



Wisdom, Salvation and the Environmental Crisis: The Case of Proverbs 2 and the *Galamsey* (Illegal Mining) Menace in Ghana

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Abstract: Within Christian theology, salvation cannot be fully understood apart from its implications for the environment. While some dismiss this connection due to the otherworldly outlook of soteriology, this paper argues that biblical salvation encompasses ecological restoration, a concept resonant with the Wesleyan emphasis on holistic, transformative grace. Navigating the theological complexities of environmental crises requires wisdom, particularly the practical, earth-affirming wisdom of Proverbs. Using Ghana's *galamsey* (illegal mining) crisis as a case study, this paper demonstrates how wisdom theology, specifically Proverbs 2, can reshape Christian responses to ecological degradation, offering a salvation that is both spiritual and environmental.

Keywords: *Wisdom • Salvation • Galamsey • Proverbs • Environment*

Introduction

The concept of salvation in the Old Testament remains a complex and often overlooked theological topic. While scholars like Gerhard von Rad have emphasized salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*) as central to Old Testament theology¹, integrating diverse traditions, particularly the wisdom literature, into a coherent soteriological framework remains challenging. As G. E. Wright notes, wisdom literature resists easy alignment with the faith expressed in historical and prophetic texts, complicating efforts to systematize Old Testament soteriology.² This tension has led to various hermeneutical approaches (complementary, dialectical, or separatist), yet the discussion remains open, reflecting the dynamic and multifaceted nature of biblical salvation.³

Recent theological discourse has expanded the scope of salvation beyond anthropocentric concerns to include ecological restoration, recognizing God's redemptive plan as inherently holistic. Since the 1960s, Christian environmental ethics has gained traction, prompting a re-evaluation of soteriology in light of ecological crises. However, this integration faces critique, particularly from those who view salvation in purely transcendent terms. This

¹ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 136–137; Gary V. Smith, "Is There A Place For Job's Wisdom In Old Testament Theology?" *Trinity Journal* 13, no.1 (1992): 3–6; C. H. H. Scobie "The Place of Wisdom in Biblical Theology," *BTB* 14, no. 2(1984):43;

² G. E. Wright, *God who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital*, SBT 8. (SCM Press, 1952), 44–45, 103–105.

³ Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 45–48; H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 12–15.

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paper argues that Christian soteriology is not exclusive of the environment, although it confronts real challenges, complexities, and paradoxes that hinder any genuine attempt to offer theological solutions.⁴ This is why biblical wisdom may be an important theological category in generating sound environmental solutions. With a unique epistemology that focuses on empiricism (Proverbs), but does not exclude revelation (Job), as well as its 'this-worldly' outlook, wisdom offers a kind of hybrid theology that may be crucial for our understanding of the role of the Bible in environmental sustainability.

Focusing on *galamsey* (illegal small-scale mining) in Ghana, which is an acute ecological and social disaster, this study examines how Proverbs 2 can inform a theology of environmental stewardship. Ghana, a predominantly Christian nation⁵, presents a critical context for exploring the church's role in addressing ecological degradation. By engaging wisdom literature, the paper argues for a soteriology that encompasses creation care, a vision of salvation as holistic transformation that finds a strong resonance in the Wesleyan theological tradition. This framework challenges Ghanaian Christians, especially those from the Wesleyan tradition, to confront the ethical and theological implications of *galamsey*.

***Galamsey* in Ghana: An Environmental and Human Catastrophe**

Galamsey has emerged as a pervasive issue in Ghana.⁶ The term, *galamsey*, refers to small-scale mining activities conducted without proper permits and which often violate mining regulations and environmental laws.⁷ *Galamsey* initially started with prospectors using pans, shovels, and containers to work through gold concentrate, but has now mutated as heavy machinery is used to excavate land and water bodies for gold.⁸ This progression has serious destructive consequences for Ghana. In a press release by The Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, the association intimated that Ghana "is on the brink of an environmental, health and social disaster as a result of illegal mining".⁹ The enormity of the problem led the President of the Republic Nana Akufo-Addo to announce in his X tweet on July 11, 2017 (5:27 pm) that he would put his "presidency on the line" in the fight against *galamsey*. Despite sustained efforts by civil society, religious groups, and traditional leaders, illegal mining continues to escalate in Ghana. Several reasons account for the increase and spread of *galamsey* operations. Foremost, perhaps, is poverty and hardship in catchment areas.¹⁰ A corollary to this is the lack of employment and loss of agricultural lands to big mining companies.¹¹ But also crucial is the role played by politicians and people in power, including traditional authorities, in their overt and covert promotion of *galamsey*.¹²

Ghana possesses substantial mineral wealth, including gold, diamonds, manganese, and more recently discovered lithium deposits.¹³ However, the environmental management of these resources presents a critical challenge: balancing economic benefits against ecological degradation. This tension is particularly acute in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM), a sector with deep historical roots. Archaeological and historical evidence suggests gold mining activities in territories comprising modern-day Ghana as early as the 7th-8th centuries CE¹⁴, with the region's mineral abundance earning it the colonial designation "Gold Coast."

⁴ Douglas J. Moo and Jonathan A. Moo, *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 67–70.

⁵ Ghana Statistical Service, *2021 Population and Housing Census: General Report* (Accra: Ghana Statistical Service, 2021), 27–30.

⁶ Ofori et al., "A Ecological Study of Galamsey Activities in Ghana and their Physiological Toxicity", *Asian Journal of Toxicology, Environmental, and Occupational Health* 2, no. 1 (2024):40-57. <https://doi.org/10.61511/ajteoh.v2i1.2024.395>.

⁷ S. A. Yeboah, "Digging Deeper: The Impact of Illegal Mining on Economic Growth and Development in Ghana," Munich Personal RePEc Archive, 15 January 2023, <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/117641/>

⁸ B. A. Teschner, "Small-Scale Mining in Ghana: The Government and the Galamsey," *Resources Policy* 37, no. 3 (2012): 308–14.

⁹ Ghana Academy of Arts and Science, "Statement on Illegal Mining," accessed 30th June, 2024 <https://gaas-gh.org/?r3d=8240>.

¹⁰ Gavin Hilson, and Sadia M. Banchirigah, "Are Alternative Livelihood Projects Alleviating Poverty in Mining Communities? Experiences from Ghana," *Journal of Development Studies* 45, (2009): 175–185.

¹¹ Kwadwo Afriyie, John K. Ganle and Janet A. A. Adomako, "The good in evil: A discourse analysis of the *galamsey* industry in Ghana," *Oxford Development Studies* 44, no. 4 (2016): 3.

¹² Moses Asori et al., "Is Illegal Mining Socio-Politically Entrenched? An Opinion Piece of the Interaction between Formal Politics and Chief Dominance in Mineral Governance, and its Influence on Fighting Galamsey in Ghana" *Geojournal* 88, no.2 (2023): 1953–6, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-022-10725-1>

¹³ Benjamin N. A. Aryee, Bernard K. Ntibery, and Evans Atorkui, "Trends in the Small-Scale Mining of Precious Minerals in Ghana: A Perspective on its Environmental Impact," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 11, no. 2(2003): 131–140."

¹⁴ Hilson, *Contextual Review of the Ghanaian Small-scale Mining Industry, MMSD and IIED*. (2002):3–4, <http://pubs.iied.org/pds/G00722.pdf>

Following independence, ASM remained largely informal until Ghana's late-20th-century economic crises precipitated structural reforms. The Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) of the 1980s introduced formal regulatory frameworks, notably the Small-Scale Gold Mining Law (PNDCL 218) and Precious Minerals Marketing Corporation Law (PNDCL 219) of 1989.¹⁵ While these measures brought some artisanal miners into the legal economy, they failed to establish effective environmental safeguards, an institutional weakness that continues to enable destructive practices like *galamsey* (illegal ASM) today.

With a host of factors, small-scale mining, although legal, has evolved into a destructive enterprise, with 85% of its total workforce operating illegally.¹⁶ The environment and human life have become the losers in this unfolding drama. Taking the environment, for instance, some of the problems studies have highlighted are the removal of vegetation, destruction, and contamination of water bodies, destruction of ecosystems, and an increase in air pollutants in affected areas.¹⁷ Many Ghanaians have recently been alarmed and appalled by the extent of destruction of several important water bodies, such as the rivers Pra, Ankobra, and Birim. In a study by Serfor-Armah et al. in the Prestea region, they found high levels of arsenic and antimony concentrations in the rivers.¹⁸ Hilson points out the danger in the use of mercury by small-scale miners, and as he reported, the World Bank had already sounded caution in one of its 1995 reports, indicating the gradual release of between four and five tons of mercury into the environment yearly.¹⁹ Studies by agencies such as the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission (GAEC) on water bodies in affected areas corroborate the damaging effects of the use of mercury in the *galamsey* operations. The contamination of water sources with mercury and cyanide poses a serious risk to food safety in affected regions. If these toxic substances enter the food chain, they can cause severe health complications, including cancer, liver damage, and kidney failure.²⁰

It is not only the water bodies that bear the brunt of *galamsey* operations, but also the vegetation, the ecology, the air, and ultimately, the people living in the affected areas. Since agriculture is the primary source of livelihood in *galamsey* communities, its destruction has severe consequences for the survival of these communities. A study by Aragon and Rud revealed that agricultural productivity has been reduced by almost 40% in *galamsey* areas.²¹ Farmlands have been lost to *galamsey* operations, and small-scale miners are unperturbed in the continuous annexation of arable lands. Young people have been lost to the *galamsey* activities, thereby reducing the hands needed on the farms. In a recent documentary by OAfrica and Tiger Eye PI, have been roped into *galamsey* activities, an unfortunate development because of their long-term exposure to mercury and cyanide.²² Now the effects of *galamsey* are being realized in areas far from the operation sites, and this has contributed to the recent hue and cry among Ghanaians as they wake up to the reality of the existential threat they face with the continuous pollution of water bodies. The Ghana Water Company Limited has warned and continues to warn of the pollution in the water bodies and the cost implications on its operations. The company has even threatened that the country may have to resort to importing portable water if nothing is done.²³

¹⁵ Hilson. "The Environmental Impact of Small-Scale Gold Mining in Ghana: Identifying Problems and Possible Solutions, *The Geographical Journal* 168, no. 1 (2002): 61.

¹⁶ Michael Eduful et al., "The Illegal Artisanal and Small-scale Mining (Galamsey) 'Menace' in Ghana: Is Military-Style Approach the Answer?" *Resource Policy* 48, (2020): 2.

¹⁷ Felicia S. Addy and Shikshya Adhikari, "Galamsey in Ghana: Mitigating its Negative Effects," WIIS policybrief, (February 2021), accessed 22nd September, 2024 <https://wiisglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/Galamsey-in-Ghana-Mitigating-its-Negative-Effects.pdf>; Afriyie, Ganle, and Adomako, "The Good in Evil," 6; Najat Osman et al., "Assessing the Impact of Illegal Small-Scale Mining (galamsey) on Cocoa Farming and Farmer Livelihood: A Case Study in the Amansie West District of Ghana," *Pelita Perkebunan* 38, no. 1 (2022): 76-79.

¹⁸ Y. Seffor-Armah et al., "The Impact of Small-Scale Mining Activities on the Level of Mercury in the Environment: The Case of Prestea and its Environs," *Journal of Radioanalytical and Nuclear Chemistry* 262, no. 3 (2004): 685-690.

¹⁹ Hilson, "The Environmental Impact of Small-Scale Gold mining in Ghana: Identifying problems and possible Solutions. *The Geographical Journal* 168, no. 1 (2002): 70.

²⁰ Hilson, "The Environmental Impact of Small Scale Gold Mining in Ghana," 64; Abdul-Gafaru Abdulai "FINDINGS: Competitive politics and the challenge of combating illegal mining in Ghana," *Effective States and Inclusive Development* (esid), June 1, 2017, accessed 22nd August, 2024. <http://www.effective-states.org/beyond-the-resources-course-the-political-economy-of-mining-and-inclusive-development-in-ghana/>.

²¹ Fernando. M. Aragon and Juan P. Rud, "Mining, Pollution and Agriculture Productivity: Evidence from Ghana. Discussion Papers dp12-08, Department of Economics, Simon Fraser University. (2012).

²² Ghana News Agency 2024, "Documentary Depicts *Galamsey* Children 'Swimming' in Mercury and Engaging in Labour, Drugs and Prostitution," January 18 2024, accessed 14th September, 2024. <https://myjoyonline.com/documentary-depicts-galamsey-children-swimming-in-mercury-and-engaging-in-labour-drugs-and-prostitution/>

²³ Abdulai, "FINDINGS."

Ghana faces a huge environmental crisis in *galamsey*. Although there are some benefits to this practice in the form of providing a source of livelihood to many young unemployed Ghanaians as well as revenue for the country, the detrimental environmental effects, as well as the social and health implications, heavily outweigh any economic justifications. This crisis demands interdisciplinary solutions, including theological engagement. Herein lies the significance of Old Testament wisdom literature. Its unique integration of *empirical observation* (Prov 24:30–34 on land neglect), *ethical imperatives* (Job 12:7–10 on creation's intrinsic value), and *divine accountability* (Eccl 5:6 on exploitation) offers a framework for environmental ethics that resonates with Ghana's Christian majority. Wisdom's focus on *created order* (Prov 3:19–20) and *human stewardship* (Ps 104:14–30) provides a pragmatic theology for sustainable mining in a way that aligns ecological care with Ghana's cultural and religious consciousness. By studying how wisdom connects environmental degradation to moral folly (Prov 6:6–11) and positions nature as a revelatory medium (Job 38–41), Ghanaian Christians can reframe *galamsey* not merely as an economic issue, but as a *theological failure* requiring repentance and restorative action.

Salvation in the Old Testament: A Wesleyan Theological Perspective

A comprehensive understanding of salvation in the Old Testament presents significant hermeneutical challenges. While Christian theology often prioritizes New Testament soteriology, the Old Testament itself presents a rich and evolving theology of redemption that should not be reduced to mere typology for Christ. The Hebrew word for salvation is *yeshu'ah* from the root *yahs'a*, with a range of meanings—spacious, sufficiency, and living in abundance.²⁴ As the English translation 'save' connotes, *yeshu'ah* has the basic meaning of deliverance. Other derivatives include redeem, restore, and victory; nonetheless, the meaning, deliverance serves as an overarching framework for the term. Although the term *yeshu'ah* is concentrated in the prophetic books, one of its important usages is in the Pentateuch, specifically the Song of Moses (Exod. 15:2), where the Israelites celebrate the triumph of Yahweh over the Egyptians. In this context, the meaning of *yeshu'ah* is victory over the enemy. Salvation as victory over the enemy can be traced in other texts such as Saul's victory over the Ammonites (1 Sam 11:13) and Jonathan's defense of David to Saul (1 Sam 19:5). The former deals with a speech by Saul to the people after his victory, where he indicated that the Lord has worked "salvation in Israel" (*təšū'āh bəyisrā'ēl*); while the latter alludes to David's victory over the Philistines.

Apart from victory in wars, salvation was construed as deliverance from trouble, violence, and any other ills in society. The Psalter gives a good insight into this understanding of salvation. For instance, Psalm 34:6 relates the cries of an individual in trouble who cries to the Lord and gets delivered from his troubles. An alternative framework for understanding salvation among the ancient Israelites involves examining its existential significance within their lived experience. For them, salvation held profound ontological value precisely because it manifested in concrete, tangible realities rather than abstract theological concepts. As Grogan remarks, "In the O.T. the great saving deeds of God are accomplished for the nation as such and with a view to a physical salvation."²⁵ Salvation guaranteed life as it marked the transition from danger to safety. The concept of salvation, therefore, is not monolithic but develops across Israel's history, reflecting God's covenantal faithfulness in various forms, including military rescue (Judg. 2:16), personal deliverance from distress (Ps. 34:6), and national restoration (Isa. 45:17).

John Wesley's theological framework, particularly his emphasis on prevenient grace, justification, and entire sanctification, provides a constructive lens for interpreting Old Testament salvation. Wesley affirmed that God's salvific work was operative long before Christ, arguing that the Israelites experienced a form of prevenient grace that is God's initiating mercy that enables response to divine deliverance (cf. Exod. 19:4; Deut. 7:8).²⁶ The Exodus narrative, for instance, demonstrates not only physical liberation but also a relational salvation that is God's act of forming a covenant people (Exod. 24:3–8), foreshadowing Wesley's concept of social holiness.²⁷ Moreover, Wesleyan theology aligns with the Old Testament's existential dimension of salvation. Just as the Psalms depict

²⁴ P. Victor Prema Sagar, "'Salvation' in the Old Testament" *Indian Journal of Theology* 18, no. 2-3 (1969):197.

²⁵ Geoffrey W. Grogan, "The Experience of Salvation in the Old and New Testaments," *Vox Evangelica* 5, (1967): 7.

²⁶ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 45.

²⁷ Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 112.

God delivering individuals from sin's consequences (Ps. 32:3–5), Wesley stressed that salvation is both present (scriptural holiness) and transformative, which leads to ethical renewal.²⁸ This resonates with the prophetic call for justice (Amos 5:24) and the wisdom tradition's emphasis on righteous living (Prov. 2:20–22).

The Old Testament's portrayal of salvation as physical and communal (e.g., the Exodus) finds a Wesleyan counterpart in the idea of entire sanctification, a holistic redemption affecting body, soul, and society. For Wesley, salvation was never merely forensic (legal pardon) but therapeutic (healing from sin's power). This mirrors the Old Testament's integration of spiritual and material deliverance (e.g., healing in Ps. 103:3; agricultural blessing in Lev. 26:4–5).

Reading Old Testament salvation through a Wesleyan lens illuminates its continuity with New Testament soteriology while honouring its historical particularity. Wesley's emphasis on grace-enabled response and holistic redemption underscores that Israel's salvation was both a divine act and covenantal partnership, which is a paradigm that challenges contemporary Christians to view environmental crises like *galamsey* not just as policy failures, but as theological failures requiring repentance and restorative justice.

The Wisdom of Proverbs 2

Depending on the titles, seven collections make up the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 2 is part of the first collection (Proverbs 1–9), which serves as an introduction to the entire book. Two main literary forms make up the first collection: lectures and wisdom poems. Proverbs 2 is a lecture, a unique form of the lecture as it deals with no explicit or practical wisdom, but the value of wisdom in general terms. Perhaps this lofty goal accounts for its strange structure among the lectures. As Fox indicates, Proverbs 2 seems to have a different purpose from the rest of the lectures²⁹; it aims to “encourage the pupil in the search for wisdom”.³⁰ Wisdom is itself the object of the pursuit, the gem to be sought for, the reward after a diligent search.

Several patterns or structures have been proposed for Proverbs 2 based on appearance, content, and form. On appearance, scholars have observed that the twenty-two lines of the saying correspond to the twenty letters in the Hebrew alphabet.³¹ However, the saying is not an acrostic poem, since each successive line does not begin with the next letter of the alphabet. Two Hebrew letters (*aleph* and *lamend*) structure the saying into two main parts (vv. 1–11 and vv. 12–22), with further subdivisions. On content, many agree that the saying is one sustained conditional sentence. There is, therefore, a dyadic structure of protasis and apodosis.³² On the form of the saying, as an instruction or lecture, it follows the other lectures in having a threefold division: exordium, lesson, and conclusion. I follow Fox's threefold division, but with some modifications as illustrated below. I employ literary analysis in my reading.

Exordium

vv. 1–4: being receptive to wisdom

vv. 5–11: leads to knowledge of God and right way of living

Lesson

vv. 12–15: and results in protection from the wicked men

vv. 16–19: and protection from the adulteress

Conclusion

vv. 20–22: so to escape death to enjoy life

²⁸ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (London: Printed by J. Paramore, 1741), 23.

²⁹ The lecture also known as Instruction is one of the major literary forms in Prov 1–9. It comes in the form of a father or teacher providing lessons to the son or student. See Michael V. Fox, “Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116, no. 4 (1997):614–615.

³⁰ Fox, “The Pedagogy of Proverbs 2,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113, no. 2 (1994):234.

³¹ Roland E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 56; *Word Biblical Commentary: Proverbs* (Word, Incorporated. 2002), 14; Patrick W. Skehan, *Studies in Israelite Poetry & Wisdom* (CBA, 1971), 9–10.

³² Fox, “Pedagogy of Proverbs 2,” 236.

Exordium (vv. 1-11)

The first part of the exordium (vv. 1-4) relays a series of conditional clauses that serve to induce the son towards the pursuit of wisdom. Discipline emerges strongly as an essential quality one needs to attain wisdom. With a commitment towards the goal of wisdom, the son needs to go through a series of actions. This pursuit is not a carefree or cursory examination; rather, it is a serious and purposeful engagement, requiring the right attitude for success. The father's rhetoric is framed with a series of verbs that seek to highlight the son's actions in the process of pursuing wisdom. Verbs, like *receive* (tiqah), *treasure* (tišpon), *inclining* (tatteh), and *call out* (tiqrāh), are lined up to underscore the son's responsibility in attaining wisdom. The effectiveness of the father's rhetoric can also be traced in his clever use of different nouns for wisdom. First, he refers to *my words* ('āmārāy) and *my commandments* (mišwotay), emphasizing the source of the wisdom as coming from him as an experienced and elderly individual who possesses a wealth of knowledge. Then he uses the terms *wisdom* (ḥokmāh), *understanding* (təvunāh), and *insight* (bīnāh), typical wisdom terms, and links them to his words and commandments. What constitutes wisdom, therefore, is the knowledge that lies in his words and instructions. Finally, the father employs metaphor to depict wisdom as *silver* (kesef) and *hidden treasures* (matmōnīm). This is a move that informs the son that wisdom is not easily attainable. Another rhetorical move by the father is the role he assigns to bodily parts in the quest for wisdom. He tells the son to use the *ear* ('ozen), the *heart* (lēv), and the mouth by calling out and raising the voice, the eyes, and by extension the entire body to *seek* (bāqāš) and *search* (ḥāfaš). If the son desires wisdom, he should be prepared to go all out, striving, persevering, and diligently seeking wisdom.

Vv. 5-11 of the exordium is the apodosis that is the logical consequence of the actions contained in the protasis. Thus, if the son can seek diligently for wisdom and is successful, what would he find, and what is the value of what he will find? These questions are addressed in this part of the exordium. Concerning the first question, two things will be discovered by the son: the fear of the Lord and knowledge of God (v. 5) and the values of righteousness, justice, equity, and good path (v.9). It is important to note that the discoveries by the son rests on two pillars of relationships with God and humans. The right relationship with God leads to the benefit of having wisdom. As vv. 6-8 indicate it is the Lord who gives wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. The recipients are the *upright* (yəšārīm), *those who walk blamelessly* (ləholəkē tom), and the *faithful ones* (ḥāsīr). God's wisdom, therefore, creates the necessary traits and dispositions in an individual to relate well with his fellows. Right relationship with humans rests on the principles of *righteousness* (šedeq), *justice* (mišpāt), and *equity* (mēšār). So far, the teacher's view of wisdom shows the triadic relationship between religion, ethics, and community. That is why the knowledge of God predisposes one to act appropriately to promote life in the community.

The value of what the son finds lies in its utility for life. In other words, wisdom is like a shield that safeguards life. This is evidenced by the language of protection or security, which dominates the father's argument. In vv. 7-8, for instance, words and phrases such as *shield* (māgēn), *guarding* (linšor), and *preserving* (yišmor) reveal God's proactive and sustained interest in the wellbeing of his followers. For the father, divine protection is guaranteed when one acquires wisdom; and what is better than God himself watching over you? We must note the link between wisdom's benefit and ethical behavior, as all the recipients of divine protection are of right ethical behavior (*those who walk blamelessly*; *faithful ones*). This cooperation between wisdom and ethics can only be successful when wisdom is able to gain access to the seats of reasoning (*heart* – lēv) and (*soul* – nefeš).

Lesson

In the exordium, the son is encouraged to search for wisdom, which is the fear of the Lord and God's knowledge, a disposition that creates ethical consciousness. When wisdom is found, that is when the son is able to internalize the knowledge of God by acting in a just and ethical manner, then God will watch over him and guard his ways. With this foundation laid, the father now focuses on the actual danger the son faces. The lesson of this poem, therefore, details the forces of chaos that threaten the son's life and by extension the community. Like the exordium, the lesson is in two parts: vv. 12-15 which deal with the wicked people and vv. 16-19 which deal with the loose woman.

With vivid imagery expressed through different metaphors, vv. 12-15 focus on the danger posed by the wicked men. Opening the unit is the key word *ləhaššīlākā* (delivering you). As a verb, *ləhaššīlākā* may refer to *ḥokmah* (wisdom in v.10) or *məzimmāh* (discretion in v.11) and *təvūnāh* (understanding in v.11). Whatever its referent

may be, there is a salvific meaning intended by the sage. Wisdom and her attendant attributes have the means of rescuing the son, although significantly this rescuing is not from the direct harm of wicked men, but from their ways (*derek*). The danger is the potential for the son to fall into the way of the wicked, to be part of the wicked men and engage in their acts –to also become a wicked man. To prevent this the sage gives a terrible description of these wicked men. First, they speak perversely (*mədabēr tahpukōt* – v12); an important description that highlights their quality of convincing innocent people to join them. Then they reverse God's order by choosing darkness (*hōšek*) and forsaking uprightness (*yošer*). After siding against God, these men revel in their ways; they carry out their evil deeds with pleasure (v.14).

V.15 concludes the unit and it is clear now that the sage is concerned about the son's direction and course of life. Two words – 'oraḥ and ma'gāl –in addition to the word *derek* allude to this. As Suzanna Millar explains, the word 'path' as alluded to by the Hebrew terms above opens up a metaphoric world of the relationship between one's behaviour and the consequences thereof.³³ For the wicked men, they have become twisted or crooked in their ways. They are forces of chaos as they turn everything upside down and inside out, seeing what is right as wrong, and the wrong as right. A wise son steers his ways away from such a course of life.

In vv 16-19, the son is this time being saved (that is rescued - *hašīl*) from the loose (strange) woman.³⁴ In other words, wisdom empowers the son to reject the strange woman. Her danger is mainly realized in her speech, her *smooth words* (*'āmārēhā heḥelīqāh*). Her words characterise her as an unfaithful wife, one who abandons her partner (v. 17). As vividly demonstrated in 7:14-20, her seductive speech "reinforces the subtlety and perversion of her words", a trait shared by the wicked men (cf. 1:11-15).³⁵ Although the threat posed by the strange woman appears to be more serious than the wicked men as Murphy notes, the two are intricately connected by the father's diction with words such as *who forsake* (*ha'ozevet*) and *delivering you* (*ləhašīlākā*).³⁶ It is the strange woman's path, however, that leads to death (v.18). This allusion to death accentuates her potent danger, thus the father is emphatic with his advice that *all* (*kol*) who succumb to her never gain their life back (v.19). They either die physically or, as Murphy suggests, other possibilities such as as spiritual death are opened.

Conclusion (vv. 20-22)

The conclusion raises two important motifs: way/path and land. These have been put in a binary structure of the fate of the upright versus that of the wicked. The son is encouraged to take after the former, the upright, by engaging in two main acts; *walk* (*tēlēk*) and *keep* (*tišmor*). First, he is to follow the example (*walk in the way*) of the good. Living by the standards of wisdom is not an uncharted path; others have done it, and the son can emulate their examples. In following the example, he is never to transgress or for once forsake that example, that is why he is encouraged to *keep* the paths (v.20), unlike the wicked *who forsake* the paths of the upright (cf. v.13). Then the reward for the son, as has been for the upright, will be the *land* (*'ereš*). The blameless and upright *abide* (*šākan*) and *remain* (*yātar*) in it (v.21). In other words, the land becomes their possession. They inherit God's promise to the fathers of Israel. The wicked, on the other hand, will be *cut off* (*kārat*) and *rooted out* (*nāsaḥ*) of it. Not only do they become the reject of God, but their entire existence is jeopardized. It is now over to the son to choose one of these paths, having in mind that one path guarantees existence in the land while the other leads to one's separation from it.

Proverbs 2, Salvation and the *Galamsey* Menace

This section critically examines the hermeneutical intersection between Proverbs 2's soteriological framework and contemporary environmental ethics, with particular attention to Ghana's *galamsey* crisis. Building upon political ecology's analytical triad of governance structures, socioeconomic inequalities, and contested power relations in resource extraction,³⁷ the analysis engages African ecotheological perspectives while interrogating the Ghanaian

³³ Suzanna R. Millar. "The Path Metaphor and the Construction of a *Schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre* in Proverbs 10:1-22:16," *Vetus Testamentum* 69, no. 1 (2019):96-98.

³⁴ Although the NRSV translates the Hebrew *zārah* as 'loose', I prefer the meaning 'strange'.

³⁵ Wendy L. Widder, "The *Peti* and the Power of Speech in Proverbs 1–9," *OTE* 35, no. 1 (2022), 124.

³⁶ Murphy, *Proverbs*, 17.

³⁷ Paul Robbins, *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 87-89; Hilson, "Gavin Hilson, "Championing the Rhetoric? 'Corporate Social Responsibility' in Ghana's Mining Sector," *Resources Policy* 53 (2017): 155, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resourpol.2017.06.011>.

church's paradoxical role as both moral arbiter and complicit actor.³⁸ Recent scholarship reveals how ecclesiastical elites' entanglement with mining interests³⁹ and the prosperity gospel's discursive sanitization of extractivism⁴⁰ have compromised institutional witness. I argue that Proverbs 2's conceptualization of wisdom as simultaneously cosmological (vv. 6-8), ethical (vv. 9-11), and ecological (vv. 20-22) provides a transformative paradigm for addressing these theological and political-economic complexities. The text's emphasis on divine wisdom as the foundation of just land relations (v. 21) challenges threefold: (1) the neoliberal extractivist paradigm, (2) traditional authority complicity, and (3) the church's failure to subvert what Kwame Nkrumah termed "the neocolonial mineral complex."⁴¹ By framing environmental predation as fundamentally foolish (Prov. 1:32) rather than merely illegal, this wisdom approach proposes a salvation ethic that converts the church from potential accomplice to ecological advocate through radical land discipleship.⁴²

This analysis engages Proverbs 2 through a hermeneutical lens that acknowledges the dynamic interplay between text, reader, and context. While the sage of Proverbs 2 does not explicitly frame wisdom in terms of salvation, the text invites an interpretive dialogue that allows contemporary concerns, such as Ghana's ecological crisis, to shape its meaning. The relationship between wisdom and salvation in Proverbs 2 can be traced through three key motifs, each offering insights for Christian responses to *galamsey*.

The first is that a disciplined human agency (Prov 2:1-4) is needed in the active pursuit of Salvation. The father's imperatives (*incline your ear, search for wisdom, and seek it like silver*) position salvation as an engaged, effortful process. Sagar highlights the reflexive nuance of the Niphal of *yash'a*, suggesting that human cooperation is integral to divine deliverance.⁴³ This challenges passive piety, emphasizing instead epistemic vigilance that is a call to intentional moral and ethical discernment. In the context of Ghana's environmental degradation, this motif critiques superficial religiosity that neglects active ecological stewardship. Churches must move beyond mere condemnation of *galamsey* and cultivate a theologically informed praxis of environmental responsibility.

The second is that salvation is divinely and ethically framed (vv. 5-8). For instance, v. 6 indicates God gives wisdom, but he gives it to the upright (v.7). Wisdom's source in Yahweh (v. 6) tethers salvation to *covenantal ethics*. The "fear of the LORD" (v. 5) transforms cognition, as Waltke notes: "The heart's reorientation enables right perception."⁴⁴ As the first motif highlighted the role humans play in salvation, this motif emphasizes the role of the divine. Prov 21:31 captures the cooperation between humans and God when it says, *The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD*.

The final motif is the value of wisdom in the son's life. In other words, salvation is transformative, and in the context of Ghana's ecological problems, salvation should lead to communal and ecological outcomes. Wisdom's fruits include deliverance from wicked paths (vv. 12-15) and ecological stability (*the upright will inhabit the land*, v. 21). These reveal the material consequences of salvation, which resonate with African cosmology's insistence on land as sacred trust.⁴⁵ When the environment is perceived from this perspective it challenges both neoliberal extractivism and church complicity in environmental harm.

Proverbs 2 presents salvation as a dynamic interplay of human agency, divine wisdom, and ethical transformation. For Ghanaian Christians, this demands a robust engagement with ecological sin—not as a peripheral issue but as a crisis of wisdom. By reclaiming land as covenantal trust and resisting exploitative practices, the church can embody a salvation that is both spiritually redemptive and ecologically just.

³⁸ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *African Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 112-115; Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in the 21st Century: The Contribution of the Pioneers* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2009), 67-71.

³⁹ Seth Agyin-Birikorang, "Silenced Pulpits: Ghanaian Churches and the Mining Crisis," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 24, no. 1 (2021): 34-38.

⁴⁰ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Pentecostalism and the Culture of Extraction in Ghana," *Pneuma* 37 (2015): 112-115.

⁴¹ Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Panaf, 1965), 78.

⁴² Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010), 143-147.

⁴³ Sagar, "Salvation", 199.

⁴⁴ Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 227.

⁴⁵ J. N. K. Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation* (Nairobi: Acton, 1995).

Building on the previous analysis of Proverbs 2, which conceptualizes salvation as an interplay of disciplined human agency, divine wisdom, and ethical transformation, the discussion below applies these motifs to the *galamsey* crisis in Ghana. Specifically, it examines how the Methodist Church Ghana (MCG) can leverage this wisdom framework to combat environmental degradation. Three key motifs, disciplined human agency, divine and ethical framing of salvation, and transformative communal and ecological outcomes, provide a theological and practical roadmap for addressing *galamsey*.

A Wisdom Response: The Methodist Church Ghana's Role in Combating *Galamsey*

Proverbs 2:1-4 underscores salvation as an active, epistemic endeavour, one that requires intentional pursuit of wisdom. Applied to *galamsey*, this demands more than superficial awareness; it necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the socio-political, economic, environmental, and health ramifications of *galamsey*. The MCG has taken preliminary steps in this direction, exemplified by the ecumenical fact-finding mission which included the then-Presiding Bishop Dr. Paul Bofo. Reacting to an uproar by some Ghanaians due to their visit to *galamsey*-affected sites in the Eastern Region, the Bishop said;

“... and I remember very well one of the insults which is our walk to the *galamsey* site. And Ghanians did not understand us, standing at the *galamsey* site and praying. We did not pray for the colour of the water to change, neither did we pray that the earth should be flat to have a smooth place. We did not go there just to pray for praying sake, but went there to see the devastation ourselves, to see the greediness in Ghanians, the selfishness in Ghanians, the unstewardship nature of human beings in Ghana. There we stood and it was all full of tears, to pray unto God to forgive us as a nation, to forgive our greed, to forgive our selfishness, to forgive our destruction of the ecosystem. Forgive us for what Ghanians have done.”⁴⁶

The Bishop's reaction reveals a critical hermeneutical move: theological engagement must be grounded in empirical reality. However, as Ofori et al. note, public environmental literacy in sub-Saharan Africa remains scant.⁴⁷ While media coverage has raised awareness, translating this into actionable knowledge remains a challenge. The MCG must institutionalize environmental education within its catechism, ensuring that ecological ethics become embedded in Christian discipleship.

Proverbs 2:5-8 roots wisdom in the *fear of the Lord*, linking salvation to covenantal ethics. This motif critiques the moral failure of Christian leaders who, despite professing faith, enable *galamsey* through corruption or apathy. The text's emphasis on divine justice (vv. 21-22), where the wicked are *cut off from the land* and the upright *inhabit it*, serves as a stark warning. The MCG must confront ecclesial complicity in environmental sin. If, as statistics suggest, 71% of Ghanaians identify as Christians, the Church's failure to model ecological integrity undermines its prophetic voice. A green ecclesiology is needed in a way that Church practices (e.g., energy use, waste management) reflect eco-stewardship. Again, leadership accountability should be prioritized, with the clergy audited for ties to extractive industries. Also, theological training should integrate environmental ethics in a way that frames *galamsey* as a sin against God's creation. The MCG's 2021 Arbor Day initiative (planting 1.4 million trees) is a laudable start, but symbolic acts must catalyse systemic change.⁴⁸ The Church should partner with environmental scientists and policymakers to draft faith-based advocacy strategies, ensuring its interventions are both theologically robust and empirically informed.

Proverbs 2:12-22 presents wisdom's fruits as tangible deliverance from wickedness (vv. 12-15) and toward ecological stability (v. 21). This aligns with African cosmologies that view land as a sacred trust.⁴⁹ In Ghana, where

⁴⁶ (@Themethodistchurchghana). n. d. “Presiding's take on Church Leaders Visit to *Galamsey* Site.” Tik Tok, November 28, 2024, accessed 15th April, 2025. <https://www.tiktok.com/@themethodistchurchghana/video/7420455096842063109>

⁴⁷ Benjamin Y. Ofori et al., “Climate Change Knowledge, Attitude and Perception of Undergraduate Students in Ghana.” *PLOS Climate* 2, no. 6 (2023), e0000215. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pclm.0000215>

⁴⁸ NewsWatch GH, “Methodist Church Ghana to Plant 1.4 Million Trees in 2021,” *News Watch Ghana*, June 2021, accessed 20th January, 2025 <https://newswatchgh.com/methodist-church-ghana-to-plant-1-4-million-trees-in-june-2021/>.

⁴⁹ J. N. K. Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation* (Nairobi: Acton, 1995).

galamsey displaces communities and poisons water sources, salvation must manifest in restorative justice. The MCG can operationalize this through several interventions. One is forming advocacy coalitions with other churches and civil organisations. Supporting alternative livelihoods for affected communities, the coalition can lobby for stricter enforcement of mining laws. The MCG can also help in mobilising grassroots support through empowering lay members to monitor and report illegal mining activities, bridging the gap between doctrine and practice. In addition, the church, reflecting on the need for ecological repentance, needs to incorporate environmental confession into liturgy, as exemplified by Bishop Bofo's prayer at the *galamsey* site.

Proverbs 2 offers the MCG a hermeneutic of salvation that is active, ethical, and transformative. The *galamsey* crisis needs concerted effort from all stakeholders, including the churches. The MCG particularly needs to employ epistemic vigilance by moving beyond awareness to critical environmental education, master moral courage by holding leaders accountable, and promote eco-stewardship and communal restoration by advocating for policies that prioritize ecological and social flourishing.

Conclusion

The interplay between wisdom and salvation, as illuminated by Proverbs 2, offers a transformative framework for addressing Ghana's *galamsey* crisis. John Goldingay's insights on the resurgence of wisdom traditions underscore their relevance in contexts of societal breakdown⁵⁰, and in the case of Ghana, precisely the conditions exacerbated by illegal mining, where environmental degradation, economic desperation, and ethical erosion converge. Wisdom theology, with its emphasis on human agency, experiential learning, and this-worldly concern, provides a vital corrective to abstract or passive religiosity, demanding instead an engaged faith that bridges divine truth and ecological justice.

Proverbs 2 models this integration. Marked by disciplined effort (vv. 1-4), covenantal fear of the Lord (vv. 5-8), and transformative ethical outcomes (vv. 12-22), the son's pursuit of wisdom mirrors the path Ghanaian Christians must take to combat *galamsey*. This sapiential vision aligns with Willis Jenkins' assertion that wisdom "transfigures the world"⁵¹ by linking divine agency to creaturely flourishing. For The Methodist Church Ghana (MCG), this means the church reflects on the following.

1. Be guided by epistemic responsibility: This can be achieved by moving beyond awareness to critical environmental discipleship, where ecological ethics are woven into preaching, education, and advocacy.
2. Lead with moral courage: Leaders, including the clergy, should be held accountable for complicity in environmental harm, and the theology of eco-stewardship should be modelled in church practices.
3. Champion communal restoration: Advocating for policies that prioritize sustainable livelihoods and partnering with scientists, activists, and policymakers to heal ravaged ecosystems.

The universal scope of wisdom, as noted by O'Collins⁵², further underscores its potential to unite diverse stakeholders (faith communities, traditional leaders, and secular institutions) in a shared mission to reclaim Ghana's land from destruction. The MCG's Arbor Day initiative exemplifies this potential, but lasting change requires institutionalizing ecological repentance, turning prayer into policy, and lament into action. Ultimately, Proverbs 2 presents a stark choice: wisdom leads to life; folly, to death. The *galamsey* crisis is a test of Ghana's collective wisdom, and the church needs to respond. By grounding its response in the triad message of Proverbs 2 (human effort, divine wisdom, and ethical transformation), the MCG can help forge a future where *the upright will inhabit the land* (Prov 2:21), and salvation is measured not only in souls saved but in rivers restored, forests renewed, and communities redeemed.

⁵⁰ John Goldingay, "The 'Salvation History' Perspective and the 'Wisdom' Perspective within the Context of Biblical Theology," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 51, no.4 (1979):198-198.

⁵¹ Willis Jenkins, "The Strategy of Ecological Spirituality," in *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology*. (Oxford Academic, 2008), accessed 13th January, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195328516.003.0005> (112).

⁵² Gerald O'Collins, "Universal wisdom," in *Salvation for All: God's Other Peoples*, (2008), online edn, Oxford Academic, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199238903.003.0015>,

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