

I Know My Redeemer Lives: A Case of Christological Commitments in Christian Preaching of the Book of Job

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Abstract

This article explores Christian interpretation and preaching of Job 19:25–27 as a case in which christological commitments of the Christian faith come into tension with the pre-Christian meanings of the text. Borrowing a term from David Stark, this article explores the hermeneutical crisis of the “historical-christological” binary and proposes the importance of critical self-awareness for sound hermeneutical method. One of the central claims of this article is that the Christian interpreter cannot fully suspend their beliefs or commitments when encountering the texts of the Old Testament; complete objectivity is not possible. Rather, the interpreter must assess their own interpretive horizon—the traditions and contexts that shape one’s perspective—even as they explore the historical moorings of the text. Concluding this article, an analysis of Gardner Taylor’s sermon on Job 19 offers an occasion for homiletical considerations that uphold both Christian commitments and the historical meanings of the text.

Keywords: christology; hermeneutics; tradition; job

I. Introduction

The relationship between Christian preachers and the Old Testament is considerably complex.¹ The Christian preacher who mindfully engages a collection of scriptures that are pre-Christian in origin must contend with an assortment of hermeneutical and theological issues. This article examines one such case in Job 19:25–27. This passage from the book of Job poses a challenge for modern preachers who find themselves at a hermeneutical impasse that

¹ In this article I have chosen to refer to the first portion of the biblical canon as the Old Testament instead of the Hebrew Bible. Though in other works I have employed the terms variably depending on context, I have chosen the designation of Old Testament specifically in this article to allude to my own position as a Christian scholar who reads these texts through a Christian hermeneutical lens. As this article suggests, such self-awareness is key when striving to handle scripture of pre-Christian origin with care.

has been described by some as a historical-christological binary.² For over sixteen centuries, Christians have popularly read these most famous words of Job as a prophetic utterance, pronouncing faith in Christ the Redeemer and hope in bodily resurrection. Translated into many languages as a confidently declarative statement, the words “I know my redeemer lives” have lent themselves to a broad range of public Christian enactments. Whether voiced by a soaring soprano in Händel’s *Messiah*, or thundering from pulpits in Eastertide, the brief testimony extracted from Job 19 has taken on a life of its own in Christian tradition.

And yet, readers equipped with modern tools of history and biblical scholarship can safely reason that Job is not best understood as a prophet. The book of Job is famously difficult to translate.³ Job 19:25–27 is no exception and has confounded biblical translators and interpreters throughout the book’s history. Some biblical scholars have even conceded to the verses’ fundamental unintelligibility: the verses, presumably corrupted in transmission, cannot be understood in their present form.⁴ Others have offered possibilities for the text’s meaning—many of which should be seriously considered by the preacher who studies the text. The word translated as “redeemer” (*gō’ēl*) could be understood a few different ways, but from a strictly literal standpoint, the word does not refer to Christ the redeemer.

Thus, a classic hermeneutical crisis comes into view: how does the modern Christian preacher handle an Old Testament text in a manner that both honors the text’s pre-Christian meaning *and* maintains the confessions of Christian faith?⁵ What is the preacher to do with

² For example, David Stark uses this term to describe a binary he observes in his students’ preaching tendencies. *David Stark*, “New Approaches for Old Testament Preaching”, in: *Homiletic* 43, no. 2 (Winter 2018).

³ In his commentary on Job 1–21, C. L. Seow writes, “The Hebrew of Job has been widely recognized as being far and away the most difficult in the Bible. This is due in large part to the number of rare words found therein, including some 170 terms that are unique to Job in the biblical corpus.” C. L. Seow, *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary*, Illuminations, Grand Rapids 2013, 20.

⁴ Aron Pinker’s translation of v. 26, for example, requires emendation. Aron Pinker, “A New Interpretation of Job 19:26”, in: *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 15, no. 2. (2015).

⁵ For example, Christians confess the eternal existence of the Son in the triune God. Even though the Old Testament antedates the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, Christians believe that the Son antedates all of scripture. Thus, it would be reasonable for Christians to read the Old Testament through a trinitarian lens—a confession of faith that lays claim to the Christian’s hermeneutical horizon. However, the history-oriented reader is cognizant of the lack of trinitarian doctrine at the time when the Old Testament texts were written. If the reader desires to understand the historical and literary context of the Old Testament, written by and for people who did not hold trinitarian beliefs, then the reader may attempt to suspend trinitarian belief while mining for the text’s pre-Christian meanings. Ultimately, this article ponders to what extent such suspension can take place, and whether Christian hermeneutics suffer from a lack of awareness and honesty about our own faith commitments when reading the Old Testament.

her christological commitments when preaching a text that, historically speaking, makes no reference to Christ? Particular to the text at hand, what does the preacher do with a text that has been celebrated for sixteen hundred years as one of scripture's most inspiring declarations of faith in Christ the redeemer, in light of the text's pre-Christian meaning?

This article proposes, fundamentally, that there are no disinterested readers. No text remains unscathed by its readers in its lifetime. The meaning of the text blossoms over time and across cultures in the hands of diverse people. Traditions are shaped around the function of the text, and traditions make claims on the preacher's hermeneutics. Often, the claim of tradition even supersedes the claim of the text. Preachers, though many try, cannot bracket off their commitments or traditions when reading the Old Testament. Contrary to popular belief, the modern period did not produce objective readers; rather, the modern period produced an abundance of readers who lack self-awareness.⁶ What is needed, then, is a hermeneutical approach that takes honest stock of those Christian commitments and traditions, and the ways in which those commitments impact interpretation and preaching—even beyond the preacher's own awareness.

This article includes a brief exploration of the 1600-year tradition of christological interpretation of Job 19:25–27 to demonstrate the extent to which our modern Christian interpretations have been shaped and formed over time. It is my intention to bring this segment of reception history to bear heavily on our considerations of the text. Historical readings of the text remain in our consciousness, with or without our full awareness. There is an inescapability about our histories. Christian preaching of the Old Testament requires interpreters to gain self-awareness about these histories and the ways in which they continue to haunt present scriptural imaginations. As stated before, the operative assumption of this article is that these traditions—this formation of the Christian imagination—cannot be fully

⁶ Postmodern philosophers and literary scholars issued a mighty challenge to the hermeneutical tendencies of the modern period. Though there is no clean, distinct break between modernity and postmodernity, and scholars often fall prey to oversimplified characterizations of both periods, a general claim can be made about the seismic shift from objectivity to subjectivity in hermeneutical methods. Hermeneutics of the modern period largely focused on developing methods that could usher readers into the same encounter with a text's singular meaning. Hermeneutics of postmodernity conceded to the impossibility of arriving at uniform encounters with texts given humanity's diverse interpretive horizons. Hermeneutics of postmodernity also affirmed the plurivocity and inexhaustibility of the meaning of texts, absolving the hermeneutical pursuit of a singular meaning. Whereas the modern period largely neglected the extent to which a reader's life circumstances might impact interpretation, the postmodern period explored the vicissitudes of human experience and the impact of experience on one's hermeneutics. Thus, an important factor for considering one's hermeneutical methods is awareness of one's own life experiences—that is, self-awareness regarding one's formation as an interpreter.

bracketed off from interpretation. And yet, this is not to suggest that Christian commitments are wholly compatible with the Old Testament text. Coming to better understand the preacher's interpretive horizon (and that of the faith community) is only part of the process. There remains the horizon of the text, itself, for which historical-critical tools and methods prove invaluable. It may be that the text confronts the preacher's traditions (as is certainly the case with Job 19:25–27). But it may also be that in the fusion of horizons, there could be something of recognition—something that calls out from the text to the Christian imagination.⁷ In such case, the preacher's task is to preach in a manner that is honest about Christian commitments *and* honest about the text, pulling through the shared thread between worlds with minimal violation of either. This hermeneutical method is not particularly novel, but hopes to make explicit the necessity for self-awareness in preaching texts like Job 19:25–27, a text that has been vaulted into the Christian imagination as christological prophecy for the majority of Christianity's history. Perhaps Job 19:25–27 could be a text that joins together Job and the modern reader in a shared experience of pain and longing, and even hope in a God who would see us vindicated. Maybe there is a rich continuity—not a binary—between the ancient text, its reception history, and the preacher who dares to preach of Job's redeemer.

What follows is an exploration of the tradition of christological commitments in Christian interpretations of Job 19:25–27, coupled with a modern critical examination of the text itself. The final section of this paper will analyze a sermon by Gardner Taylor on this text, with accompanying homiletical reflections. Taylor models a hermeneutic that is broad enough to hold space for Christian conviction *and* the historical moorings of the text. For Taylor, the heart of the text is no more and no less than the hope that “there is a God somewhere!”—a refrain that enjoins his listeners to engage eschatological hope, while bearing witness to a present experience of deep suffering with Job.

⁷ My use of the term “horizon” in relation to hermeneutics is derived from Gadamer's concept of the “fusion of horizons.” Gadamer writes, “The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of the narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of the horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth.” Thus, for Gadamer, one's interpretive horizon is in flux in relation to one's contexts and encounters with the world beyond one's horizon. A “fusion of horizons” describes a process of deepening encounter between one's horizon and the horizon (albeit constructed and provisional in some sense) of whatever is being perceived and interpreted. *Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method*, Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, London 2013, 313–318.

2. Christological Commitments in Christian Interpretations of Job 19:25–27

In one of Vittore Carpaccio's works, *Meditation on the Passion of Christ*, the 15th century Venetian painter places Christ in the center, appearing dead or asleep, on a dilapidated throne.⁸ He sits between two elderly men. The man to Christ's left is Jerome—identified by his iconic books, rosary, and lion. In her article on Venetian paintings of Job, Heidi Hornik explains that in 1911, art historian Claude Phillips recognized Jerome by these attributes, but struggled to identify the man portrayed on the other side of Christ. The man on the other side of Christ sits cross-legged, with one elbow resting on his knee, hand supporting his head as though fatigued or ill. He is sitting on a stone slab engraved with a Hebrew inscription, scrawled with nearly illegible characters. Phillips suggested that the third man's identity might be discovered by a "careful search through the voluminous writings of Jerome."⁹ Perhaps if Phillips could have deciphered the Hebrew, he would have discovered that the third man—indeed a man who appears in the voluminous writings of Jerome—was Job. The slab is engraved with the words of Job 19:25a.

Jerome was among the first Christian theologians to apply a christological understanding to Job 19:25. Though others before Jerome had pondered Job's seemingly prescient reference to resurrection, Jerome seems to be the first to assert a christological reading of the redeemer figure.¹⁰ In the Vulgate, where he very well could have opted for a different, more literal translation of the Hebrew, Jerome opted for "*scio enim quod redemptor meus vivat et in novissimo de terra surrecturus sim*,"¹¹ an interpretive move that C. L. Seow calls "doctrinally inspired."¹² Seow writes, ". . . beginning with Vulg, the redeemer who lives (v.25a) has been interpreted as an allusion to Christ, and hence in Christian interpretations of the passage through the Reformation and beyond."¹³

Jerome's interpretation of Job proved to be highly influential on the most important figure in Job's reception history, Gregory the Great. Gregory's expansive commentary on Job, *Moralia in Job* (written 578–595 CE), became the single most influential interpretation of the book of Job throughout the entire medieval period. It could be argued that many clergy were more familiar with Gregory's *Moralia* than the actual text of Job. In the *Moralia*, every single word and gesture

⁸ Pertinent to this paper's discussion of Job 19:25, Samuel Balentine's essay, "Who Will Be Job's Redeemer?" includes a brief examination of Carpaccio's *Meditation on the Passion of Christ*. Samuel E. Balentine, "Look at Me and Be Appalled": Essays on Job, Theology, and Ethics, Leiden 2021, 41–43.

⁹ Heidi J. Hornik, "The Venetian Images by Bellini and Carpaccio: Job as Intercessor or Prophet?", in: *Review and Expositor* 99, (2002), 552.

¹⁰ Seow (note 3), 170.

¹¹ English trans. "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and in the end I shall rise from the earth."

¹² *Ibid.*, 187.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 793.

of Job is understood to anticipate Christ.¹⁴ Job is elevated as the ideal Christian, who both prefigures Christ and speaks prophetically of the coming of Christ. The tradition of Job the prophet, testifying to Christ the redeemer, remained in vogue across the centuries largely due to Gregory's lasting influence, and thereby, Jerome's influence. Gregory's *Moralia* became the central commentary on Job read by theologians and clergy. Virtually all subsequent commentaries on Job paid homage to Gregory and maintained much of his interpretation. Even in the late medieval period, *Moralia* remained popular and widely distributed.

Carpaccio's *Meditation on the Passion* is an example of the popularity of christological interpretation of Job at the level of high material art. But the popularity of christological interpretation had also been bolstered by centuries of common Christian association of Job with Christ. For example, Job was included in the liturgical readings for Wednesday of Holy Week as early as the fourth century in Milan. This indicates a perceived connection between Job and Christ, particularly around resurrection.¹⁵ Additionally, Job 19:25–27 found its way into Christian funeral rites going back to the ancient memorial service, Office of the Dead.¹⁶ Job on the one hand models a path of grief and loss, but on the other hand—especially when coupled with words from Jesus—his voice is heard as a prophetic harbinger of the coming of Christ and resurrection of the dead. Job was also featured prominently in the Matins of the Burial of the Dead, which was likely established before the seventh century. The Matins is interspersed with some of the darkest verses from Job's laments, yet between the lines of lament, the congregation offers a pledge of confession: "I believe that my redeemer lives . . ." Mark Larrimore observes that finally when the words of Job 19:25 are read, the belief of the congregation is affirmed in Job's confident declaration: "I *know* that my redeemer lives."¹⁷

Theologians and biblical interpreters of the medieval period were never likely to encounter the text of Job on its own. It was customary for biblical texts to be surrounded, literally in print on the page, by the most authoritative commentary from church fathers and scholars. For example, the *Glossa Ordinaria*, established by the twelfth century, featured biblical text that "floated like an island in a sea of authorized interpretation."¹⁸ Before reaching the first verse of

¹⁴ Mark Larrimore, *The Book of Job: A Biography*, *Lives of Great Religious Books*, Princeton 2013, 29.

¹⁵ Mark Larrimore observes, "What was understood as Job's prophetic awareness of the coming of Christ and of the resurrection led the book of Job to be read from early on in the Easter season." *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

Job, the reader encountered the interpretations of Jerome, Nicholas de Lyra, and Gregory. The text was never unmediated, ensuring that the reader saw Christ in Job's words and actions.¹⁹

Even the common people of the medieval period—those who were largely illiterate or uneducated—were steeped in christological readings of Job. Twelfth-century *Bibles Moralisées* paired Old Testament images with New Testament images, creating a visual interpretive synthesis for the common person. These picture Bibles informed stained glass images in churches, which offered a similar visual synthesis.²⁰ As medieval Christians worshiped, they were suspended in a hermeneutical tradition that suggested that the Old Testament prefigures the New Testament, and the New Testament illuminates the Old Testament. The *Biblia Pauperum* of the fifteenth century similarly reinforced this visual representation. One page, for example, displayed Christ gathering the redeemed to his chest, with a supporting image of Job's children feasting, in anticipation of resurrection and redemption.²¹

The reinforcement of christological commitments in Christian interpretation of Job continued through the Reformation. Martin Luther found Christ in Job's pages, as did all other preachers who inherited the traditions of the church fathers.²² Job's Christ continued to show up in art, music, and poetry well into the seventeenth century.²³ Even when the Enlightenment produced a great wealth of skepticism towards popular interpretations of Job, the christological impulse persisted among preachers and laypeople, alike.²⁴ This impulse persisted well into the modern period.

¹⁹ Larrimore quotes the following excerpt from *Barbara Nelson Sargent-Baur*, *Brothers of Dragons*: "Job Dolens" and François Villon, New York 1990, 20. "Typically, approaching the beginning of Job, one is first greeted by a double prologue contributed by Jerome, one part bearing on the Septuagint and the other on the Hebrew text. This is followed by an *exposition* of the second part of the prologue and a double *praefatio* by Nicholas de Lyra, to which is appended an anonymous *additio*. Thereupon comes a somewhat lengthy "Prothemata in Job" based on Gregory's *Moralia*. Only now have we finally arrived at the first verse of the book of Job."

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 34f.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 35f.

²² John Calvin was a notable exception, who determined that Job could not be a prophet. Calvin penned 159 sermons on Job between 1554 and 1555, and though he found ample substance in Job for the formation of Christian life, he did not believe Job possessed prophetic awareness of a redeemer.

²³ For examples of medieval poetry about Christ as Job's redeemer, see *Martin Chase*, "The Book of Job and the Figure of Job in Old English Literature," in: Franklin T. Harkins/Aaron Canty (eds.), *A Companion to Job in the Middle Ages*, Leiden 2016, 354–391.

²⁴ Larrimore notes, specifically, Voltaire and Kant's handling of Job as examples of the skeptical turn. *Larrimore* (note 14), 161–171.

3. A Modern Reading of Job's Redeemer

With the nineteenth century turn to historical-critical methods, biblical scholars and theologians largely abandoned premodern hermeneutics. Modern biblical scholarship has produced a number of possible translations and interpretations of the enigmatic Job 19:25–27. While the Hebrew of 25a is fairly straightforward, the identity of Job's *gō'ēl* remains ambiguous. The preceding and following verses pose such a challenge to translators, that it is difficult to decipher a proper literary context for the *gō'ēl*. Concerning verse 26, Édouard Dhorme commented, "Much ink has been spilt over this verse. A glance at the versions shows that the difficulties did not arise yesterday, and Knabenbauer is right in saying: *versiculus brevis, septens constans voculis, at undequaque difficultatibus septus*."²⁵ Interpreters have bemoaned the verses that surround 19:25 as "totally confusing" and "obscure and completely irrational."²⁶ In his article, "A New Interpretation of Job 19:26," Aron Pinker notes the apparent confusion among ancient translators as well, as he describes the "incoherent translation of the LXX, the incomplete rendition of the Peshitta, the paraphrase of the Targum, and the theological allusions of the Vulgate."²⁷ Nearly all modern scholars agree that Job was not having a prophetic vision of the resurrection of the dead in verses 26–27, but suggestions for translating the verses do not bring much clarity.²⁸ The modern impulse to read Job 19:25–27 contextually, however, is not a futile endeavor; it simply means that all translations and interpretations contain some informed speculation.²⁹ At the very least, reading 19:25 in context with its surrounding verses (or especially the whole speech of chapter 19), paints a very different picture of Job's disposition from medieval portrayals of Job.

On the matter of identifying Job's redeemer, there seem to be two primary camps: either Job's redeemer is God, or a third party. Most theories of Job's *gō'ēl* begin with an analysis of the term. In secular (i.e., familial and legal) usage, the term referred to the next of kin "who intervened to maintain the rights or preserve the continuity of the family" according to Norman Habel.³⁰ While the majority of scholars interpret Job's redeemer as a heavenly or

²⁵ This segment from Dhorme's commentary is cited in Pinker, "A New Interpretation of Job 19:26", 2. The Latin can be translated, "a short verse, consisting of seven syllables, but on every side is trapped by difficulties."

²⁶ Paul Trudinger, "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth': A Note on Job 19:25 & 26", in: The Downside Review 124, issue 436 (2006), 224.

²⁷ Pinker (note 4), 4.

²⁸ Pinker summarizes three interpretations of 19:26: (1) the resurrection view, which persisted until the seventeenth century, (2) the ante mortem view, which suggests that Job will see God while he is still alive, and (3) the post mortem view, which suggests that Job will somehow encounter God after death. Ibid., 5–7.

²⁹ Trudinger (note 26), 226.

³⁰ Norman Habel, The Book of Job: A Commentary, The Old Testament Library, Philadelphia 1985, 304.

celestial being who takes on such responsibilities (whether God or third party), some scholars read *gō'el* quite literally, as though Job is referring to a human kinsman redeemer who will work to redeem his legacy and property, and will avenge Job's wrongful suffering.³¹ Commonly, scholars associate Job's redeemer of 19:25 with the *mokhiach*, or "arbiter," of 9:33, and the *'edh*, or "witness," of 16:19. Habel speculates that Job's redeemer, the arbiter, and the witness are to be understood as celestial figures. Regardless of their identities, all three figures are conjured in Job's desperation for justice. And yet, the ambiguity of their identities sheds little light on Job's *gō'el*.³²

Some scholars point to the metaphorical application of *gō'el* to God throughout the Old Testament and posit that the term had become a recognizable referent to divine attributes of justice and mercy by the time Job was written.³³ Habel argues adamantly against this position. Citing preceding moments from Job's speeches, he writes,

His God is his accuser, adversary, enemy, spy, destroyer, hunter, and siege commander. Against this opponent Job needs a *gō'el*, one who will take up his case and bring it before the court of heaven for public resolution. That this *gō'el* would be one and the same person as his cruel opponent seems quite illogical, inconsistent, and, from Job's perspective, intolerable.³⁴

Seow argues, however, that Job calls upon God as redeemer *ironically*. Seow is not known to dampen Job's anguish or anger. Ironic appropriation of *gō'el* in Job 19:25 leaves room for Job's anger and disappointment, while cracking open the door to the possibility of vindication. Seow makes the keen observation that, "importantly, Job does not mention God by name, asserting only cryptically that his redeemer—whoever that may turn out to be—"lives." The intent of this anonymous reference, one may surmise, is to remind God of a role abandoned that must be taken up again."³⁵ Seow does not read 19:25 as a climactic declaration of faith or

³¹ Matthew J. Suriano, "Death, Disinheritance, and Job's Kinsman-Redeemer", in: JBL 129, no. 1 (2010): 49–66.

³² It is worth noting that Gustavo Gutiérrez interpreted all three of these terms in relation to one another, as "three faces of one and the same God as experienced by one who suffers adversity and is searching." Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of The Innocent*, New York 1987, 56.

³³ Seow observes that God is explicitly called "my redeemer" in Psalm 19:14, "precisely the same form we find in our passage in Job." He notes that "Elsewhere, too, God is frequently called redeemer (Isa 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24:47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; 63:16; Jer 50:34; Ps 78:35)." Seow (note 3), 805.

³⁴ Habel (note 30), 305.

³⁵ Seow (note 3), 806.

belief, but rather as another attempt to bring God to account. In his poignant reflection on this section of Job, he writes,

Nevertheless, despite his despair and sense of complete isolation, Job dares to harbor a stubborn belief in the possibility of vindication even after his body disintegrates and is no more. . . . God has in fact played the role of Job's enemy, the one who caused him to be isolated and alienated. Yet Job refuses to give up on the possibility of redemption. He holds on to the possibility of a redeemer who is not dormant, a redeemer who will vindicate him after all. Still, he does not name that redeemer, as if leaving that role open—as a challenge to whoever might dutifully accept it. One might indeed see Job's words as a desperate longing, a bold challenge for God to be God.³⁶

In this reading of Job, the redeemer is interpreted as a reference to God, even as God remains elusive and troubling. Job's declaration is surprisingly hopeful, even if he speaks out of frustration. That he can conceive (even ironically) of God vindicating him seems to be, at this point in the text, a sign of life in a man who feels near dead.

4. Breaking the Binary, Finding Continuity

In his 2018 article, "New Approaches for Old Testament Preaching," David Stark observed a pattern among his preaching students, that when preaching the Old Testament, they felt that they must either preach Christ *or* preach on the historical background of the text. Stark identifies this tendency as a nineteenth-century historical-christological binary.³⁷ With the rise of modern historical-critical approaches in the nineteenth century, texts like Job 19:25 were largely purged of their christological affiliations. Gradually, in the twentieth century, Job was displaced from liturgies over concern for the "over-catechized Job" (that is, a Job who had drifted considerably from his literary context).³⁸ By the twentieth century, the status of the Old Testament's relevance to Christianity was entirely up for debate.³⁹ At no other point in the

³⁶ Ibid., 809.

³⁷ Stark (note 2), 13.

³⁸ See P. Rouillard's observation about the eventual displacement of Job from the liturgy in *Balentine* (note 8), 40.

³⁹ One can gather a sense for the discussion in Bernhard Anderson's collection of essays on the Old Testament and Christian faith. Included in the series is an essay by Bultmann titled, "The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith." Several of the other essays of the volume respond to Bultmann's bold claims about the Old Testament. *Bernhard W. Anderson, The Old Testament and Christian Faith: A Theological Discussion*, New York 1963.

history of Christianity was the Old Testament assumed to be less than the Word of God. Seemingly every attempt to delineate the relationship between the Old and New Testaments affirmed an unshakable rift between the two, a fundamental incompatibility. This rift contributed to a steady decline in Christian preaching of the Old Testament.⁴⁰

And yet, the twentieth century also ushered in an age of biblical theology and literary methods. These approaches were less focused on delineating the rift between the Old and New Testaments, and were more concerned with treating whole texts and their relationships to each other, even across testamental divide and literary difference. In the wake of troubling global events, biblical scholars and historians became more attuned to socio-political issues pertaining to the interpretation of biblical texts. Rolf Rendtorff, for example, argued in his book *Canon and Theology* that Christians should become critically self-aware of the ways in which we have exerted dominance over Jewish people throughout history. This awareness ought to lead Christian interpreters to interrogate our hermeneutical methods. Rendtorff invites his readers to imagine a collaborative relationship between Jewish and Christian biblical interpretations, in which Christians learn to honor the pre-Christian significance of biblical texts.⁴¹

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries authors have continued to deconstruct the so-called historical-christological binary to find ways to honor both the historical text, and the commitments of Christian faith. In a chapter from his *Old Testament Theology*, Gerhard Hasel helpfully addresses the pitfalls of various hermeneutical approaches from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He argues that many approaches failed to adequately address the sprawling diversity of texts and testimonies of the Old Testament. By treating the Old Testament as a propaedeutic, or merely a set of promises to be fulfilled in the New, Hasel argues that they “suffer from a reductionism of the multiplicity of OT thought, which merely becomes a pale reflection of the Messiah to come.”⁴² He borrows the term “Christomonism” to refer to this tendency, and argues that what is needed, rather, is a trinitarian approach.⁴³ A trinitarian approach affirms the triune God of scripture, and reduces the need to refer to each member of the trinity in every text. He concludes the chapter by

⁴⁰ Terence Fretheim identifies this as one of five contributing factors to the decline of Christian preaching of the Old Testament. *Terence E. Fretheim, “The Old Testament in Christian Proclamation” in: What Kind of God?: Collected Essays of Terence E. Fretheim, eds. Michael J. Chan and Brent A. Strawn, University Park 2015, 341–349.*

⁴¹ *Rolf Rendtorff, Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology, Minneapolis 1993.*

⁴² *Gerhard Hasel, Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate, Grand Rapids 1991, 178.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 178.

affirming seven relationships between the two testaments.⁴⁴ Not every text bears reference to these relationships, but the relationships sustain a rich intertestamental connection that complicates hermeneutical binaries.

In an essay titled “The Old Testament in Christian Proclamation” Terrence Fretheim poses the question, “But how in preaching do we do justice to both: our *knowledge* of [the Old Testament’s] pre-Christian origins and our *experience* of hearing them as Christian words?”⁴⁵ This is, in my estimation, the central question for preachers of Job 19:25–27. Even the most cerebral preachers produced by modern biblical training cannot escape the confession of their faith: that the kind of redeemer Job longs for—a God who will show mercy and justice, who will be made known, who will see Job vindicated—is the kind of redeemer Christians find in Christ. Perhaps the continuity between Job’s redeemer and the Christian’s christological commitments is in a shared longing for God to be present and to make things right. One need not violate the historical situation of the text to connect Job’s hope for a redeemer with the Christian imagination.

5. Homiletical Considerations

First and foremost, it must be stated and affirmed that Job 19:25–27, like all texts, bears a surplus of meaning that cannot be contained by a single sermon. The preacher must make peace with the evasive, expansive life of the text beyond the preacher’s own capacity to comprehend. The task of the preacher is *not* to find and champion a singular meaning of the text over against all other possible interpretations. Rather, the preacher steps into a moving stream of reception, and picks up a possibility to proclaim for others. The possibility discerned by the preacher, however, ought to emerge out of careful study of the text and with appropriate self-awareness of how the preacher has been shaped by their own traditions. This is not a novel approach to Christian preaching of the Old Testament, but it merits affirmation moving forward.

In this section of the paper, a sermon on Job 19 by the great American preacher, Gardner Taylor, will serve as a touchstone for homiletical considerations.⁴⁶ Taylor (1918–2015) was among the most recognizable preachers of the twentieth century. Jared Alcántara has devoted a considerable portion of his scholarship to studying the life and preaching of Taylor. In

⁴⁴ Ibid., 191–193.

⁴⁵ Fretheim (note 40), 346.

⁴⁶ This sermon has been preserved as a recording, and can be found at the following YouTube links: <https://youtu.be/s14G9EWujJY> and <https://youtu.be/agY83m2EpJw>

Crossover Preaching, Alcántara highlights Taylor's intercultural competence, improvisatory style, and more generally, the way Taylor embodied proclamation.⁴⁷ His capacity to “turn ink into blood,” to bring a sermon to life in his delivery of it, is certainly on full display in his sermon on Job 19.⁴⁸ His patient cadence, his impressive range of vocal dynamics, and his capacity to command the energy in the room all contributed to his great prominence.

But it is Taylor's theology of preaching, and the way it shapes his hermeneutical approach to Job 19, that matters most for this analysis. In his shorter volume on the legacy of Taylor, *Learning from a Legend*, Alcántara notes the primacy of redemption in Taylor's homiletical theology. He writes,

Redemption reminds us that gospel proclamation is central instead of peripheral to what preachers do. Dr. Taylor made it his ambition to preach Christ-centered, redemptive sermons. His preaching “motto” (if we can call it that) was taken from the King James Version of John 12:21: “We would see Jesus.” . . . In 1983, Dr. Taylor explained the purpose of the sermon this way: “to bring the people before the presence of God and within sight of the heart of Christ. No sermon can do more. None should want to do less.”⁴⁹

Given Taylor's homiletical theology, his sermon on Job 19 provides an interesting case in which Taylor negotiates his christological commitments with the historical text. He neither denies his christological commitments, nor deprives the text of its historical and literary contexts. Taylor's precise negotiation of this relationship is not necessarily the model for all preachers, but his dedication to negotiating the relationship should be instructive.

Taylor's sermon, which seems to have been preached at the L. K. Williams Ministers' Institute in Texas, begins with a simple reading of verses 25–27.⁵⁰ “In the 19th chapter of the book of Job,” he begins slowly, “there are these well-known words: “For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh *shall* I see God, whom I *shall* see for myself and

⁴⁷ Jared E. Alcántara, *Crossover Preaching: Intercultural-Improvisational Homiletics in Conversation with Gardner C. Taylor*, Downers Grove 2015.

⁴⁸ Alcántara draws upon a quote from Charles L. Bartow to describe the way in which preachers set free the “arrested performance” of the written text. *Ibid.*, 91–137.

⁴⁹ Jared E. Alcántara, *Learning from a Legend: What Gardner C. Taylor Can Teach Us about Preaching*, Eugene 2016, 5.

⁵⁰ I am indebted to Carolyn J. Sharp, whose informal transcript of this sermon with accompanying information proved invaluable to this article.

mine eyes *shall* behold.” Taylor marks the repetition of “shall” with a slowed pace, allowing the eschatological projection to lure listeners along. His first remark following the reading of the text concerns its ancient origins. “These words have lighted the darkness for twenty-five centuries of human living.” The listeners are transported to an unfamiliar, ambiguous location. No need to name the inscrutable Land of Uz—twenty-five centuries emphasized ample distance from the subject of the text. And yet, the words found their way across that span of time, and in Taylor’s own congregation, he notes, the words have long accompanied funerary rites. The text lived a full life between its inception and Gardner’s context.

Taylor goes on to describe a modern reenactment of the Job story in Archibald MacLeish’s *J.B.* to draw a connection between Job’s anguish and the experience of the common person. Reflecting on Job’s enduring relevance, Taylor asks,

Why has this old hoary and ancient account lived on to be considered and examined and reflected upon by the succeeding generations of twenty-five centuries? Why?, you ask me. And I answer: Because these words of this book speak of the deepest and truest stuff of our human existence. . . . It is a biopsy—an extract of living tissue—of what our human condition is all about.

He reminds his audience that the human condition with all its fullness and precarity, never “gets out of style.”

Taylor then turns his attention to the nineteenth chapter of Job, and properly contextualizes the previously quoted verses. Speaking of Job’s anguish, Taylor casts the image of a window, saying, “The window has narrowed out of which he looks upon the landscape of life.” The narrowing window becomes something like a refrain as he describes the way in which Job lost his property, his children, his health, his friends, and even God.

Once there had been homes of children, and fruitful fields and lowing cattle, and bleating sheep. But now the window has narrowed. [...] [H]e lies amidst the graves of his children and the wrecked ruins of his fortune. But then, beyond that, his own body is attacked, [...] his friends have assaulted him. They have driven cold steel into his already bleeding spirit. They have added indignity upon indignity, and they have visited insult upon insult, and he can bear it no longer. The window out of which he looks at the landscape of life has narrowed to a slit.

He continues in his description of Job's despair, adding at each turn that the window grows narrower and narrower. Even as Taylor's objective in preaching is to bring people into the presence of God, to see and be seen by Jesus, Taylor has chosen to draw his listeners into a narrowing frame, in which vision of the divine is obscured.

Finally comes a fairly climatic moment in the sermon—one of at least two such climaxes. Job posits that God has overthrown him, to which Taylor responds in verse, with each verse marked by exuberant response from his audience:

If God be for us, then what difference does it make who is against us?

If God be for us, then our enemies are like dust.

If God be with us, then calamity can come only so close.

If God be with us, we can run through a troop and jump over a wall. If God—

(Taylor pauses briefly, as though to signal the painful conclusion one must draw in the presence of Job's suffering.)

--but my Father, if God be against us, what else is there left?

The climactic arc of Taylor's speech peaks not in the bold and hopeful declaration of a redeemer—not yet, anyway—but rather in the utter defeat of Job's condition.

Taylor shifts to a pastoral tone, as though to tend to the wound he just opened in his audience. He surrounds his audience with several examples of people called by God to preach who suffered illness, loss, or depression. It is not until this moment in the sermon, once he has transported the listener out of the text and into the lives of suffering preachers, that Taylor makes his first mention of Christ. He does not name Jesus, but rather refers to Jesus as "our Lord." He cites the suffering of our Lord on the cross, and the Revelation vision of the one deemed worthy of opening the seal. He memorably proclaims, "The bloody marks in the hand [of our Lord] are the seal of authority." Thus, Christ is more closely aligned in the sermon with preachers who have been called upon to preach, even through suffering. Taylor argues that there is an authority that comes only by suffering.

At this point in the sermon, Taylor returns to Job, and doubles down on Job's lament. While many preachers avoid the most languishing moments of Job's speeches, Taylor refuses to turn his back on Job. It is as if he has heard Job's cry for someone to advocate for him, and stepped up to the task. Out of Job's despair, Taylor moves to a series of questions directed to his audience, preparing for the second climax of the sermon:

How do you answer, when the tide goes against you, when it seems like you have no hiding place and your head is defenseless?

Underneath the unfriendly elements, how do you answer?

In the deep dark places of the soul, where the sides of the valley rise steep around you and there is no sunlight on your pathway, how do you answer?

When it seems as if life is at ebb tide and all that you once counted dear is against you, how do you answer?

He continues, "The window has narrowed to a slit. This man, this man takes the sticky sores and separates them as the scabs come off on the sheets, gets up to look out, out there and sees a broad landscape." Finally, the familiar words of 19:25–27 come back around, "I know that my Redeemer liveth. Sit! I know that my redeemer liveth. Forsaken? I know that my Redeemer liveth. Accused by false friends? I know that my Redeemer liveth. Alone, terrified, the night so dark around me? I know that my Redeemer liveth."

Taylor brings this moment of confession into contact with a well-known hymn when he tells his audience, "[Job] is saying that there is a God somewhere." The words of this hymn become a new refrain for the audience whose vision became so obscured—"there is a God somewhere!" This statement avoids the certainty that so often accompanies christological interpretations, and the use of "God" avoids positioning Jesus in Job's confession. The final moments of Taylor's sermon are spent in eschatological vision. A constellation of hopeful projections from Genesis, Isaiah, and Revelation round out the sermon, each punctuated with the promise of *shall*—a promise of future hope, even when all seems lost.

Taylor's sermon is a marvel of oration. It is a remarkable feat to guide listeners into the open wounds of Job, to mirror Job's wounds with those of his hearers, and to usher them into the risk of declaring "there is a God somewhere!" Upon careful examination, one can see Taylor's obvious christological commitments. And yet, Taylor is mindful not to impose aspects of his own faith on Job, a figure of pre-Christian literature. He does not even call upon Jesus's name—perhaps in an effort to avoid anachronistic applications to Job 19. The attention Taylor

gives to the heart of chapter nineteen—that is, Job’s anguish—proves his dedication to the historical and literary contexts of the passage.

While not all preachers would negotiate the relationship between the historical Job and his legacy in Christian imagination the same way that Taylor does in this sermon, preachers can learn from Taylor’s approach. Preachers might not feel any need to refer to Christ in a sermon on Job 19:25–27. If one grounds their hermeneutic in a trinitarian approach, for example, then one may affirm that the God of Job is the God revealed in Christ; thus, the God of all scripture is sufficient, and mention of all members of the trinity in every text is not necessary.⁵¹ And yet, the preacher would be wise to tend to the many centuries of enduring christological legacy of Job 19:25–27. Again, self-awareness is critical to sound hermeneutics. It would be foolish to neglect the extent to which the tradition of christological interpretation has impacted the preacher’s reception of the text. Job’s redeemer—though not quite the redeemer Christians have come to know—indicates something of the human condition: a longing for redemption in this life or the next. The continuity between Job’s longing and ours is a sufficient hermeneutical avenue upon which preachers may negotiate the tension between Job’s world and ours.

As indicated in the title of this article, Job 19:25–27 presents merely one case in which the hermeneutical tension between modern Christian interpreters and the ancient pre-Christian text comes into view. Other texts of the Old Testament bear similar reception histories, swept up in the broad hermeneutical trends of pre-modernity. The suggestion of this article is not to merely concede to christological traditions or commitments, but to handle those commitments honestly in the presence of pre-Christian scripture, while inviting scripture to push back upon our commitments. There in the tension between worlds emerge dialectical revelations—continued reverberations of inexhaustible texts—ready to be faithfully discerned by each new age.

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⁵¹ See the trinitarian approach mentioned in *Hasel* (note 42), 178.