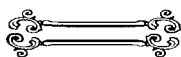


Kazimierz Sabik  
Karolina Kumor  
(editores)



*La cultura  
del barroco español  
e iberoamericano  
y su contexto europeo*



Varsovia 2010

# ESCHATOLOGY AND POLITICS. THE DREAM OF IMPERIAL JUSTICE IN THE WRITINGS OF ANTÓNIO VIEIRA

EWA ŁUKASZYK  
Warsaw University



**Summary:** The paper's aim is to present the thought of a Jesuit priest, António Vieira (1608-1697), included in his writings both in Portuguese, such as *História do Futuro*, and in Latin, such as *Clavis Prophetarum*. The main ideas of Vieira implied the creation of a universal empire which would appease religious and political conflicts dividing European nations, as well as inscribe harmoniously the territories which had been discovered during the maritime expansion into a coherent zone of European influence. The thought of Vieira was at the same time utopist and surprisingly pragmatist. His intention was undoubtedly to put forward a vision of just and fair relationships between Europeans and the dominated peoples. Nevertheless, the main question we pose is to find out if and in what measure Vieira's utopia managed to avoid, at least in its basis, symbolical oppression against dominated peoples or, on the contrary, tangible forms of oppression constituted inherent parts of the vision of the Vicirian "Fifth Empire".

**Key words:** António Vieira, empire, evangelization, millenarism, oppression

The name of Vieira appeals recently very positive connotations; he is identified with noble causes, like the call for justice to the Jews and the defense of Indians. Just as example, Maria Manuela Lopes Cardoso in the title of her recent book calls him "pioneiro e paradigma de interculturalidade" (Cardoso, 2001). His heritage is judged worth celebrating. Nevertheless it is important to remember all the difficulties and internal contradictions of Vieirian vision. As much as a "pioneer of multiculturalism", he can also be regarded as one of the early ideologues and legitimizers of symbolic and economical oppression exercised by Europeans over large parts of the world. To rethink the figure of António Vieira can also illuminate the paradoxical nature of the European colonial project as a whole, a project which joined in an inextricable way both the humanitarian effort of turning to the other with a salutary, redemptive message and the tough reality of exploration and enslavement.

Vieira is ambiguous and his work should not be treated with regard to the norms of so called political correctness. He is not a humanitarian thinker nor activist. His endeavors, realized so often with enormous courage and self abnegation, f. ex. the defense of Indians or his long life fight against the Inquisition regarding the persecution of *cristãos-novos*, do not arise from a humanitarian premises as such. Vieira's main concern is not the man nor his

well-being in this world. The Jesuit is obsessed by the word, the prophetic word, which he tries to make coincide with the reality, longing for the fulfillment of the prophecies.

In Vieira's thought, an eschatological vision coexists nevertheless with political and economical pragmatism. This fact is not a paradox. The two aspects form a logical continuity. His vision of the "Fifth Empire" (*Quinto Império*) pretend to offer a radical solution to both worldly and spiritual problems. It would appease religious and political conflicts dividing European nations, as well as inscribe harmoniously the territories which had been discovered during the maritime expansion into a coherent zone of European influence. This universal empire is, in Vieira's eyes, something unavoidable as the fulfillment of a transhistorical predestination.

Vieira the visionary lives in a pre-apocalyptic time, close to the climax of the History marked by a paroxysm of which a new, unified humanity would be born, united into a new kind of community, realizing the evangelical ideal of *unum ovile unus pastor* (John 10, 16). Since *História do Futuro*, Vieira the pragmatist tries to discern the outlines of the political organization of the ideal, universal state in which this new humanity would live, indicating a special role to the Portuguese, which should be responsible of laying the foundations for it. His intention was undoubtedly to put forward a vision of just and fair relationships between Europeans and the dominated peoples, for the benefit of all. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to ask today in what measure Vieira's utopia managed to avoid, at least in its general outline, the symbolical oppression against dominated peoples or, rather on the contrary, tangible forms of oppression constituted inherent parts of the vision of the Vieirian "Fifth Empire".

The life of António Vieira was in a large measure related to the New World. Born in Lisbon, he lived since an early age in Bahia, where he studied in the local Jesuit college and entered the Society of Jesus at the age of 15. His political activity is closely related to his work as a court preacher, after his journey back to Lisbon in 1641. He recommends to the king to adapt, against the Inquisition, a policy of protection towards so called *cristãos-novos*, who still controlled considerable economical resources. Those pragmatic measures are indispensable in the moment while the Portuguese monarchy is still involved in wars in defense of its independence after breaking a 60 years long union with Spain. The christianized Jews formed an important part of the merchant burgesses implied in large networks of international trade. Vieira's appeal to the king contributes to the creation, in 1649, of *Compania Geral do Comércio do Brasil*, based on Dutch model, with a commercial monopoly and another important privilege: its wealth is legally preserved from the possibility of being confiscated by Inquisition.

Vieira served the king John IV in many diplomatic missions to Holland, France and Rome, acting sometimes against the interests of the Church and the Jesuits themselves. Facing a threat of being expelled from the Company, Vieira resigns himself to return as a missionary to the interior of Brazil. It is in the Brazilian province of Maranhão that he creates his most important writings, treating in parallel his great vision of the Fifth Empire and trying to create the orientating lines for the incipient Brazilian economy. Here, the contribution of Vieira is of most polemical consequences. His aim is to defend the Indians forced to work on the plantations created in the colony. The native populations, physically and mentally not adapted to the hard work and the condition of slavery, face an imminent extinction. In 1654 he set sail for Lisbon to plead their cause at the court and in fact he managed to obtain

from the king a series of decrees prohibiting the enslavement of Indians. In this way, the native population would be preserved under exclusive control of the Society of Jesus. As alternative, Vieira the pragmatist proposes a massive import of African slaves, solution which is by the way largely practiced in other parts of Brazil already by this time. Nevertheless, the acquisition of black slaves is expensive and the proposal faces a strong resistance, leading to an open conflict between the Jesuit preacher and the Brazilian settlers.

Even more difficult times start with the death of the king John IV and the government of Castelo Melhor, hostile towards the Jesuits. Between 1665 and 1667 Vieira is judged by Inquisition and condemned for heretical points of view. Finally, acquitted, he travels to Rome, and again, rehabilitated eight years after his condemnation, he would not hesitate to use his influence in the fight against the Inquisition. The fact that he obtains from the Pope Clement X the suspension of the Inquisition for seven years (1674-1681) should be counted as the major victory of the Jesuit preacher. Finally Vieira returns to Brazil where he spends the last 16 years of his life, completing his writings, mainly the Latin work *Clavis Prophetarum*.

The central idea of the historiosophic and eschatological vision of Vieira is that of the culmination of human history in the Fifth Empire, a universal state which would definitely close the bloody and sinful eon. The ideal of political unity is inseparable of the religious ideal of the consummated earthly Kingdom of the Christ. The dual, spiritual and worldly power in this ideal state would belong to an "angelical" sovereign, which in some moments Vieira tried to identify with already deceased, but miraculously resuscitated king John IV. This idea, which may seem very odd, has in fact deep roots in the Portuguese myth of the returning king Sebastian. The "second life" of the king John IV, a monarch to which Vieira was personally very strongly attached, is also, as the Jesuit believes, predicted in so called "prophecies of Bandarra", a shoemaker from a small Portuguese town of Trancoso. Vieira commented on Bandarra in a letter to the bishop of Japan, D. André Fernandes, under the title of *Esperanças de Portugal, Quinto Império do Mundo. Primeira e Segunda Vida de El-Rei D. João IV*, as well as in many other writings.

A systematic exposition of all the details concerning the Fifth Empire would be included in an unfinished book *História do Futuro* (The History of the Future). We dispose of its introductory part (*Livro Antepreimeiro*), as well as of the plan of the whole. Nevertheless the most complete version of the Vieirian vision is to be found in an extensive Latin treatise *Clavis Prophetarum* on which Vieira worked in Brazil during the last period of his life, even if also that manuscript had remained uncompleted at the moment of his death. By the way, it had long remained inaccessible to most of the scholars, as it was for the first time published in a printed version quite recently, in 2000, thanks to the efforts of Prof. Arnaldo do Espírito Santo and his collaborators. Specially the third chapter, *De regno Christi in Terris consummato*, can be considered as a *summa* of Vieirian thought on the fulfillment of both earthly and spiritual hopes of the human kind. This sketch of the history of evangelization culminates in the vision of the whole humanity converted to one faith, in which heathens and Jews would finally participate.

The Fifth Empire as a universal state should indicate a proper place for every human group. The main basis to build this structure and at the same time to legitimize it was the Bible and the interpretation of the Prophets. In Vieirian interpretation, the "lusocentrism", as Paulo Borges calls it (1995: 214-15), the strong supposition of the central place

of Portugal in the world and its role in creating the universal empire, is derived from the episode of the drunkenness of Noah. Vieira sees in it a promise of ruling the world given to Japheth, which, through his son Tubal (Genesis 10, 2) is believed to be the founder of the Portuguese nation.

The text of Genesis seems to give a model of relationships between three main groups existing in the "post-diluvian" reality of the Old World and, at the same time, a legitimization of the conquest of the countries inhabited by the progeny of Ham. The offspring of three sons of Noah was believed to give origin to the three main ethnic and racial groups: Christian/European, Semitic and the black, Hamitic population. The curse of Noah gave a handy legitimization of the slavery, as the biblical patriarch stated: "a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren" (Genesis 9, 25). In the meanwhile, according to the symbolism of this biblical narrative, Christians and Jews, as the descendants of the two "good" sons who together hanged on their shoulders the cloak destined to cover their father's nakedness (Genesis 9, 23), should still collaborate closely in the new reality. This is the part of the prophecy which still fails to be fulfilled: Shem and his offspring also received an equal blessing, then, logically, they should play an equal part in the implementation of the Fifth Empire. For this reason, in parallel to his diplomatic missions to Holland in service of the king John IV, Vieira is believed to have secretly met some rabbis and Jewish scholars in hope to establish what he projected to be a "theological agreement" (*acordo teológico*), a way to appease the discrepancies between both monotheistic religions and to put an end on the persecutions.

The task of establishing the proper place of the Indians in the universal order required a greater effort of imagination. The Holy Scripture does not seem to mention explicitly their existence. Already at an early stage of Portuguese contacts with the native population, (as soon as in the letter written by Pero Vaz de Caminha to the king at the occasion of the official discovery of Brazil in 1500), naked Indians, not knowing the genital shame associated by Christians to the sense of guilt starting in Paradise, were interpreted by many people as a special part of humanity preserved from the original sin. This positive interpretation of the naked man subsisted as a consistent current of thought independently of well-liked and abundant literature exploring the motifs of cannibalism which circulated over all Europe (whose example could be a popular relation of Hans Standen).

Vieira tries to solve the problem of the apparent absence of the Indians in the biblical narration interpreting a particularly obscure excerpt of the prophecy of Isaiah:

Ah, land of whirring wings that is beyond the rivers of Cush, which sends ambassadors by the sea, in vessels of papyrus on the waters! Go, you swift messengers, to a nation, tall and smooth, to a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide. All you inhabitants of the world, you who dwell on the earth, when a signal is raised on the mountains, look! When a trumpet is blown, hear! (18, 1-3)

In *História do Futuro* he comments also on Isaiah 41, 17, speaking about people dying with thirst: "When the poor and needy search for water and there is none, and their tongues are parched from thirst, then I, the Lord, will answer them". Vieira thinks this passage re-

fers to the baptismal water, which natives would finally obtain (1992: 211). Their conversion is presented in this way as a fulfillment of the prophecy.

At the redaction of *Clavis Prophetarum*, after many years of arduous missionary work, Vieira seems much less enthusiastic about Indians and their very ability to comprehend and accept the Christian faith. In fact, he declares that after 14 years of dealing with Brazilian natives, he gained the certainty that at least many of them are in the state of “ignorantia invincibile” of God (2000: 356-57). He even concludes that the fact they had never before entered in contact with the evangelical message is a special sign of Providence – which “providenciou não providenciando” – and a proof of divine mercy, because, not knowing the message of God, the Indians at least avoid the mortal sin of rejecting it: “Ex parte quidem Dei majus malum est ipsum negare, quam nescire; [...] majus malum est ignorantia de eodem Deo vincibilis, hoc est cum culpa, quam invincibilis et innocens” (2000: 352-53).

Vieira regards the implementation of the Fifth Empire not as establishing a political or economical rule, but in much larger, cosmic terms. In a sense, he returns to the idea of apocatastasis taken from the eschatological reflection of Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. To build the new empire means “restituir o mundo à sua primitiva inteireza” (1992: 60) – to reconstitute the primitive integrity of the world, which Vieira shows in his *História do Futuro* through the image of a body with fractured members, needing to set the broken bones. The growth and the ultimate triumph of this empire should be imagined as based much more on spiritual supremacy than on military power, as Vieira deduces in *Clavis Prophetarum* from the history of the Roman Empire by Paul Orosius and from S. Leon: “Romaque ipsa latius praesideret religione divina, quam dominatione terrene, et multo minus esset, quod illi bellicus labor subdidit, quam quod pax Christiana subjecit” (2000: 110-113).

Vieira poses the question why did the evangelization take such a long time and the apostolic work, after so many centuries, is still so far from completing, as he observes with surprise that Christianity, on a global scale, is still a minority religion (2000: 145). As he deduces from the biblical excerpt concerning Daniel, the advent of the special time, and with it the fulfillment of the Fifth Empire, requires a kind of maturity of the mankind, growing in science and wisdom (Daniel 12, 4).

Vieira also dedicates a large fragment of his work to prove something apparently self-evident: the necessity of the missionary work. He anticipates the objections of all those who might consider the natives as not deserving the Word of God or simply, as partially he admits himself, not able to receive it. Here, in fact, two different attitudes are possible: first one is to acknowledge the cultural difference and thus to leave the natives in peace, letting them live according their traditional ways of life. The second possibility is to consider that the evangelic message is addressed to all peoples, what Vieira extensively proves recurring to the authority of Saint Paul, the Apostle of the Pagans. The missionary subscribes evidently the second point of view; but it is perhaps the first one, even if tainted with spite towards the “innate barbarity and wildness” of the natives, that could lead to the attitude of authentic acknowledgement of their inalienable identity and distinctiveness.

Vieira the pragmatist and the man of action knows better than anybody all the obstacles and difficulties on the way towards the ideal of *unum ovile unus pastor*. Nevertheless, his thought is strongly based on the supremacy of the word over the world. He believes more

in the authority of the prophets than in the testimony of his own eyes. If a given prophecy seems not fulfilled, the only conclusion we should draw is that this fulfillment must be imminent.

Another main idea of Vieira is related to the evolution of the quality of the time itself. As humanity is inexorably marching towards the end of the world and the Final Judgment, new providential instruments will undoubtedly appear to provide a supernatural assistance to the apostolic task. The Church itself will pass to its third and the last stage under the guidance of a holy pope in the company of new twelve apostles, who would reestablish its full splendor:

Pastor Angelicus, hoc est Romanus Pontifex hujus nominis, qui admiranda humilitate, sapientia et sanctitate praeditus duodecim Apostolos habebit instar Christi, cum quibus reformabit et pristino splendori Ecclesiam restitute. (2000: 566)

The secular power would be closely and harmoniously associated with this spiritual power, according to the biblical paradigm of Moses and Aaron:

Hinc est quod in primo Sacerdotio legis veteris Ecclesiasticam et saecularem potestatem in duobus fratribus Moyse et Aarone, divina providential conjunxerit, ut, quemadmodum ait Spiritus Sanctus, frater juvaretur a fratre, et unita, atque germanata, ut ita dicam, potestas mutuo sibi esset auxilio. (2000: 582)

Conclusively, Vieira's project aims to inscribe all peoples in a scheme dictated by the European imagination based on Christian sources. This overwhelming project could not leave even the smallest margin for diversity. It led to deplete the world, to occupy the integrity of available space on a global scale. In *Clavis Prophetarum* Vieira sketches an interesting image of a network of "lines" of evangelization, starting from the "umbilicus of the world" and running in different directions, forming in consequence a kind of geographical grid surrounding all the globe:

Apostoli antequam ad praedicandum exirent, omnes, [...] in montem Sion convenere, siquidem ex Sion exivit lex, et verbum Domini de Jerusalem; partitoque ibi mundo juxta numerum suum in duodecim plagas, totidem lineas cosmographicas ab illo umbilico terrae, tamquam a centro in circumferentiam, seu peripheriam aequaliter perduxere; eo nimirum consilio, ut toto Evangelii opere veluti in mappa delineato, et in conspectu omnium positio, unusquisque lineam suam quaquaversum sequeretur, et omnes divisim ac recta in communem laborem incumberent. (2000: 189)

In this network, all the human beings should find their place that, according to Vieira, is inherent to the dignity of the human nature, which is *not in all cases* and specially not *always* able of God, but able *to become mature* enough to receive it in the special, apocalyptic time of fulfillment. This would not happen in the present, imperfect state of the humanity and of the Church itself, but remains possible in a better, more perfect time, which undoubtedly shall come:

Necessarium est, et omnimoda necessitate, omnes in universum homines esse Deum cognituros, et in Christum credituros, in tempore scilicet Novi Testamenti et legis gratiae de qua loquebamur, non tamen in omni tempore et statu Ecclesiae, ut in praesenti experimur, sed in alio feliciori ac perfectiori absque dubio quandoque future. (2000: 620)

After Saint Paul, Vieira was fully sensitive to this human potentiality of “knowing about God” and as a missionary he considered himself as personally responsible for safeguarding it. He dreamed about a fair Church and a fair state. But his mentality remained restraint to the categories of universal unity and totality. Thinking in terms of pluralism was essentially alien to his intellectual formation. Establishing the guidelines of his universal state, Vieira did not manage to avoid the symbolical oppression against dominated peoples. On the contrary, tangible forms of oppression constituted inherent parts of his dream of the “Fifth Empire”, which could not be more than a unilateral, Christian vision of the world. It was unquestionably too early to think in “intercultural” terms. His “established time”, “tempus statutum”, in which all contradictions would be harmonized, still laid beyond the horizon, waiting, according to the prophecy of Daniel (12, 4), for a wiser humanity, when “multiplex erit scientia”. The positive aspect of the Vieirian thought lays undoubtedly in his faith in the advancement of the humanity, able to break the mental barriers which led previously to conflicts, persecution and enslavement. Nevertheless it would be a blatant anachronism to see in this figure an early “paradigm of interculturalism”.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BORGES, Paulo Alexandre Esteves (1995) *A Plenificação da História em Pe António Vieira. Estudo sobre a ideia do Quinto Imperio na Defesa perante o Tribunal do Santo Officio*. Lisboa, IN-CM.
- CARDOSO, Maria Manuela Lopes (2001) *António Vieira: pioneiro e paradigma da Interculturalidade*. Lisboa, Chaves Ferreira Publicações.
- VIEIRA, António (2000) *Clavis Prophetarum. Chave dos Profetas. Livro III*. Edição crítica, fixação do texto, tradução, notas e glossário de Arnaldo do Espírito Santo *et al.* Lisboa, Biblioteca Nacional.
- , (1992) *História do Futuro*. Introdução, actualização do texto e notas por Maria Leonor Carvalhão Buescu, 2ª ed., Lisboa, IN-CM.

