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## DE-PAGANIZING EXISTENTIAL WISDOM IN CATHOLIC WISDOM LITERATURE

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### Abstract

The seven wisdom books of the Catholic Bible, namely, *Job*, *Proverbs*, *Psalms*, *Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes)*, *Song of Songs*, *Wisdom*, and *Sirach*, expound on the life of wisdom using practical maxims that give meaning to existence. Within their hortatory pronouncements, there lies an existential connection. However, the maxims are not entirely compatible with each other and they can be scrutinized under the critique of wisdom as “pagan.” This paper navigates through the seven books within the Wisdom Literature of the Catholic canonical scripture to extract the paired themes of ‘suffering and death,’ and the issue of ‘freedom vs divine sovereignty’ to de-paganize the books. The paper thus explores the text as a philosophical venture in contrast to biblical exegesis, which provides an actual interpretation of the text. To do this, the paper first (1) extracts the important understanding of the themes within the texts (as result and discussion) and then (2) proceeds to argue using a de-paganizing hermeneutic discussion as recapitulation/conclusion. The recapitulation of such themes finds a seminal thread for an existential hermeneutic that focuses on the paradoxes of the ethical questions concerning the meaning of life.

**Keywords:** Ethics, Wisdom Literature, Hermeneutics, Existentialism, Suffering, Death, Freedom, Pagan

### 1. INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM WITH WISDOM

The problem with wisdom is its seemingly omnipresent staging of itself in a person’s quotidian experience. A bad thing happens and sage advice comes to mind: some rational justification and a moral lesson to be learned. The opposite holds true: a good thing happens and there is again another erudite validation to confirm the path by which an action was taken. That is to say, there is just no end to the lists of proverbial statements and aphorisms that can take place after the fact. For Žižek (2014), this understanding of wisdom is “disgusting” and “conformist”:

There is a point of so-called “Christian Wisdom,” to which I’m totally opposed. I’m generally opposed to Wisdom. I think that Wisdom is the most disgusting thing you can imagine. Wisdom is the most conformist thing you can imagine. Wisdom is this: whatever you do, a wise man will come and justify it. You do something risky, and you succeed. There will be a wise man who will come and say something like “Only those who risk profit...and so on [can be successful].” Now, say you do the same thing but failed. A wise man will come and he will say something – for us in Slovenia – like... “You cannot urinate against the wind.” This is wisdom.

Asked whether or not it is possible for a philosopher to be ironically anti-wisdom (i.e. that philosophy is φιλο- “love” + -σοφία “wisdom”), Žižek radically stressed that wisdom is “pagan” that even the religious existentialist Søren Kierkegaard is “anti-wise man par excellence.” It should be remembered here that, to contextualize the phrase, Kierkegaard was the philosopher who “showed that any attempt to rationalize the Christian experience resulted in claims that, to the Greeks, would have sounded absurd” (Dreyfus, p. 141; Italics mine). Jesus in this sense did not utter some ethical and moral injunctions as rationalizations of the way to achieve eternal life. Otherwise, he would be selling the way to eternal life in the same manner that, in medieval times, Johann Tetzel sold indulgences for the establishment of St. Peter’s Basilica. This is why there is a good sense in Žižek’s words when he says that “from no one else, from Kierkegaard, you can learn this: that whatever Jesus Christ was, he wasn’t a wise guy” (2014). The fact of the matter is that anything, Žižek mentally experiments, can be sold as “wisdom”:

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Let's take...I will say something. [1] Why are we running after this miserable earthly pleasures? Think about eternity, the only satisfaction is eternity. If I were to say it with proper pathos, it would sound a deep thing to say. Now, let's say the opposite. [2] Why run after the specter of eternity? *Carpe diem!* Grasp what you have here. It sounds wise. Now I will say the third option. [3] Why be caught in a contrast between eternity and temporary existence? The true wisdom is to see eternity in fleeting temporary pleasures. It is wise. Then I say the fourth variation. [4] We are forever condemned between the two. A wise man accepts this. You know, whatever I say - that's my point - you can sell it as a wisdom. This is wisdom. (Žižek, 2014)

In the wisdom literature of the Bible composing of seven books, the way one views wisdom varies and one should ask which one a person shall take in the course of his life. It can also be asked whether all those views have the moral character of an 'ought' towards the good need to be followed all at once. In G.E. Moore's ethics, "the term 'good' - the coinage in ethics that implies a force of action - is indefinable and that for his naturalistic fallacy, any attempt whatsoever to define 'good' is bound to fail" (see Kahambing, 2019 as cited from Moore, 1903, 11-16; cf. Glock, 2008, p. 57). If so, will that dissolve the black and white moral judgments of morality - though not strictly in Kantian terms - and dissolve the whole cards of argumentation into the obfuscating gray areas of ethical dilemmas? If not, will not the wisdom literature of the Bible appear as a mere mental exercise of cherry-picking an attitude that will suit one's practical dealings? Will this not reduce the sanctity of hortatory moral lines into pragmatic insinuations under the guise of the complex web of the hermeneutics of 'wisdom'? How does one de-paganize, so to speak, the seemingly profound formulation of wisdom?

In attempting to de-paganize, as it were, the bible's wisdom literature, or to avoid falling into the trap of pagan justification, one should not equate biblical wisdom with banal platitudes, sagely aphorisms, or simple and naïve motivation cards. We should take note here that Biblical Wisdom is Hebrew by context and not Greek as in σοφία. Moreover, biblical wisdom's understanding of existence is not Roman stoic life as put forward by Marcus Aurelius and Seneca. Instead, one should situate existential wisdom into the whole universe of paradoxical divine acknowledgment. That is to say, that in reversal to the "perverse core of Christianity," which Žižek formulates as "God first threw humanity into Sin in order to create the opportunity for saving it through Christ's sacrifice" (2003, p. 53), he agrees with G.K. Chesterton's reading that God also knew how not only that human freedom is the greatest paradoxical gift, but that the governance of the universe as a whole itself is full of paradoxes (recall Schelling and the abyss of freedom).

One should then go into this de-paganizing move by investigating within these books the paradoxical existential tenets that connect their most important feature of viewing life. To do this, it is vital to inquire for the major themes of existentialism, such as suffering, death, and the question of freedom paradoxically under the watch of divine authority. Within such themes, an opening for philosophy transpires and the ethical task of the hermeneutical study is hopefully to project an existentialism that caters to the understanding of these books into attitudes of life.

The significance of this paper can be stressed in the questioning of the ubiquitous and paradoxical relation of freedom to divine sovereignty. Such a relationship involves the question of suffering and death. It is in this frame that Harold Kushner contextualizes his book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (2004). Additionally, Albert Mohler says that for Christians, "the question of suffering rises to a new level of importance because of our belief in the sovereignty of our loving and merciful God" (Piper & Taylor, 2006). The study is therefore important in delving further into the question of the meaning of life - a vital topic in ethics under existentialism - amid the complex interrelations such a paradox.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This paper attempts to hermeneutically expose the central existential tenets of the seven Catholic Wisdom books, namely, *Job*, *Proverbs*, *Psalms*, *Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes)*, *Song of Songs*, *Wisdom*, and *Sirach*. However, though the methodology of interpretation catches attention to a parallel method of biblical exegesis, the manner of looking at the text differs inasmuch as the objective of the research is only to seek the very kernel of the books' brand of existentialism. It thereby opens the hermetic existential quality of the text without going into the actual orthodox interpretation. For Mathers (2013), on the one hand, hermeneutics per se provides rules to interpret God's Word. Such rules include the contextualization of biblical passages and how the Old Testament connects and presages the New Testament. Biblical Exegesis as a method, on the other hand, is the "application of Biblical Hermeneutical Principles" (Mathers, p. 7). It also includes the preparation of the text for communicating the Good News and some textual criticisms. The method of the paper, however, deviates from the original use of hermeneutics in the biblical sense and makes use of ethical consideration of the meaning of life patterned in existentialist lenses. But the understanding of existentialism here does not necessarily point to the secular existentialism that predominates its literature in the likes of Sartre, Camus, and Nietzsche. Accordingly, for Wrathall & Dreyfus (2006), the main points of such existentialist trends are:

- Everyday life is at best banal and at worst absurd and meaningless.
- Anxiety in the face of death can disclose to us the banality or absurdity of life
- The most pressing philosophical task is to help us cope with anxiety and despair in such a way that we can affirm this life in all its absurdity.

However, there are two other senses of these existentialist ideas which the study will focus. One is that "the ideal human life will be authentic, that is, accept responsibility for the exercise of freedom" (Wrathall & Dreyfus, 2006, p. 6). The other is that "there is a constant motivation to flee from anxiety back into conformism and a reaffirmation of everyday life." The same ethical considerations are then utilized in this study and hence the hermeneutical method serves for the purpose of questioning the presuppositions of freedom and its interplay



with divine sovereignty, along with the concepts of suffering and death. Hence, the paper first (1) extracts the important understanding of the themes within the texts (as results) and then (2) proceeds to argue using a de-paganizing hermeneutic discussion as recapitulation/conclusion. The recapitulation of such themes finds a seminal thread for an existential hermeneutic that focuses on the paradoxes of the ethical questions concerning the meaning of life.

### 3. RESULTS

Below is a table containing extractions of the central idea of the seven books on the issues of 'suffering and death' and 'human freedom vs. divine sovereignty.' The issue of suffering and death are put together because of their connection. And the paired theme of freedom and divine governance are inseparable as a paradox.

Table 1: "Suffering and Death" and "Human Freedom vs Divine Sovereignty" in the 7 books

Book	Suffering and Death	Human Freedom vs Divine Sovereignty
Job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suffering is experienced by the innocent too.</li> <li>Death is situated against the ambit of divine justice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human freedom is not bound within the direct consequence of reward and punishment.</li> <li>Divine sovereignty does not dwell within the justice system of human affairs.</li> </ul>
Proverbs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suffering is associated with one's behavior.</li> <li>Death is avoidance from a life of wisdom.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human freedom assumes the status of sonship in the economics of divine sovereignty.</li> <li>Divine sovereignty begets fear and trust.</li> </ul>
Psalms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suffering is a way for man towards glory.</li> <li>Death is the separation from God due to sin.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human freedom is intertwined with Divine sovereignty in that man must acknowledge God's graciousness of divine power with him.</li> </ul>
Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suffering is a confusing consequence because sometimes bad things happen to good people and good things happen to the bad ones.</li> <li>Death is a paradoxical point of remembrance and forgetting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human freedom is not significant.</li> <li>Divine sovereignty must be feared as an act of wisdom.</li> </ul>
Song of Songs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suffering is being separated from one's love.</li> <li>Death is a bond of complete love.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human freedom is centered on the life and experience of love.</li> <li>Divine sovereignty emphasizes love and commitment.</li> </ul>
Wisdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suffering is not necessarily evil.</li> <li>Death is the ultimate judgment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human freedom is subject to its actions.</li> <li>Divine sovereignty corrects creation in a vigilant yet steady manner.</li> </ul>
Sirach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suffering is an anxious effect on sinners.</li> <li>Death is a constant positive reminder not to sin.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human freedom is not entirely bound within free-choices but is also not an excuse to blame God.</li> <li>Divine sovereignty stands against evil.</li> </ul>

### 4. DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 SUFFERING AND DEATH

The face of suffering is explicit in *Job*. Having lost his properties and daughters, Job is faced with an existential dilemma that for the first time in his life he cannot justify. What he got instead from the experience are pieces of advice that can be likened to pagan wisdom. His friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, arrived but wrongly justified his suffering. According to them, Job must have done something to deserve his suffering so that the only solution is to seek God's clemency. However, the crucial lesson in the Book of Job is that the innocent also suffers and there is simply no justification for this. This idea debunks the traditional tribal wisdom of retribution of 'an eye for an eye' and 'a tooth for a tooth,' so that what the book of Job tells us about suffering is its unjustifiable moment when it occurs in life. Moreover, concerning death, the book

wrests the 'meaning' of death - who dies and for what reasons - from its traditional/moral theological context in the system of divine justice and allows death to emerge as a question alongside other moral/theological questions such as the nature of God, the operation of the world, the fate of the wicked, and the value of piety (Matthewson, 2006, p. 7-8).

The question of death and suffering, therefore, is placed against the ambit of divine justice. Death, as it were, "emerges as a main 'figure' in *Job* precisely because the book contests the operation of divine justice in the world and does not take it for granted as the operative theological system by which God directs the universe" (Matthewson, 2006, p. 7-8). Death in this manner becomes an issue that questions the very nature of divine justice that decides who gets a chance at life and who doesn't.

The book of *Proverbs* has a simplistic formulation of suffering and death. Positive and thus "with an optimistic tone, it teaches that one's behavior determines whether one prospers or suffers" (Whybray, 1995). There is, moreover, a little discussion about death. Imaginative prose suggests that to hate wisdom is to be "in





love with death" (8:36). What the prose about death explicates is that although simplistic in formation, this is not entirely the case for Proverbs. Frydrych notes of the fact that while *prima facie* "the world which emerges is very black and white: the wise prosper and the fools come to destruction, over and over again... A close reading shows that indeed some exceptions are at least implied, if not explicitly stated" (as cited by Steward 2016, p. 356). The book, therefore, is open to moral imagination and reasoning and does not merely formulate naïve statements.

In the book of *Psalms*, the idea and the very experience of suffering assumes a direction. For Futato (1999), suffering in the text is a path to glory. It is a *conditio sine qua non* for the sake of an eventual glory in God. Similarly, death is "sin's wages; it is an alienation of life and separation from God, which is sometimes expressed as sickness or death" (deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, & Tanner, 2014, p. 694). Among the 150 psalms, there are psalms for celebrations and also for lamentations, but the idea of suffering and death in the book is a constant. The glory of God is attested in the endurance of suffering as a way.

In *Ecclesiastes* or *Qoheleth*, there is confusion - and the inability to distinguish the good from the bad (cf. Chapter 8) - why the wicked prosper and the just suffer. The manner of making things clear is not properly distinguished so that a moral absolutist cannot in any way determine goodness and evil in terms of their consequences. On the matter of death, "on the one hand, Qoheleth says 'remember death,' while on the other hand, he proclaims 'forget your mortality'. These are complementary views: life is short yet the only possible joy should not be neglected" (Kealy, 2012).

In the *Song of Songs*, one finds an account of romantic love presented in poetic prose by lovers. So the suffering in the text means being away from the beloved. This is exemplified when the Maiden cries for her beloved as she longs for him. Moreover, the certainty of death becomes a perfect illustration of love. "For love is as strong as death" (Song of Songs 8: 6), says the text, and the symmetry speaks of the truth the other way around: that death is as the strong necessary bond of love. It is completeness in the giving of one's life as one lets oneself be overwhelmed with love.

In the book of *Wisdom*, one can read how suffering, along with barrenness and early death cannot be classified as necessarily evil (Wisdom. 3: 13-4: 9). Those, for example, who die "will serve as judges to condemn their persecutors (Wisdom 4:7-20). The death of the just is the entrance to a happy eternity. God the creator rules the cosmos and redeems the chosen and guides them to the end (eschatology)" (Kealy, 2012). Suffering and death altogether compose the wisdom that there is an end that (not justifies) but underlies in God's guidance.

And in *Sirach*, suffering becomes "inner stress for sinners and the universe fights on the behalf of the virtuous" (May, 1988, p. 839ff). Moreover, suffering has a strong connection with death since "the fact of death pervades this book (Sirach 14: 12ff; 17: 25; 33: 10ff; 38: 21-23; 40:5)" (Kealy, 2012). However, the idea of death "[is] used in very positive ways by Ben Sira to challenge and improve the quality of life in the present e.g. 'Remember your last days, and you will never sin' (Sirach 7:36)" (Kealy, 2012, p. 242).

#### 4.2 HUMAN FREEDOM VS DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

In the book of *Job*, "there is no reasoned connection between virtue and reward, wickedness and punishment" (Murphy, 2002, p. 45). Again, the moral universe of Job does not operate in the old tribal justice system. What is clear in the duration of the discourses towards God's speech, in the end, is that:

The world of retribution - and not of temporal retribution only - is not where God dwells; at most God visits it. The Lord is not a prisoner of the 'give to me and I will give to you' mentality. Nothing, no human work however valuable merits grace, for if it did, grace would cease to be grace. This is the heart of the message of the book of Job. (Gutierrez, 1987, pp. 88-89)

It can be recalled here that Job was overwhelmed by God's sovereignty and this is understood to be wisdom (Dailey, 1994). Job remained adamant to hastily act on the situation, processing the events and suspending any rational impulse to overcome him. This freedom is an acknowledgment of the human limitation to grasp the inner workings of the divine. The orthodox reading is, of course, that God, in the end, smote Job's friends by telling them they are wrong; God showed off his majesty by asking rhetorical questions about his power and creation.

*Proverbs* uses moral imagination and reasoning. The injunctions are not simplistic or naïve. The book "acknowledges the limits of wisdom and employs imaginative, and potentially indeterminate, literary structures such as metaphors and prototypes to cultivate a student who is capable of imaginative reasoning" (Steward, 2016, p. 372). It is this limitation that informs us what wisdom is: that the fear of the Lord *is itself* the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10). Consequently, freedom in the text can be morally imagined as a filial gift. The man "envisioned by Proverbs is not a cosmic orphan nor a protected baby but a beloved son in a joyous home (Prov. 3:12)" (Brueggemann, 1972, p. 21). Juxtaposing this to the divine, the power of God's sovereignty becomes a safe haven that is a source of assurance and strength. In the book, the "name of God of Israel is, in fact, found 87 times in Proverbs, a God to be feared and trusted" (Kealy, 2012, p. 36).

In *Psalms*, Psalm 105 addresses both human responsibility and God's sovereignty. It is wise for man to exercise his freedom by acknowledging God's graciousness.

"The first five verses are filled with commands: "give thanks," "make known," "sing praises," "speak," "glory," "seek" (3 times), and "remember." The final verse tells us that the reason for God's sovereign deliverance and preservation of His people was "so that they might keep His statutes and observe His laws." And thus we see both God's sovereignty and our responsibility. To sum up the psalm: Because of God's sovereign, gracious dealings with us, we should praise Him, obey Him, and make Him known to others" (Cole, n.d.).

In Psalm 135, one can read how God's dealings are indeed sovereign and gracious since "God does whatever he pleases in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all the ocean depths" (Ps. 135: 6). Psalm 78, for instance, teaches the wisdom that because of God's sovereignty, "a traumatized community can recover and reorient themselves to the reality of their covenant relationship with God" (Poe Hays, 2017).



In *Ecclesiastes* or *Qoheleth*, it is almost as if freedom is merely a contingent adjunct to the workings of the divine. For Qoheleth, "all human works were transient and unimportant. What can bring happiness and really matters is the fear of God through the Torah (i.e. wisdom)" (Kealy, p. 158). This is to give way to the idea that the "end of the matter" – a phrase commonly used in the text – is for humans to fear God and to obey his commandments (Qoheleth 12: 13). While Sneed (2002) argues that the text can be read using the Derridian method, the existential wisdom that is inscribed in the text is found in Qoheleth's attempt "to master the chaos inherent in the cosmos" within the background of divine commands. While freedom lies within the ambit of the "dichotomous conceptualization of human morality," it regains grounding only as wisdom when it makes room for the obedience to the divine.

In *Song of Songs*, one caps the nexus of freedom and divine sovereignty on the essential point of love. In this book, the highlight does not focus on whether there is justice or divine justice, but only that there is a relationship with the divine that cannot be explicated through legal conventions or taxonomies. For Bannister (2000),

God does not divide the world into sacred and secular, and demonstrates the importance that God places on love and commitment. It is also significant that God has chosen to deal with this most important topic, so central to human life and experience, through a poem, rather than through a long list of rules, regulations, and advice.

In *Wisdom*, there is a proportionality to which God deals with man's freedom. In the text, God is merciful and loves his creation, so it is God's prerogative as a sign of his life to guide man into leading him. Divine sovereignty in this sense only corrects "little by little" (Wisdom 2: 21-12: 2). Because of this guidance, one is punished "by the very things by which one sins" (Wisdom 2: 16). The punishment fits the crime under God's discretion.

In *Sirach*, Ben Sira "makes no effort to reconcile determinism and free-choice but admonishes those who attempt to blame God for their failings" (Murphy, 2002, p. 238). This is to reiterate God's position in the universe, which is that "God is the opposite of evil, and life the opposite of death so the sinner is the opposite of the godly. Look at all the works of the Most High; they are in pairs, the one the opposite of the other" (Sirach 33:14-15). The binary dealings and the paradox that this exposes in nature do not mean that God chooses sides. Freedom might be intervened at some point by the divine power but this is not an excuse to associate to God even the very acts which warrant the other side of God's position, or in this case, evil.

##### 5. RECAPITULATION/CONCLUSION: DE-PAGANIZING WISDOM

In navigating through the seven wisdom books, one sees that there are varied injunctions concerning the existential themes of 'suffering and death' and 'human freedom vs divine sovereignty.' Although one can hermeneutically critique these as again a pagan justification of moral or ethical reality, the other hermeneutical ground is that this only shows how the wisdom books are not simple moral intimations but are complex and paradoxical. As a recapitulation, let us examine the four variations of wisdom formulations that Žižek experiments to de-paganize wisdom.

First, do the injunctions in the wisdom literature assume the first variant of thinking always about eternity? In some sense, they do. When suffering and death are considered to happen only to contemplate eternal life, then the essence of freedom seems to be lessened or at best negated. But this is not entirely the case since there are also discussions of commitment, longing, and some appropriations of freedom as proportionate to its consequences. And then there is *Song of Songs*, where eternity and freedom are not the main concern but love. In the book, love assumes a crucial role in human experience that the dichotomies of the sacred and the profane in accordance with divine power are not placed proper premium.

Second, do the books simply adhere to the earthly consideration of *this* existence? Certainly not, since there is always the acknowledgment of divine power. Ben Sira, for instance, assigns the best position of God that counters the human tendency to assume a non-consequentialist course of action. Although it has leanings to Karmic tendencies, *Sirach*, on the contrary, merely prohibits the total abduction of absolute liberalities.

Third, do the books suggest that eternity can be found in the contingency of every passing moment? There is a resistance in this view, which seems to imply pantheistic elements. Wisdom in this sense is not to absolutely acknowledge God in natural processes. Otherwise, it will again fall into the critique of nature's privation, imperfection, and inconsistencies. In nature, there is evil, the competing forces of radical differences, chaos, and so on. So this disavows a consistent declaration of pantheistic leanings.

What the foregrounding of the paper exposes is that there is a further understanding of wisdom that does not apply to psychoanalytic explanations of phenomena in the sense of Karl Popper's critique. The Catholic Wisdom literature in this sense does not provide a panacea to the paradoxical underpinnings of reality. It does not, in other words, make pseudo-pronouncements that can never be invalidated. For instance, Job's case again pictures how even the discourses of God can be subjected to a different understanding. In Chesterton's reading, God too acknowledges this paradoxical relation. Love in the *Song of Songs* gives us a sense of relief not to over-rationalize the possessive tendencies of love. The failure to admit how one can also give way for the workings of the Other is a failure to sense the limits of one's freedom.

The fact that in some parts the Wisdom books do not give full consequence to one's actions and also do not give way to a full determinism of events provides enough reasons that a man cannot simply cherry-pick an attitude towards life as pragmatic insinuations. Nobody wants, for example, that each mistake has a corresponding fitting punishment as in the book of *Wisdom*. This would reduce divine justice to tribal trials. Although it assures instinctively the human desire to equalize, this strictly legalistic universe is just not a kind of universal wisdom that one can fully submit to. Alternatively, no one can also fully accept that at some point in one's life, as in *Job*, things can simply mess up. And yet in *Sirach*, this is again not a case of moral blame to God in the sense of an epideictic schema.

Perhaps a final point can shed light on the connection of wisdom in the economics of the world, particularly in ecology. With the contemporary ethical sanctions on man's relationship with the environment



today, capped in some ethical prospects of the Anthropocene (Kahambing, 2019b), can we at best allow this as some opportunity to impose a certain hermeneutic of 'wisdom' to justify man's excessive intervention on the one hand or God's overarching plan of creation on the other (recall Noah's flood or think of Aquinas' justification of physical evil as part of God's economy)? One should recall here that Aquinas' justification can fall under the critique of Christianity's perverse core: physical evil such as typhoons and catastrophes are allowable as long as it's not moral evil. But this appears too much of the divine power in terms of intervening over creation for a moral purpose. In this sense, a perfectly moral universe can simply justify the petty moral reasoning of some puritans that God allows massive earthquakes because apparently, humanity is sinful (with rising crime rates, homosexuality, and prostitution). And we are not supposed to acquire a perfect understanding of this because of his sovereign authority and the elusive plan or the 'bigger picture' to justify this tiny dot in the event of human history serves nothing but a stain of a greater canvass. Žižek thus has good reasons for seeing this as 'disgusting' and 'perverse.' But how again to de-paganize the literature? While not fully aligning his proposal of a communist utopia of a better hell,<sup>1</sup> perhaps the fourth variant of his selling of wisdom can provide input.

The fourth variant of Žižek's thought experiment (i.e. that a wise guy accepts the existence of both freedom and divine sovereignty) seems to fit into the description that this paper does. There are good reasons to suppose the plausibility of wisdom as this necessary acceptance of the way things are. But there is a caveat, namely, that it does not discredit the fact that it needs an ontic struggle. Wisdom is therefore not a passive acceptance of the way things are. The existence of suffering and death, freedom and divine sovereignty are indeed paradoxical, but there is no wise guy who accepts such as a source of pacified serenity in life. The paradox simply needs an inquisitive position that constantly goes over the existential ideas put forward by the books themselves. Meaning to say, that here, there is no grand explanation as to how things operate but only this necessary delving into the ethical choices we make. A de-paganizing turn of biblical wisdom makes it clear how even the idea of the absolute gives room for the contingency of events in human experience. And thus, human freedom as intertwined with suffering and death is a necessary indication that there a room for agency, no matter that it stands as a grant from the divine.

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<sup>1</sup> This is an on-going paper with the prospect of defending Aquinas ideas from Žižek's critique. Žižek apparently sees that the thought of eternal life has a paradox in terms of the beatific vision. It seems that in such utopia, the blessed are enjoying the suffering of others in hell as if they take pleasure in the bosom of divine justice.