CHAPTER TWELVE

UNIVERSAL EVANGELIZATION, TOLERATION, AND ECUMENISM?

As observed, António Vieira expounded upon what appears to be an original theory regarding the Fifth Empire—especially when describing it as an empire of Christ and the Christians—as holding both temporal and spiritual power and as happening within history. In addition, as discussed, he does not explicitly envision any sort of change of venue, i.e., a change from earth to heaven or the creation of a new cosmos. Furthermore, Vieira makes his own sections of interpretation by thinkers such as Augustine and Joachim of Fiore concerning the time of the end. Nevertheless, his main purpose was definitely the creation of a world where only Christianity would exist. For that, and because he did not follow a theory of elimination of the other (gentiles and Jews), he proposes the existence of two different moments of conversion to Christian faith in terms that remind us of the actual use of the word “ecumenism,” so much in vogue today.

Vieira discusses this subject of universal evangelization in the last chapter of book III of the Clavis prophetarum. However, he had already mentioned some of the main evidence for these conversions in his prior writings. For him, history also contemplated past, present, and future,¹ although the most important part of it—the one he decided to write about—was definitely the future. He was aware that the time before the events of the end described in Daniel and Revelation had not yet been reached, although it was near. First, the antichrist had not yet been defeated, and then the gospel was not yet universally spread and accepted. However, it was already possible to claim that those who had stayed faithful to Christ since His first coming had overcome and achieved the initial conversion. Pursuing this line of thinking, Vieira suggests that the only possible thing to do to discover the time of the end was to equate it from a different perspective: the universal

¹ Cf. footnote 3 of chapter 11 of this work.
evangelization happening at different moments. This is his starting point, as well as an ingenious question. He also says that his main objective is to observe how the universal conversion would take place under a global perspective and in harmony with the Scriptures. Therefore, it is clear that his main purpose is achieving universal evangelization. The problem is to solve the existing difficulties in Portugal between Catholics and the Jewish community that have mainly been caused by the intervention of the Portuguese Inquisition, which becomes one of the most important arguments used by Vieira.

Vieira describes, as mentioned, two times of conversion: one before the antichrist and another during the time of the antichrist. He says that the first is to be done by the apostles and their successors, while the second, by Elijah and Enoch, would give special consideration to gentiles and Jews. However, in the following pages Vieira acutely discusses the meaning of “conversion” and how it would be possible to speak about any “conversion” after the antichrist, when all of humankind would have been subdued. In addition, he underlines, how is it possible to speak about any type of universal conversion that does not include gentiles and Jews prior to the coming of the antichrist?

As already observed, he argues that if an antichrist were to appear in such circumstances, then it would be impossible to speak of a general antichrist. It would thus be necessary to speak of an antimoses for the Jews, an antimohammed for the Muslims, an antiamida for the gentiles, and an anticalvin or antiluther for the heretics. As such, Vieira proposes the term “restitution” instead of conversion. Thus, at the time of creation, all of humankind was part of God’s people, so now it is necessary for all people to convert once again to that single and universal religion: Christianity. Moreover, he asks why the Vulgate

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2 “Quo posito, solum restat, ut quaestionem totam ad secundam tituli partem contrahentes nova inquisitione examinemus: utrum alis diversis temporibus universalis quoque conversionis sit adimplenda.” In Vieira, Clavis prophetarum—chave dos profetas, p. 644.

3 “Sed nobis non de parte unius populi, sed de integra utriusque conversione in magnam totius operis lucem, et concordiam Scripturarum agendum.” In Ibid., pp. 644–66.


5 Ibid., p. 654.

6 “Vnde merito dubitabis cur dixerit Christus, omnes istos restituendos esse, non vero convertendos.” In ibid., p. 656.