

JOB'S PROBLEM

November 27, 2021

The Old Testament is a store of treasures, because every one of its 46 Books is, by definition of the Council of Trent, the Word of God. To define the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, it has been well said that the New lies hidden within the Old, while the Old comes clearly into view in the New. Thus there is no contradiction between the two Testaments, nor between the God of the Old and the God of the New Testaments (as some people are tempted to think), nor between the doctrine of the Old and the New, but the Old is simply fulfilled in the New.

Therefore the Old Testament can have much to give us in this crisis of the New Testament Church, approaching its close in human history with the end of the world. For indeed that end is not going to be without much human suffering of the innocent, which is the problem of suffering in its acutest form, and which is the central theme of the Old Testament's 20th Book, the Book of Job. These "Comments" will present in three separate issues Job's problem, patience and solution respectively. Firstly the problem.

The problem is that Job is a wholly blameless and upright man, a very successful landowner with a large family of ten children and considerable property, with thousands of farm animals. Moreover he has a great piety and devotion to God. Yet he is going to be made to suffer intensely, without his knowing why. Firstly attacks from outside on his property and children deprive him entirely of both. But his only reaction is to bless God. In his own sublime words, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." But then, as though he is not suffering enough, he is attacked in his own person with loathsome sores from head to foot, so that

he is reduced to scraping himself off with a fragment of pottery. His wife tempts him to seek relief in cursing God, but again he reacts with an exceptional piety: "Foolish woman, if we accept good from the hands of God, shall we not also receive evil?" – Let us remember this admirable example of Job and his noble words when the heavens come crashing around our ears in the next few years!

What Job had not known, but what the narrator of Job's story had told us in those first two chapters of the Book, was that his appalling sufferings, apparently undeserved, had indeed come from God, from a kind of tussle between God and Satan, no less. When Satan had once appeared before God, God asked if he had ever seen such piety as in His servant Job. Satan responded that that was due to a special protection from God for Job, but if God would only stop protecting him, in suffering Job would curse God just like anyone else. God then gave Satan permission to make Job suffer in all his belongings but not in person. That was when Job had lost his family and all his property, but had said not a word against God. "You see?" said God, when Satan reappeared before Him. "Ah," replied Satan, "but just let him suffer in his own person, and You will see him curse You." God then gave permission to Satan to do his worst against the person of Job, but not to take his life, and that was when Job had been stricken with unbearable sores from head to foot, reducing him to a human wreck sitting on a heap of ashes, agonising over what he might have done to deserve such misery upon misery. The story continues with the patience of Job.

Meanwhile in our Covid misery, a first great piece of wisdom is to remember how all our lives are slung between two invisible powers in their tussle for our invisible souls, Satan striving with might and main to pull us down to Hell, and God doing all He can, short of taking away our free-will, to get us with Him for ever enjoying the beatific vision of Himself in Heaven. Almighty God could easily nullify all

efforts of Satan, but then His Heaven would fill with robots, and that is not what He had ever meant to create Creation for. Then let us all read between the lines of the Covid nonsense, and recognise a just and loving God at work to get us to Heaven. Unlike Job, by our worldwide scorn for His very existence, we have deserved our worldwide nonsense.

Kyrie eleison