to fall on himself – a kind of penal substitution, perhaps – which is something not unlike what God would do! He comes the "lamb led to slaughter" (Isa. 53). His actions is almost like a sacrifice embodying the victory of the cross that meets violence, injustice, and forsakenness – the powers of darkness – with the victory of forgiveness, love, and humility. Job loves God for no reason.

(3) Thus, this relationship is similar to the portrayal of God the Father at the Cross. Christ cries out, "Why have you forsaken me?" The Father, like God out of the whirlwind, gives no answer as to why, no aid for his Son. Jesus appears as a forsaken sinner dying a god-forsaken death, which does not look very good for God as an all-powerful, omniscient, morally perfect God. This portrays the Father as one who forsakes, abandons, and refuses to give a reason. However, this is Christ's willing sacrifice as God to display the love of God.

To accuse Job of speaking inaccurately of God is, categorically, to give licence to the idea that Jesus could be wrong too. As I have been arguing, Job is not speaking inaccurately, nor is there an inaccuracy in Jesus' cry at the crucifixion. In Christian faith, lament and accusation to God, even of wrong done and being forsaken, it seems, does not abolish divine perfection or goodness, but rather shows God's oneness with the forsaken, and therefore deepens participation in God. God wants honesty before conformity, and it is through honesty that true obedience is formed.

This brings us deeper into Luther's theology of the cross, [20] as we have already been meditating upon it. This looks to the scandal of seeing God in Christ crucified, which I have applied by typology to Job also. Space does not permit a full sketch of Luther's beautiful thinking on the matter, but the theology resolves, as Luther insisted in his Heidelberg Disputation (1518) to see God revealed in Christ, as the image of the unseen God. Opposed to a theology of glory that constructs a view of God in majesty and power first, the theologian of the cross locates the fullest expression of God in the man suffering at the cross for us. Integral to Luther's theology of the cross is that God hides himself in order to reveal himself for creatures. Therefore, it is important that seeing Job as a type of Christ means seeing God at one with him, not ambivalent to him, much less above him or against him. God is proud of Job and loves him, and is showing the defeat of evil through him. He is not angry or against him, ultimately. The negative portrayal of God out of the whirlwind is similar to the negative portrayal

of God as Father at the cross (albeit not 100% the same). Job in his lament, his despair, his silence, his repenting in the full misery of dust and ashes, giving up every last bit of dignity for the glory of God, is the way of the cross, the way that overcomes evil. The point is not that the Father has forsaken Christ but that the Father is showing in Christ the abandoned one, God with us, God for us. This dissolves the sharp antithesis between the God of the whirlwind who speaks apathetically from on high and Job, the insignificant and small man, standing silent. God is in Job's god-forsaken silence.

Of course, when we ponder a narrative of God, endings are important: just as God does not abandon Christ to the grave, nor does God abandon Job to dust and ashes. The temporal revelation of the eternal God may have moments where he appears as the accuser or forsaker in the moment, but these are seen in the light of the resurrection where Job was right in insisting that his redeemer lives (Job 19:25). If Christ was not the Son of God, if Christ really was forsaken by God, then there would have been no Easter Sunday. Thus, the fullest expression of God in the narrative happens in Job only after Job repents as God quickly turns to Eliphaz and company to shame them. Job is quickly installed as a mediator for prayer and sacrifice for the others, similar to how Christ ascended to be a priestly mediator. And the text resolves, showing how God restored Job. The rewards are substantial, but one would wonder if that would really make up for the pain of having your whole family killed. Again this is a pre-Christ way of think about restoration. And again, these are best read as typologically pointing to New Testament hope of the resurrection, which does reverse and restore all wounds. Obviously, as we preach at funerals, the God's solution to death is not to have more kids, but that one day we will be reconciled in eternal life.

In conclusion, I have attempted a fuller and more resolute reading of the narrative of Job by using certain theological models from Dionysius, Eckhart, and Luther. In doing so, harsher portrayals of God are read in a Christological and therefore more productive light. Notice that this takes issue at the sloppiness of the traditional reading, but comes to a theodicy by way of anthropodicy. When we honestly relate to God, even in lament, we must come to the point where we step forward in love, if even for no reason. If we lament pain in this world, it is because we love. To mourn is to love. To see evil and even be angry at God is to hold love as most ultimate, and if love is most ultimate, and one believes that God is love – love that has no why – the final step must be to love as God loves, loving a broken world, with its present absence of God, with a love that goes beyond the "why." It loves and waits in faith for the resurrection.

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[1] Lindsay Wilson, "Job," in *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament,* ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 148-156.

[2] John Chrysostom, "Three Homilies on the Devil," trans. T.P. Brandram, *in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 9. Ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1889) New Advent, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1919.htm, (accessed Wednesday, April 24, 2013).

[3] Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed,* Part III: sect. xxii. For an essay comparing Maimonides' and Aquinas' Job see, Martin D. Yaffe, "Providence in medieval Aristotelianism: Moses Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas on the Book of Job," in *The Voice out of the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job,* eds. Leo G. Perdue and W. Clark Gilpin (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992): 111-128.
[4] Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed,* III: xxiii.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Thomas Aquinas, *The Literal Exposition on Job,* trans. A. Damico (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).
[7] Ibid., 423-30.
[8] Ibid., 441-42.
[9] The largest and most thorough of these is the multi-volume commentary by David Clines, *Job* WBC 17-18 (Grand Rapids: Zonderan, 2015). More recently, a standard commentary such as Tremper Longman, *Job* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).
[10] See Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995).
[11] There are several passages in the OT that insinuate that God causes both good and evil, which generates all sorts of interpretive challenges for Christian and Jewish interpreters.
[12] "To fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding" (Ps. 111:10). "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Pr. 1:7). "Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgement" (Ecc. 12:12).
[13] See Elaine Pagel, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Vintage, 1995).
[14] Termper Longmann III does so in his commentary, *Job* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012). However, examples of this abound.
[15] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1997), 388.
[16] Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchies,* ch. 2, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works,* trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 147-53.
[17] Meister Eckhart, "Sermon 83," in *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treaties, and Defense*, trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 208.
[18] Now, how I am appropriating Eckhart is a little different from what he means. Eckhart is talking about negation of the negation; I am looking at the negative imagery for God as the means to ponder his unlovability. When Eckhart provokes the reader to view God as "unlove" this, as some have pointed out, functions to negate language into the ineffable by language itself. Nevertheless, my point is that negative imagery negates imagery, so in a round-a-bout way we are on the same page. Eckhart is talking about a contemplative exercise, while I am looking this in the act of theological reading. They are similar, and the result is the same.
[19] Meister Eckhart, *Sermon 28*, quoted in, Colledge and McGinn, "Introduction," *Meister Eckhart,* 59.
[20] Luther's theology of the cross is found in several of his works. For an introduction to this, see Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Theology of the Cross," in *Lutheran Quarterly* XVI (2002): 443-466.