

A REMARK ON HUMAN SUFFERING AND PROVIDENCE ACCORDING TO THOMAS AQUINAS AND ANTÔNIO VIEIRA¹

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Abstract: A fundamental thesis for the Christian tradition is that *everything that happens in the world happens under the providence of God*. Thus, even the suffering of human beings must also be understood under the light of the notion of providence, and the suffering of a just person like Job or of a whole human community like the slaves in colonial Brazil seems particularly perplexing. One recent interpretation stresses the therapeutic function of adversities. A careful reading of some texts by Thomas Aquinas and Antônio Vieira points otherwise. These authors insist rather on the human limitations in fully understanding divine providence as well as on the necessity of having faith in the providence of God.

Keywords: Divine providence, human suffering, job, Thomas Aquinas, Antonio Vieira.

INTRODUCTION

I would modestly like to examine some specific and sensitive points related to the thesis *Everything that happens in the world happens under the providence of God*. More precisely, I will inquire about how Thomas Aquinas in his *Commentary on the*

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Book of Job understands the problem of human suffering regarding providence. Moreover, accepting the challenge to present some point in connection with the colonial scholastics, I will also try to examine very briefly some possible similarities shared by Thomas Aquinas and Antonio Vieira on the subject. The proper comparison would be better shown as a comparison between some reading of Aquinas and some reading of Vieira. I have no intention to be exhaustive with regard to the interpretation of the vast writings of both authors (nor I would have the capacity to do it). Bearing this in mind, I will confine myself to a limited group of texts, more specifically, on three sermons Vieira wrote in which there are references to the situation of the African slaves in Brazil. The most relevant text of Aquinas on the subject, albeit not the only one, is the *Expositio super Iob ad litteram*. Because it is such a difficult subject, I will use a contemporary approach given by an eminent professor as a sort of compass, but I do not necessarily agree with it.

My interest on the subject is both theological and ethical. And for that I cannot but excuse myself, since maybe the intention of this article would be to speculate, as a student of Thomas Aquinas, the way these two approaches may shed light on each other. This research is obviously not finished yet. The effort to understand the coexistence of divine providence and man's free will is, for instance, I believe, a promising way to apprehend both concepts. Besides, as in the catalogue of virtues held by Aquinas three theological virtues belong in the domain of Ethics, it also seems promising that an effort to acquire knowledge of the divine attributes gives the ethical inquirer at least some insights. I also wonder whether here too one must proceed according to the general

methodical guideline of taking first the way the things are better known to us before beginning the consideration of the divine.

THE SUFFERING OF JOB AS AQUINAS UNDERSTANDS IT

As we know from the biblical narrative, the devil received permission from God to attack Job on different levels, to test his character and his loyalty to God. For the sake of clarity, we will now restate the adversities that Job then had to face on account of this purported “bet” between God and the devil. We follow the order given in the biblical text.

First, Job loses his oxen (his five hundred yoke of oxen) and his donkeys (his five hundred she-asses). And also his employees. The Sabeans rushed in, and took all away, and slew the servants with the sword. (Job 1,15). Then The fire of God fell from heaven, and striking the sheep and the servants, hath consumed them. (Job 1,16). Job had seven thousand sheep. Then The Chaldeans made three troops, and have fallen upon the camels, and taken them; moreover, they have slain the servants with the sword. (Job 1,17). Job had three thousand camels.

After the loss of his whole property and employees, Job loses his children. I quote the words of a messenger to Job: A violent wind came on a sudden from the side of the desert, and shook the four corners of the house, and it fell upon thy children, and they are dead. (Job 1, 19).

Because this first cycle of adversities was not enough to make Job to blaspheme, as was the intention of Satan, a second wave of adversities fell upon Job. *So Satan went forth from*

the presence of the Lord, and struck Job with a very grievous ulcer, from the sole of the foot even to the top of his head. (Job 2, 7). Moreover, facing the situation, the wife of Job said he should curse God and die. (Job 2, 9).

As consequences of the waves of adversities (that is, the loss of animals, the loss of employees, the loss of children, and the loss of his own health), Job also lost his prestige, his reputation in the community, he lost the perseverance in faith of his wife, and the credibility among the three friends that came to console him.

Examining the subject, Professor Eleonore Stump had the following important insight: none of these losses in fact destroyed what stands for true happiness in Thomas's understanding (STUMP 2003, 464-465). The permission of God for Satan to strike Job should not be taken as an objection against the perfect goodness or justice of God. What Stump tries to show is that all these adversities should not be understood as really jeopardizing happiness. We naturally take Job's losses to constitute the destruction of his happiness. But if we look at the chapters on happiness in *Summa contra Gentiles* (SGC), we find Aquinas arguing for the following claims: happiness does not consist in wealth [SCG III.30], happiness does not consist in the goods of the body such as health [SCG III.32], and happiness does not consist in honors [SCG III.28]. (STUMP 2003, 464).

Stump wants to show that it is not immediately clear, contrary to what we unreflectively assume, that Job's happiness is destroyed in consequence of not having these things. (STUMP 2003, 464). And because happiness does not consist in health, honor, or riches, then it does not follow that a

person who does not have these things is without happiness. (STUMP 2003, 464).

The very dense argumentation of Professor Stump, which I will not reproduce completely here, moves on and reaches two interesting but problematic conclusions: (i) The traditional reading is misleading: the suffering that strikes Job is after all not so grave. (ii) The suffering is in fact a help to human beings, a kind of *chemotherapy for spiritual cancer, which infects all human beings, even those as pure and innocent by human standards* (STUMP 2003, 469).

The first conclusion deserves a digression. Professor Stump herself admits that particularly the loss of his children causes pain to Job, *a pain in the absence of a person whom one loves* (STUMP 2003, 465). In the same context, she says *Aquinas is not a Stoic*. This last remark send us to the way Aquinas speaks about the Stoics, not with reference to himself, but in order to distinguish Aristotle from them. This happens a few times in his works. In commenting the first book of *Nicomachean Ethics*, where we find the discussion about the impact of chance and the wheel of fortune on happiness (1100b22-1100b32),⁴ Aquinas explicitly mentions the opinion of the Stoics in comparison with the position of Aristotle:

Sententia Libri Ethicorum, I, Lectio 16:

⁴ Text of Aristotle 1100b22-1100b32: Now many events happen by chance, and events differing in importance; small pieces of good fortune or of its opposite clearly do not weigh down the scales of life one way or the other, but a multitude of great events if they turn out well will make life more blessed (for not only are they themselves such as to add beauty to life, but the way a man deals with them may be noble and good), while if they turn out ill they crush and maim blessedness; for they both bring pain with them and hinder many activities. Yet even in these nobility shines through, when a man bears with resignation many great misfortunes, not through insensibility to pain but through nobility and greatness of soul. (Translated by W. D. Ross)

<p><i>Si autem accidant e converso, ut scilicet sint multa et magna mala, inferunt quidem felici quamdam tribulationem exterius et conturbationem interius; quia interius inferunt tristitias, et exterius impediunt a multis bonis operationibus. Non tamen per ea tollitur totaliter operatio virtutis; quia etiam ipsis infortuniis virtus bene utitur. Et sic refulget in eis bonum virtutis, inquantum scilicet aliquis faciliter sustinet multa et magna infortunia: non propter hoc quod non sentiat dolorem seu tristitiam, sicut Stoici posuerunt; sed quia tamquam virilis et magnanimus, huiusmodi tristitiis eius ratio non succumbit.</i></p>	<p>195. If on the contrary the evils should be frequent and great, they will cause the happy man external annoyance and internal affliction, because internally they bring about sadness and externally they hinder good works. However they do not eliminate virtuous action entirely, because virtue makes good use even of misfortunes themselves. In this way the good of virtue shines forth insofar as a man gracefully endures frequent and great misfortunes, not because he may not feel the sorrow or sadness as the Stoics held but, being courageous and magnanimous, his reason does not succumb to such afflictions.⁵</p>
<p><i>Haec enim fuit diversitas inter Stoicos et Peripateticos, quorum princeps fuit Aristoteles, quod Stoici posuerunt tristitiam nullo modo cadere in virtuosum, quia in corporalibus et exterioribus rebus nullum bonum hominis consistere ponebant; Peripatetici autem ponebant in homine virtuoso tristitiam ratione moderatam, non autem quae rationem subverteret. Ponebant enim quod in corporalibus et exterioribus rebus, aliquod hominis bonum consistat, non quidem maximum, sed minimum, in quantum scilicet adiuvat et decorat virtutem.</i></p>	<p>196. This, in fact, was the difference between the Stoics and the Peripatetics, whose leader was Aristotle. The Stoics held that sorrow in no way afflicts a virtuous man, because, in their view, corporeal or external things are not in any sense a good of man. The Peripatetics, on the contrary, said that a virtuous man is affected by sadness, yet this does not overwhelm reason but is moderated by it. In their opinion corporeal and external things do constitute some good of man, not the greatest but the least and this in the degree that they help and adorn virtue.</p>

In fact, the position of the Stoics, as it is reconstructed

⁵ In all instances, the basis for the English translation of the *Sententia Libri Ethicorum* was taken from the version of C. I. Litzinger *St. Thomas Aquinas Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (1993).

by Aquinas when commenting Aristotle, is that there is no human good but virtue, and that virtue does not host any movement of the passions.

Sententia Libri Ethicorum, II, Lectio 3:

<p><i>Et ex hac occasione fuerunt moti Stoici ut dicerent quod virtutes sunt quaedam impassibilitates et quietes. Quia enim videbant quod homines fiunt mali per delectationes et tristitias, consequens esse putaverunt quod virtus in hoc consistat quod omnino transmutationes passionum cessent. Sed in hoc non bene dixerunt quod totaliter a virtuoso voluerunt excludere animae passiones. Pertinet enim ad bonum rationis, ut reguletur per eam appetitus sensitivus, cuius motus sunt passiones. Unde ad virtutem non pertinet quod excludat omnes passiones, sed solum inordinatas, quae scilicet sunt ut non oportet et quando non oportet, et quaecumque alia adduntur pertinentia ad alias circumstantias. Ex his ergo concludit supponendum esse quod circa voluptates et tristitias virtus optima operetur, malitia autem, quae est habitus virtuti contrarius, mala.</i></p>	<p>272. The Stoics took occasion of this⁶ to say that virtues are certain quiescent and passionless dispositions. The reason was that they saw men become evil through pleasures and sorrows, and consequently they thought that virtue consists in the total cessation of the changes of the passions. But in this they erred wishing to exclude entirely the passions of the soul from a virtuous man. It belongs, of course, to the good of reason to regulate the sensitive appetite—and the passions are movements of this appetite. Hence it is not the business of virtue to exclude all, but only the inordinate passions, that is, those which are not as they ought to be and are not at the time they ought to be (he adds also all the other things belonging to the remaining circumstances). From this he then concludes that we must suppose that virtue should work what is best regarding pleasures and sorrows but vice, which is the habit opposed to virtue should work what is evil.</p>
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⁶ SLE, II, n.271: (...) that men become evil through the deterioration of virtue from the fact that they pursue the pleasures and steer clear of the sorrows which they ought not, or when they ought not, or in some other way by which one may deviate from right reason. / Videmus autem quod homines fiunt pravi per corruptionem virtutis ex eo quod sequuntur voluptates et fugiunt tristitias vel quas non oportet vel quando non oportet, vel qualitercumque aliter deviet aliquis a ratione recta.

The same issue appears again in other passages in the works of Aquinas,⁷ as for instance when he treats the special virtue of courage, and once again in the *Commentary on Job*:

Expositio super Iob ad litteram, Caput 1:

<p><i>Enumerata adversitate beati Iob, agitur hic de patientia quam in adversitate monstravit. Sciendum autem est ad evidentiam eorum quae hic dicuntur quod circa corporalia bona et circa animi passiones antiquorum philosophorum diversa opinio fuit. Nam Stoici dixerunt bona exteriora nulla bona hominis esse, et quod pro eorum amissione nulla tristitia animo sapientes poterat inesse; Peripateticorum vero Sententia fuit quod bona exteriora sunt quidem aliqua hominis bona, non quidem principalia sed quae instrumentaliter ordinata ad principale hominis bonum, quod est bonum mentis: et propter hoc sapientem in amissionibus exteriorum bonorum moderate tristari concedebant, ita scilicet quod per tristitiam ratio non absorberetur ut a rectitudine declinaret. Et haec sententia</i></p>	<p>After the adversity of blessed Job has been narrated, there is a discussion here of the patience which he demonstrated in adversity. Now as evidence of the things which are said here, one should know that concerning corporeal goods and concerning the passions of the spirit the opinion of ancient philosophers was different. For the Stoics said that external goods are not the goods of man and that there could be no sadness in the spirit of the wise man over their loss. The opinion of the Peripatetics, however, was that external goods are indeed a kind of goods for man-not his principal goods, of course, but ordered as it were instrumentally toward the principal good of man, which is the good of his</p>
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⁷ It is important to mention the case of Priamus, that Aristotle call into question as he deals with the problem of the impact of great misfortunes on the life of a virtuous man. SLE, I, n.178: *Sometimes it happens that a man has had an abundance of external goods all his life, and in old age falls into great misfortune as Priam did, according to the epic poem of Homer. No one will call that man happy who has enjoyed such goods of fortune and ends his life in misery. The fact that one has been reduced from great prosperity to extreme wretchedness seems to add to his misery. / Contingit enim quandoque quod aliquis, qui per totam vitam suam habuit maximam abundantiam exteriorum bonorum, in senectute incidat in maximas calamitates, sicut de Priamo narrat Homerus in versibus heroicis. Nullus autem dicet eum esse felicem qui talibus usus est bonis fortunis et postea finit miserabiliter. Quia hoc ad augmentum miseriae pertinere videtur, quod aliquis de magna prosperitate in magnam miseriam deveniat.* The secondary literature on this topic is vast. For a classic approach, see John M. Cooper, *Aristotle on the goods of fortune* (1985). For an updated overview in Portuguese, see Thaiany Rafaela Wagner, *A boa vida e os seus componentes: há espaço para o que não pode ser controlado? Relacionando eudaimonia e tykhe* (2021).

<p><i>verior est et ecclesiasticae doctrinae concordat, ut patet per Augustinum in libro de civitate Dei.</i></p>	<p>mind. And on this account they conceded that the wise man is moderately saddened at the loss of external goods, namely, in such a way that his reason is not engrossed through sadness so that it deviates from straightforwardness. And this opinion is the truer one and agrees with Church doctrine, as is clear in Augustine in his book <i>City of God</i> [IX.4].</p>
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The thesis attributed by Aquinas to the Stoics is therefore that *external goods are not the goods of man and that there could be no sadness in the spirit of the wise man over their loss*. In this sense, it is right saying Aquinas is not a Stoic. As was said before, the virtuous man endures great misfortunes, not because he does not feel sorrow or sadness, but because his reason does not succumb to such afflictions. But the sadness for his losses is plainly valid. The conclusion that the sort of human suffering which strikes Job is not after all so grave seems then only partially sound. On the one hand misfortunes do not destroy the possibility of perfect happiness, on the other hand they are indeed cause of terrible suffering even for the virtuous man. The sufferings Job go through must be taken as horrible, otherwise his narrative would be of no significance.

As to the second conclusion – that human suffering is a kind of chemotherapy for our spiritual cancer (STUMP 1993, 344) – it seems that Professor Stump is arguing for a comprehensive explanation for the human suffering, what curiously appears at first sight to endorse the opinion of the three friends who came to console Job. This is curious because Professor Stump is quite aware that the opinions of the

friends are not without flaws, and if we take the book of Job as a *disputatio*, the *determinatio magistralis* is not in the voice of the consolers, nor even in the voice of Job. In fact, she does not see herself as sustaining the same thesis as the consolers, but we have this impression, and that is because we see her statement that Job too *was infected with the radical human tendencies towards evil* as problematic in face of the very text of Aquinas, as we will show later. I quote Professor Stump:

On Aquinas's view, all human beings have a terminal cancer of soul, a proneness to evil which invariably eventuates in sin and which in the right circumstances blows up into monstrosity. On his view, even 'our senses and our thoughts are prone to evil'.⁸ The pure and innocent among human beings are no exception to this claim. When the biblical text says that Job was righteous, Aquinas takes the text to mean that Job was pure by human standards. By the objective, uncurved standards of God, even Job was infected with the radical human tendencies towards evil [In Job 9,24-30]. No human being who remains uncured of this disease can see God. On Aquinas's view, then, the primary obstacle to contemplation of God, in which human happiness consists, is the sinful character of human beings. (STUMP 2003, 465-466).

Our suspicion that this statement may not be totally precise arouse from two points: (i) The explanation of Aquinas in commenting the description of Job given by the Bible, and (ii) the way the biblical text itself explains the opinion God has about Job, also commented by Aquinas.

The biblical narrative precisely begins with the description of Job:

⁸ In Heb. 12, Lectio 2, n.674: *Et quia sensus nostri, et cogitatio nostra prona sunt ad malum, ut dicitur Gen. VIII, 21, ideo dominus castigat nos, ut retrahat nos a malo. / And because our senses and thoughts are prone to evil (Gen. 6:5), the Lord chastises us to draw from evil.*

<i>Vir erat in terra Hus nomine Iob et erat vir ille simplex et rectus ac timens Deum et recedens a malo. (Iob 1,1)</i>	There was a man in the land of Uz by the name of Job, and that man was simple and straightforward, fearing God and withdrawing from evil. (Job 1,1)
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The explanation of the characteristics of Job given by Aquinas is remarkable. He explains each attribute in detail and organically. Moreover, he gives at the very start of the commentary the reason of that characterization, and then it becomes absolutely clear that the adversities did not happen in reaction to any sin whatsoever:

Expositio super Iob ad litteram, Caput 1:

Et ne aliquis adversitates quae postmodum inducuntur pro peccatis huius viri ei accidisse crederet, consequenter describitur eius virtus, per quam a peccatis demonstratur immunis.	And lest anyone believe that the adversities which are introduced later happened to this man because of his sins, next is described Job's virtue, by reason of which he is shown to be free from sin. ⁹
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If the book of Job is a treatise on providence (more precisely, on how divine providence works), as Aquinas says it is a few lines above the last quote,¹⁰ and if Aquinas is right in taking the case of Job as the hardest test to divine providence, because *the affliction of just men is what seems to exclude the most divine providence from human affairs*,¹¹ then a description of the

⁹ In all instances, the English translation of the *Expositio super Iob ad litteram* was taken from Anthony Damico's version (1989).

¹⁰ (...) *the whole intention of this book is aimed at showing how human affairs are ruled by divine providence / intentio huius libri tota ordinatur ad ostendendum qualiter res humanae providentia divina regantur*. The intention of the book seems then not **to prove** that human affairs are ruled by divine providence, but to show **how** this is to be understood. That is, in what manner does providence work.

¹¹ *Quia, sicut dictum est, intentio huius libri tota ordinatur ad ostendendum qualiter res humanae providentia divina regantur, praemittitur quasi totius disputationis fundamentum quaedam historia in qua cuiusdam viri iusti multiplex afflictio recitatur: hoc enim est quod maxime videtur divinam providentiam a rebus humanis excludere. Expositio super Iob ad litteram, Caput 1.*

protagonist as really virtuous seems to be absolutely vital for the whole discussion. After all, the great enigma of providence (in human eyes) would be at least partially undermined if the hardest test for it would be the suffering of an ordinary person, full of flaws and feeble. In other words, the question *Why Job suffers?* would have for the Stoics the meaning that Job in fact was not virtuous at all. However, the problem here is to deal with a providence that allows grave suffering to really virtuous or innocent people.

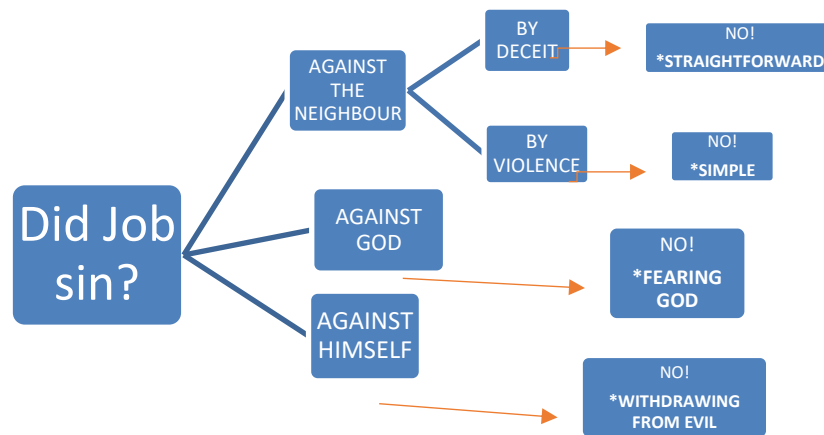
That is the reason why in explaining the meaning of the four predicates settled above (that is: Job was simple, straightforward, fearing God and withdrawing from evil), Aquinas gives us a comprehensive framework:

Expositio super Iob ad litteram, Caput 1:

<p>Sciendum siquidem est hominem tripliciter peccare: sunt enim quaedam peccata quibus peccatur in proximum, sicut homicidia, adulteria, furta et alia huiusmodi; quaedam quibus peccatur in Deum, sicut periurium, sacrilegium, blasphemia et huiusmodi; quaedam quibus unusquisque in se ipsum peccat, secundum illud apostoli Cor. VI 18 <i>qui fornicatur, in corpus suum peccat.</i></p> <p><i>In proximum autem quis peccat dupliciter, occulte per dolum et manifeste per vim; hic autem vir per dolum proximum non circumvenit, unde dicitur et erat vir ille simplex: simplicitas enim proprie dolositati opponitur; nulli violentiam intulit, sequitur enim et rectus: rectitudo enim ad iustitiam proprie</i></p>	<p>One should know, indeed, that a man sins in three ways. For there are certain sins by which he sins against his neighbor, such as murder, adultery, theft, and others of this kind; certain others by which he sins against God, such as perjury, sacrilege, blasphemy, and the like; and certain others by which each man sins against himself, according to the Apostle in I Corinthians 6:18: <i>One who fornicates sins against his own body.</i></p> <p>Now one sins against his neighbor in two ways-covertly by deceit and overtly by violence. This man, however, did not circumvent his neighbor by deceit. Hence is said and that man was simple, for simplicity is properly opposed to deceit. He inflicted violence on no one, for the</p>
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<p><i>pertinet, quae in aequalitate consistit, secundum illud Is. XXVI 7 semita iusti recta est, rectus callis iusti ad inambulandum.</i></p> <p><i>Quod autem in Deum non peccaverit aperte ostenditur per hoc quod subditur ac timens Deum, in quo reverentia ad Deum designatur. Quod etiam in se ipsum non peccaverit ostenditur in hoc quod subditur ac recedens a malo, quia malum odio habuit propter se ipsum, non solum propter nocumentum proximi vel offensam Dei.</i></p>	<p>expression <i>and straightforward</i> follows, for straightforwardness properly pertains to justice, which consists in equity. According to Isaiah 26:7, <i>The path of the just man is straight; straight is the trail of the just man to tread.</i></p> <p>Now that he did not sin against God is clearly shown by the addition <i>fearing God</i>, in which reverence for God is designated. That he also did not sin against himself is shown in the addition <i>and withdrawing from evil</i>, because he hated evil on his own account, not only because of harm to his neighbor or offense against God.</p>
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The following figure illustrates the analytical interpretation of the biblical text by Aquinas:



If the hardest case for the divine attribute of providence is the fact that God wills or at least permits that a loyal servant (a truly virtuous man like Job) suffers terribly, it does not

seem a good interpretation attempting to reduce the integrity of the test-case-personification. Taking the problem in its highest level leads to the acknowledgment that Job has no flaw as to justify some sort of punishment.

As was said before, there is a second reason to be cautious about the affirmation that *even Job was infected with the radical human tendencies towards evil*, maybe not about the affirmation in itself, but about the use of this interpretation in connection with the question of providence.

And the Lord said to him [Satan]: Hast thou considered my servant, Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a simple and upright man, and fearing God, and avoiding evil? (Job 1,8)¹².

The following speech appears after the first wave of adversities:

And the Lord said to Satan: Hast thou considered my servant, Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a man simple and upright, and fearing God, and avoiding evil, and still keeping his innocence? But you stirred Me against him to afflict him in vain. (Job 2,3)¹³.

We said before that the assertion of a radical human tendency towards evil could be in some aspect right, because what Job personifies is at least very rare, if not unique, as the biblical words confirms (*there is none like him in the earth*), so that the assertion may be valid for the majority of mankind. But that is not our point here. The point here is rather that the reasoning about providence as puzzling as it really is must

¹² Job, 1,8: *dixitque Dominus ad eum numquid considerasti servum meum Iob quod non sit ei similis in terra homo simplex et rectus et timens Deum ac recedens a malo.*

¹³ Job 2,3: *et dixit Dominus ad Satan numquid considerasti servum meum Iob quod non sit ei similis in terra vir simplex et rectus timens Deum ac recedens a malo et adhuc retinens innocentiam tu autem commovisti me adversus eum ut adfligerem illum frustra.*

deal with the suffering of someone who is without flaws.¹⁴ If God permits such nasty waves of adversities to fustigate the most virtuous man, a flawless man, the interpretation that God does that to teach Job lessons in order to become what he already is seems not very solid. The commentary of Aquinas on the beginning of the second chapter is quite elucidating too, showing that the adversities did not produce the virtues in Job but rather revealed them.

Expositio super Iob ad litteram, Caput 2:

<p><i>Sed Satan calumniam inferebat quasi Iob actibus virtutum intenderet propter temporalia bona, sicut et mali homines quorum Satan princeps est perniciose iudicant de intentione bonorum; sed haec calumnia repulsa erat per hoc quod post exteriorum bonorum amissionem adhuc in virtute stabilis permanebat, ex quo sufficienter ostensum est quod eius intentio non erat ad exteriora bona obliquata. Restabat igitur ostendere ad perfecta demonstrationem virtutis Iob quod nec etiam ad salutem proprii corporis incurvata erat eius intentio [...].</i></p>	<p>But Satan was inferring calumny, as if Job were devoting himself to acts of virtue because of temporal goods, just as evil men, also, whose prince is Satan, pass pernicious judgment on the intention of good men. But this calumny had been refuted because he still remained steadfast in virtue after the loss of his external goods, and as a result of this steadfastness it was sufficiently shown that his intention had not been turned aside toward external goods. It remained to be shown, then, for a perfect demonstration of Job's virtue, that his intention had not even been turned to the health of his own body.</p>
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In explaining the last quotation, Aquinas gives us in my opinion one of the most illuminating hints on the subject.

Expositio super Iob ad litteram, Caput 2:

<p><i>ex quo ulterius dominus ostendit uspicionem Satan fuisse calumniosam et</i></p>	<p>From this assertion the Lord shows further that Satan's suspicion had</p>
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¹⁴ In this text, we must avoid the apparently easy way out of appealing to the original sin of every man (leaving aside all the difficulties the subject has in itself).

<p><i>intentionem frustratam, unde sequitur tu autem commovisti me adversus eum ut affligerem illum frustra.</i></p> <p><i>Ex hoc autem quod dicitur commovisti me adversus eum, non est intelligendum quod Deus ab aliquo provocetur ad volendum quod prius nolebat sicut est apud homines consuetum dicitur enim Num. XXIII 19 non est Deus ut homo ut mentiatur, neque ut filius hominis ut mutetur, sed loquitur hic Scriptura de Deo figuratiter more humano: homines enim quando facere aliquid volunt propter aliquem ab illo commoveri dicuntur;</i></p>	<p>been slanderous and his intention had been frustrated. Hence follows <i>But you stirred Me against him to afflict him in vain</i>. Now one should not understand from this statement, <i>you stirred Me against him</i>, that God is provoked by anyone to want what He did not want before, as is usual among men—for the text of Numbers 23:19 says that "God is not like man so that He lies, nor like the son of man so that He changes"—but Scripture here speaks figuratively of God's acting in a human manner, for when men want to do something because of someone they are said to be stirred by him.</p>
<p><i>Deus autem vult quidem facere, sicut et facit, hoc propter illud, tamen absque omni mentis commotione quia ab aeterno in mente habuit quid propter quod facturus esset.</i></p>	<p>Now God indeed does just as He wants, one thing for the sake of another, but without any stirring of His mind, because from eternity He has had in mind what He was going to do for what purpose.</p>
<p><i>Disposuerat igitur dominus ab aeterno Iob temporaliter affligere ad demonstrandam veritatem virtutis eius, ut omnis malignorum excluderetur calumnia, unde ad hoc significandum hic dicitur tu autem commovisti me adversus eum.</i></p>	<p>The Lord had disposed from eternity, then, to afflict Job temporally to demonstrate the truth of his virtue, so that every calumny of malicious men would be excluded. Hence, to signify this fact the text says here, <i>But you stirred Me against him</i>.</p>
<p><i>Quod autem dicitur ut affligerem illum frustra, intelligendum est quantum ad intentionem Satan non quantum ad intentionem Dei: expetierat enim Satan adversitatem Iob intendens ex hoc eum in impatientiam et blasphemiam deducere,</i></p>	<p>Now the phrase <i>to afflict him in vain</i> should be understood with respect to Satan's intention, not with respect to God's. For Satan had contrived Job's adversity intending to lead him by it into impatience and blasphemy,</p>

<i>quod consecutus non erat; Deus autem hoc permiserat ad declarandam virtutem eius, quod et factum erat: sic igitur frustra afflicto est Iob quantum ad intentionem Satan sed non quantum ad intentionem Dei.</i>	which he had not achieved. God, however, had permitted this adversity to declare his virtue, and this had happened. So, then, Job was afflicted in vain with respect to Satan's intention but not with respect to God's.
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As I understand the argument, it follows that:

- (i) God is not properly moved by the provocation of Satan.
- (ii) All that happens succeeds under the providence of God.¹⁵
- (iii) The waves of adversities that stroke Job were always part of the plan of God (from eternity, *since the beginning*).¹⁶
- (iv) The great difference relies then on the intention associated with the events: while Satan wanted the adversities to show the evil character of Job and in some sense to prove the impossibility of true virtue,

¹⁵ Be that in the mode of necessity or be that in the mode of contingency, as Aquinas sustains in *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 22, a. 4: *Whether divine providence imposes any necessity upon things foreseen? / Quarto, utrum providentia divina imponat necessitatem rebus provisus.* The *corpus articuli* says: *I answer that, Divine providence imposes necessity upon some things; not upon all, as some formerly believed. For to providence it belongs to order things towards an end. Now after the divine goodness, which is an extrinsic end to all things, the principal good in things themselves is the perfection of the universe; which would not be, were not all grades of being found in things. Whence it pertains to divine providence to produce every grade of being. And thus it has prepared for some things necessary causes, so that they happen of necessity; for others contingent causes, that they may happen by contingency, according to the nature of their proximate causes. / Respondeo dicendum quod providentia divina quibusdam rebus necessitatem imponit, non autem omnibus, ut quidam crediderunt. Ad providentiam enim pertinet ordinare res in finem. Post bonitatem autem divinam, quae est finis a rebus separatus, principale bonum in ipsis rebus existens, est perfectio universi, quae quidem non esset, si non omnes gradus essendi invenirentur in rebus. Unde ad divinam providentiam pertinet omnes gradus entium producere. Et ideo quibusdam effectibus praeparavit causas necessarias, ut necessario evenirent; quibusdam vero causas contingentes, ut evenirent contingenter, secundum conditionem proximarum causarum.*

¹⁶ We should not forget that the proper freedom of rational agents is never undermined by such claims according to Aquinas.

God took them to manifest the virtue of Job to all humanity.¹⁷

- (v) So, Satan made no bet with God. In fact, Satan fell into a trap.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE SUFFERING OF THE SLAVES IN BRAZIL BY ANTONIO VIEIRA (1608-1697)

To face the cruelty of slavery in the 17th century, the Jesuit Antonio Vieira uses an argumentation that may sound similar to that one we saw in the case of Job and in the treatment of providence by Aquinas. In the series of sermons named *Maria Rosa Mística*, we find there three sermons (numbers XIV, XX and XXVII) which contain explicit reference of the condition of the slaves in Brazil.

SERMON XIV

In 1633, probably December 27, Antonio Vieira preached for the first time in public. His audience was “a brotherhood of blacks” in a sugar-mill in Bahia. Although he was very young (25 years old), the sermon is very well organized and complex too.

He begins the Sermon XIV with a long praise in honor of the Virgin Mary gravitating towards a text of Matthew (1,16): *Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ (Maria*

¹⁷ The point seems to be the affirmation of the possibility and advantageousness of being virtuous, and also to show the falsity of the devil’s view. So we may say that God made with Satan no bet, but prepared him a trap!

de qua natus est Jesus, qui vocatur Christus). He turns the birth of Jesus Christ into the birth of Christ in the Incarnation and the birth of Jesus as Savior in the cross.¹⁸ He also extends Mary's motherhood to St. John, who was there in the Calvary (Vieira quotes John 19,26: Woman, behold thy son. / *mulier ecce filius tuus*), and also to the blacks their devotees, who belong to a nation recognized by the Scripture as child of Our Lady too.¹⁹ The moment of this last birth was also in the Calvary, together with all other nations, as far as they unite in faith.²⁰

At this point, Vieira holds that the black people forced to come from Africa to Brazil do not realize what a miracle that was, in spite of the common impression that this was more like brute exile, slavery and disgrace (*desterro, cativo e desgraça*).²¹ However, although Vieira writes a long section trying to show the advantages of leaving paganism, maybe as

¹⁸ "(...) o menino nascido já era Cristo, mas ainda não era Salvador. Havia de ser Salvador, e para ser Salvador, nascia, mas ainda não o era. Cristo sim, *qui est Christus*; porque já estava ungido na dignidade de Filho de Deus, mas na de Jesus, e de Salvador ainda não; porque essa não a havia de receber no Presépio, senão na Cruz." (VIEIRA 2015a, 400-401).

¹⁹ "O Profeta Rei falando da Virgem Maria diz assim: *Homo, et homo natus est in ea, et ipse fundavit eam Altissimus* [Sl 86,5]. 'Nasceu nela o homem, e mais o homem: e quem a fundou foi esse mesmo Altíssimo'. (...) Mas o Profeta (...) não só diz que nasceu da Senhora esse homem, que enquanto Deus a criou, senão que nasceu dela o homem, e mais o homem: *Homo, et homo natus est in ea*. Se um destes homens nascidos de Maria é Deus; o outro homem nascido de Maria quem é? É todo homem que tem a Fé, e conhecimento de Cristo, de qualquer qualidade, de qualquer nação, e de qualquer cor que seja (...). Assim o diz o mesmo texto tão claramente, que nomeia os mesmos Pretos por sua própria nação, e por seu próprio nome: *Memor ero Rahab, et Babylonis scientium me; Ecce alienigenae, et Tyrus, et Populus Aethiopiae hi fuerunt illic* ["Lembrar-me-ei de Raab e de Babilônia que me reconheceram; ali estiveram também os estrangeiros, Tiro, e o povo dos etíopes.]" (VIEIRA 2015a, 404).

²⁰ "Os Etiópes de que fala o texto de Davi não são todos os Pretos universalmente, porque muitos deles são gentios nas suas terras; mas fala somente daqueles de que eu também falo, que são os que por mercê de Deus, e de sua Santíssima Mãe, por meio da Fé, e conhecimento de Cristo, e por virtude do Batismo são cristãos." (VIEIRA 2015a, 406).

²¹ "Oh, se a gente preta tirada das brenhas da sua Etiópia, e passada ao Brasil, conheceu bem quanto deve a Deus, e a sua Santíssima Mãe por este que pode parecer desterro, cativo e desgraça, e não é senão milagre, e grande milagre!" (VIEIRA 2015a, 410).

a way of consolation, he proceeds to a much longer section thereafter in which he detains himself in dealing with the real and awful suffering of the slaves in front of him. The slaves in Brazil, he affirms, are perfect imitators of the cross and of the crucified Christ, and as such they will be rewarded.

<p><i>Não há trabalho, nem gênero de vida no mundo mais parecido à Cruz, e Paixão de Cristo, que o vosso em um destes Engenhos. (...) Em um engenho sois imitadores de Cristo crucificado: Imitatoribus Christi crucifixi; porque padeceis em um modo muito semelhante o que o mesmo Senhor padeceu na Sua Cruz, e em toda a Sua Paixão. (...) A Paixão de Cristo foi de noite sem dormir, parte de dia sem descansar, e tais são as vossas noites, e os vossos dias. Cristo despido, e vós despidos; Cristo sem comer, e vós famintos; Cristo em tudo maltratado, e vós maltratados em tudo. Os ferros, as prisões, os açoites, as chagas, os nomes afrontosos, de tudo isso se compõe a vossa imitação, que se for acompanhada de paciência, também terá merecimento de martírio. (VIEIRA 2015a, 414).</i></p>	<p>No labor nor way of life in the world is more similar to the Cross and the Passion of Christ than that of yours in one of these sugar-mills. (...) In a sugar-mill you are imitators of the crucified Christ: <i>Imitatoribus Christi crucifixi</i>; because you suffer in a manner very similar to that which the Lord suffered in His Cross and in all His Passion. (...) The Passion of Christ was of night without sleeping, part of a day without recovery, and so are your nights and your days. Christ nude, and you nude; Christ did not eat, and you are starving; Christ in all mistreated, and you mistreated in all. The irons, the prisons, the lashes, the insults, from that all is your imitation made of, which will but receive the reward of martyrdom too, if accompanied with patience.²²</p>
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Vieira goes further saying that in a so terrible condition that evoke hell,²³ his audience should pray, and pray above all the sorrowful mysteries, for praying helps to relieve the

²² All translations from Portuguese into English are ours. I thank Rodrigo Marinho Santos Ribeiro for the revision of the English of the whole text.

²³ “E que coisa há na confusão deste mundo mais semelhante ao inferno que qualquer destes vossos Engenhos, e tanto mais, quanto de maior fábrica? Por isso foi tão bem recebida aquela breve, e discreta definição de quem chamou a um Engenho de açúcar ‘doce inferno’.” (VIEIRA 2015a, 419).

pain and sanctify the works. (VIEIRA 2015a, 416-417, 420). Anywhere though we find Vieira saying that suffering would be some reaction or response to sin.

We may read a final observation Vieira makes as an anticipation of his criticism on the masters of slaves, which will come more explicit in the following sermons. The masters of sugar-mills should actually envy their slaves in their suffering much more than the slaves should envy the comfort that their own work provides for the masters.²⁴ The masters may recite the joyful mysteries today, but there is no doubt that the slaves, who recite today the sorrowful mysteries, will recite with the angels the joyful and glorious.²⁵

SERMON XX

Vieira reproaches the masters of slaves also in the Sermon XX, where he builds a comprehensive inversion starting from this question:

<i>Qual destas duas Irmandades é mais grata e mais favorecida da Mãe de Deus: se a dos Pretos, ou a dos Brancos, a dos Escravos ou a dos Senhores? (VIEIRA 2015b, 161).</i>	Which of these brotherhoods is more graced and more favored by the Mother of God: that one of black men or that one of white men, that of the slaves or that of the masters?
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To summarize the answer, Vieira not only firmly describes the great dignity of the slave inasmuch as he lives what the incarnated God lived among us, that is, prison, violence, humiliation, but also Vieira praises the black color

²⁴ “Mas inveja devem ter vossos senhores às vossas penas, do que vós aos seus gostos, a que servis com tanto trabalho.” (VIEIRA 2015a, 422).

²⁵ “No Céu cantarei os mistérios gozosos, e gloriosos com os Anjos, e lá vos gloriareis de ter suprido, com grande merecimento, o que eles não podem, no contínuo exercício dos dolorosos.” (VIEIRA 2015a, 422).

mentioning on that account many biblical passages.

Beyond and most impressive is though the harsh criticism Vieira develops against the masters of slaves in the last pages of this Sermon. He evokes several biblical texts, one of them being the narrative of the beggar Lazarus and the rich man (Lk 16, 19-31). Both died, but the rich man who lived in palaces and ate banquets went to hell while the miserable Lazarus was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom (Lk 16, 22).

<p><i>Digam-me os ricos quem foi este Rico, e os pobres quem foi este Lázaros. O Rico foi o que são hoje os que se chamam Senhores; e Lázaros foi o que são hoje os pobres Escravos. Não são os Senhores os que vivem descansados, e em delicias, e os Escravos em perpétua aflição, e trabalhos? (VIEIRA 2015b, 179).</i></p>	<p>Tell me now the wealthy: who was this rich man? And the poor: who was this Lazarus? The rich man was they who today call themselves Masters; and Lazarus was who today are the poor slaves. Is it not the Masters who live relaxed and among luxuries? And not the slaves in perpetual affliction and labors?</p>
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Worth noting is the insistence of Vieira in reproaching the masters as to their injustices and the grave risk they run because of it. In the next and last part of this brief study, we can see this admonition even more strongly.

SERMON XXVII

At the very opening of the Sermon XXVII, Vieira compares the scene of the miserable slaves and their opulent masters with the two states of Job. *Fortune puts together happiness and misery in the same theater.*²⁶ We arrive then at an

²⁶ “Já se depois de chegados olharmos para estes miseráveis, e para os que se chamam seus Senhores, Cont.

impressive passage:

<p><i>Não há Escravo no Brasil, e mais quando vejo os mais miseráveis, que não seja matéria para mim de uma profunda meditação. Comparo o presente com o futuro, o tempo com a eternidade, o que vejo, com o que creio, e não posso entender que Deus, que criou estes homens tanto à Sua imagem, e semelhança, como os demais, os predestinasse para dois Infernos, um nesta vida, outro na outra. (VIEIRA 2015b, 341).</i></p>	<p>There is no slave in Brazil who does not produce in me a profound meditation, and even more when I see the most miserable. I compare the present with the future, what I see with what I believe, and I cannot understand that God, which made these men to His image and likeness, as the others, could predestinate them to two hells, one in this life, another in the other.</p>
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For Vieira, to be slave is a condition that can happen to anyone anytime, as the many narratives of captivity told in the Bible show. But in his view there is a huge difference between captivity of the body and captivity of the soul, and it should be no doubt which one we must avoid at any cost. And like a threat addressed to the masters once more, Vieira asks:

<p><i>E aqueles, que se viram Cativos em Babilônia, eram Pretos ou Brancos? Eram Cativos, ou livres? Eram escravos, ou Senhores? Nem na cor, nem na Liberdade, nem no Senhorio, vos eram inferiores. (VIEIRA 2015b, 341).</i></p>	<p>Those who were captives in Babylon, were they black or were they white? Were they captive or were they free? Were they slaves or were they masters? Not in color nor in freedom nor in Mastership they were inferior in comparison to you.</p>
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The effort made by Vieira to fight the injustice which causes the suffering of the slaves, as for instance when he severely reproaches the masters, maybe signifies that in Vieira too, as well as in our interpretation of Aquinas, the

o que se viu nos dois estados de Jó é o que aqui representa a fortuna, pondo juntas a felicidade, e a miséria no mesmo teatro.” (VIEIRA 2015b, 340-341).

puzzling search for justification of the extreme human suffering in connection with the notion of divine providence is made without a necessary reference to the guilt of the ones that suffer.

<p><i>Oh Deus! Quantas graças devemos à Fé, que nos destes, porque ela só nos cativa o entendimento, para que à vista destas desigualdades, reconheçamos contudo Vossa justiça, e providência. (VIEIRA 2015b, 341).</i></p>	<p>O, God! How many graces we owe to Faith that You gave us, because only Faith captivates the understanding in order that, facing these inequalities, we recognize however Your justice and providence.</p>
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Awful adversities are not necessarily punishment or instrument of purification. Sometimes they are simply mysterious. As both Aquinas and Vieira seem to agree, they should be taken in the light of faith in the divine providence, maybe the only available real consolation for human suffering.

Resumo: Uma tese fundamental para a tradição cristã é a de que *todas as coisas que acontecem no mundo acontecem sob a providência divina*. Assim, também o sofrimento dos seres humanos precisa ser compreendido à luz da noção de providência, e o sofrimento de um justo como Jó ou de uma comunidade humana inteira como os escravos no Brasil colonial parece especialmente desconcertante. Uma interpretação recente enfatiza a função terapêutica das adversidades. Contudo, uma visão cuidadosa de alguns textos de Tomás de Aquino e de Antônio Vieira apontam para a limitação humana quanto à plena compreensão da providência divina bem como para a imprescindibilidade da fé na providência de Deus.

Palavras-chave: Providência divina, Sofrimento humano, Jó, Tomás de Aquino, Antônio Vieira.

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